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An Exploration of the Relationship Between Outdoor Learning and Well-being

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BA (Hons) Primary Education with QTS

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March 2020

Frontispiece

This is to certify that the contents of this extended essay follow results based on an investigation carried out by the author, except where specific reference is made of the work by others. This research project that has been presented has not been submitted in candidature of any award other than contributing towards the overall degree classification of BA (Hons) in Primary Education with QTS at the University of Wales Trinity Saint David, Carmarthen.

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Contents Page

Contents	Page Number
Frontispiece	3
Acknowledgments	4
Chapter One: Introduction	6
Chapter Two: Literature Review	7
What is Outdoor Learning?	7
How Can Outdoor Learning Support Learning in School?	8
How Can Outdoor Learning Support Well-being?	10
Chapter Three: Methodology	12
Chapter Four: Results and Discussion	14
Responses to Questionnaire	14
Interview with Learners	18
Observation	20
Chapter Five: Conclusion	22
Reference List	23
Appendix	29
Appendix One: Application for Ethical Approval	29
Appendix Two: Covering Letter for Electronic Questionnaire	43
Appendix Three: Interview Consent Form	44
Appendix Four: Traffic Light Fans for Assent	45
Appendix Five: Elective School Report	46
Appendix Six: Responses to Electronic Questionnaire	48
Appendix Seven: Transcript of Interview One	51
Appendix Eight: Transcript of Interview Two	53
Appendix Nine: Examples of Work	55
Appendix Ten: Transcript of Interview with Learning in the Foundation Phase	56
Appendix Eleven: Transcript of Interview with Learning in Key Stage Two	60
Appendix Eleven: Plans to Show Outdoor Provision Areas	62
Appendix Twelve: Observational Notes	64

Chapter One: Introduction

This research project aims to contribute to an informed discussion regarding the relationship between outdoor learning and well-being within primary education. Statistics by the Welsh Government (2018) demonstrates that one in three learners within a typical sized classroom may be affected by a mental health issue. With this considered, the government aims to develop the well-being of learners with a key purpose of the new curriculum for learners to become 'healthy, confident individuals' (Donaldson, 2015, p.30). This can be delivered by building their belief, resilience and empathy to develop their emotional and mental well-being (ibid.). However, the term well-being will depend upon the individuals' experience and the resources available to them (Underdown, 2006; Musgrave, 2017). The term usually refers to an individuals' mental or physical state in which is free from ill health (Estyn, 2019b). However, the Welsh Government (2018) conveys that practitioners lack the confidence and capacity to support the mental health of learners within their school. This seems to demonstrate that more assistance is required in order to support both the learners and the practitioners.

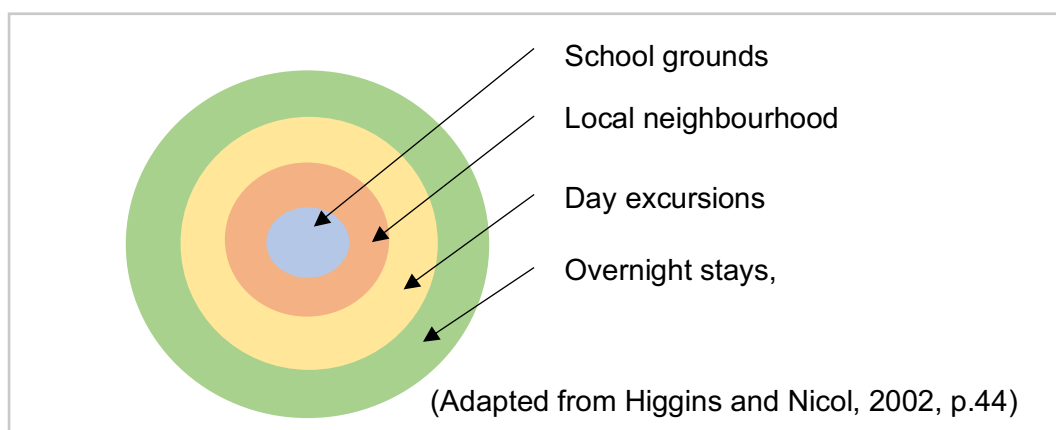
Research conducted by Woodland Trust Scotland (2015) and Musgrave (2017) illustrate that well-being can be enhanced by administering learning in an outdoor environment. They argue that this provides opportunity for health promotions that may not be developed when learning indoors (ibid.). For the purpose of this research, the term 'outdoor learning' will be used as a learning environment in which includes discovering, experimenting and learning about the natural world as a result of engaging in activities outside the classroom (Institute for Education, 2018). This is essential as the curriculum affirms that learners are required to experience opportunities in a variety of environments (WG, 2019a). It is of the author's opinion that the use of the outdoor learning environment will develop the learners' well-being and engagement in a range of activities. However, Palmer (2015) and observations during various professional teaching experiences acknowledge that the curriculum has become more assessment driven and technological revolution has decreased opportunities for outdoor learning. As proposed by Carrington (2016), learners spend twice as long playing on technology than playing outside. Therefore, conducting research will develop professional practice in using the outdoors within a primary classroom. British Educational Research Association (2018) identifies that educational research aims practitioners to be at their most effective by demonstrating current practice in their academic subjects. When practitioners direct their own learning, this has a great impact on the learners (Hattie, 2009). Thus, a combination of primary and secondary research will be undertaken to investigate the question. The first section of the research will explore secondary research whilst the second section will identify primary data. The chosen primary research methods are a questionnaire, interviews and observations.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

What is Outdoor Learning?

Department for Education and Skills (2006) and Institute for Education (2018) define outdoor learning as a learning environment in which activities are conducted outside of the classroom. This should not be viewed as a subject but as an approach to teaching and learning (Plymouth University, 2016). Through direct engagement with the outdoors, knowledge, skills, attitudes and behaviour may be transformed (Institute for Outdoor Learning, 2020). However, outdoor provision may contrast in each establishment (Bilton, 2010; Constable, 2015) with an implication of this being that different learning may take place. These provisions can be understood through concentric circles (see Figure one). Yet, it is understood that an outdoor learning environment is often less structured and formal than the classroom (Harris, 2018). Cooper (2015) suggests that such an outdoor learning environment can provide structured and unstructured learning, activities and play, particularly within early childhood education. This may allow learners to develop their own curiosity without the assistance and dependence on the class teacher (Beames et al., 2012). Independent learning may in turn allow learners to receive guidance and encouragement from their peers to develop their independence to complete the task self-sufficiently (Vygotsky, 1978). As a consequence of the learners applying their knowledge to explain concepts and ideas, learners are likely to become ambitious capable learners (Donaldson, 2015).

Figure 1: The four 'zones' of outdoor learning



When comparing the outdoor environment to the classroom, learners are considered to be more physically active, engaged and problem solve due to a difference in stimuli (Beames et al., 2012). Accordingly, learners do not perceive the outdoors as an environment where learning is held as the absence of the classroom walls allows learners to feel less constrained (Woodland Trust Scotland, 2015). Bilton (2010) underlines that a natural learning environment

is one in which a number of learners are perceived as being content and capable. This comes as a result of a learning environment catering for every learners' needs (ibid.). However, this does not entail proceeding indoor activities in a similar manner as the outdoor environment (DCELLS, 2009). Therefore, due to outdoor learning being a multifaceted research area, it is often found that outdoor learning may not have relevance to any aspect of the curriculum (Waite and Pratt, 2011). Beames et al. (2012) note that outdoor learning is predominantly effective when the learning is beneficial and not planned for distraction.

How Can Outdoor Learning Support Learning in School?

During the middle ages, outdoor learning was not considered as an essential aspect to learning but learning was received through a formal dialogue (Joyce, 2012). Opportunity for outdoor learning today has continued to be as limited to some learners as Constable (2015) claims that learners are diminishing contact with the natural environment due to the change of lifestyle. Plymouth University (2016) records that the statistics of young individuals engaging with the outdoors has reduced by 90% over the past twenty years, emphasising that a few learners would not have gained rich experiences such as the beach. Therefore, educational systems are required to deliver outdoor learning opportunities within education. Research by DCELLS (2009) demonstrates that outdoor experiences are most effective when schools, parents and the community work in partnership. Working in partnership with parents is important in order to ensure that those who show great concerns about the risk to their children's health understand the great benefits of outdoor learning (Estyn, 2019c; Learning and Teaching Scotland, 2010).

Ensuring that every learner experiences the world beyond the classroom is essential for pupils' learning and physical development (Department for Education and Skills, 2006). Outdoor learning has been recognised as a crucial aspect of early education and practitioners should ensure that outdoor learning is valued as much as learning undertaken indoors (Joyce, 2012; DCELLS, 2009). When used effectively, outdoor learning provides depth to the curriculum which may not be achieved indoors (Learning and Teaching Scotland, 2010). This often includes discovering, experimenting, engaging and learning about the world (Institute for Outdoor Learning, 2020). Estyn (2011) conveys that a number of schools have made effective use of their outdoor provision areas by investing time and money. However, fostering learning outdoors is predominantly seen within primary and early secondary education in comparison to higher education due to a structured timetable (Beames et al., 2012). Further limitations to promote outdoor learning include the quality and space provided to undertake outdoor learning (Ofsted, 2008). Although provision areas may contrast, DCELLS (2009) demonstrates that a

small outdoor environment can enhance learning in a similar way as a much larger environment. By providing learners the opportunity to experience creative, challenging and adventurous lessons, learners are likely to remember this experience (ibid.; Learning and Teaching Scotland, 2010).

Within primary education, outdoor learning can promote a number of aspects within the curriculum (ibid.). Education for Sustainable Development and Global Citizenship recognises the importance of experiential learning by allowing learners to appreciate the world beyond the classroom through seven themes (WG, 2008a). This demonstrated that outdoor learning is not confined to a particular subject. Effectively, 90% of schools agreed that the curriculum can be delivered through outdoor learning (Plymouth University, 2016). Contrastingly, Estyn (2011) underlines that senior leaders within schools are not often provided effective training to improve their outdoor facilities. As a result of this, a number of schools do not use the outdoors effectively with great concerns over the welfare of their learners when undertaking activities within the outdoor environment (ibid.). Bilton (2005) advocates that practitioners are required to overcome these risks to utilise the environment effectively in order to develop essential skills. Managing possible risks can be achieved through a risk assessment. This is a mandatory requirement in which practitioners are obliged by law to complete prior to an activity in order to record possible hazards (WG, 2017).

In addition to this, Beames et al. (2012) concede that the most effective learning are the ones in which are held in authentic learning contexts that are realistic and provide first-hand experience which can be achieved outdoors. This experience will allow learners to explore and make connections about themselves, individuals and the natural world around them (Johnson and Duffek, 2008). As emphasised by Dewey (1894) and Piaget (1973), learners require to interact with the environment in order to learn. This is likely to enhance their understanding as Ofsted (2008) articulates that learners are likely to show engagement when subjects are presented in an interest and engaging manner. For example, Porter (2018) connotes that concrete experiences are essential in order for learners to be able to write creatively. This will be achieved by providing the learners opportunity to engage their senses throughout the year (Black, 2019; Huggins and Wickett, 2011). Sensory development supports sensory and multiple intelligences of an individual (Beames et al., 2012). In turn, an outdoor learning environment will provide learners the opportunity to thrive with a number of different learning styles proposed (Estyn, 2019c). This complements Gardner's (1993) theory of Multiple Intelligence as he demonstrates that not all learners learn in the same way. Nevertheless, improvements are required as Estyn (2011) and Ofsted (2008) highlight that a

number of schools do not always assess outdoor learning in a similar manner to assessments conducted within the classroom learning environment.

How Can Outdoor Learning Support Well-being?

An outdoor learning environment can enhance all developmental stages of a learner: social, physical, creative, cultural and personal (Johnson and Duffek, 2008; DCELLS, 2009). In most cases, Beames et al. (2012) and Cooper (2015) initiate that outdoor learning will help bring the curriculum to life, help learners understand the environment and encourage physical activity. Physical activity resonates with extensive research demonstrating the benefits brought upon an individual's health and well-being (Homan, 2018). Research by Estyn (2011) initiates that practitioners record an incline in their learner's fitness and stamina as a consequence of engagement shown in the activity conducted outdoors. The Mental Health Foundation (2019) has recorded obesity as a global challenge and one in which will continue to rise. Therefore, the Welsh Government (2019b) have set out a consultation in order to prevent obesity as statistics demonstrate that one in every ten individuals are identified as being obese. Hence, outdoor learning is effective to improve mental health as obesity factors poorer mental health and low self-esteem (ibid.; Mental Health Foundation, 2019). By providing learners the opportunity to access additional learning environments beyond the classroom, this will influence the learners to use this environment daily, even in the case of wet weather conditions (Johnson and Duffek, 2008). Learners often dismiss poorer weather conditions due to their excitement towards learning outdoors (Estyn, 2016).

A further benefit is that the use and engagement of outdoor learning can promote social interaction which can have a positive effect on their well-being (Estyn, 2011; 2016; Plymouth University, 2016). This is predominantly seen with regard to learners who struggle within the restriction of the classroom as Black (2019) states that learners who do not often participate within the classroom show effective communication skills within the outdoors. Woodland Trust Scotland (2015) suggests that this comes as a result of outdoor learning positively impacting on the learner's independence, confidence, self-esteem and self-efficacy. Knight (2013) acknowledges this and emphasises that this may develop effective relationships and positive attitudes encouraging learners to socialise. Learners are therefore likely to develop their understanding of their peers by being provided the opportunity to independently participate and co-operate with others outdoors (Rea, 2011). In turn, by working collaboratively, Homan (2018) recognises that learners are likely to successfully achieve the overall outcome which will positively affect the learner's well-being. This emphasises that maintaining healthy relationships are necessary for our minds and bodies to thrive (WG, 2019a). In effect, learners

will become enterprising creative contributors, ready to play a part in work and life (Donaldson, 2015).

However, Gill (2010, cited in Welsh Council for Outdoor Learning, 2018, p.27) affirms that education should not only allow practitioners to deliver the curriculum but allow learners to enhance life skills. The curriculum should develop the learner's confidence and resilience which can in turn be achieved through fostering positive relationships with their peers (ibid.). Promoting resilience effectively is important in order to assist positive health and well-being by enabling learners to overcome adverse events (WG, 2010). A number of activities conducted outdoors prompt learners to work beyond their comfort zones which enables them to develop and manage their concerns (Estyn, 2019d). The attributes of confidence and resilience are required in order to develop as health confident individuals (Donaldson, 2015). Homan (2018) suggests that a number of learners recognise the outdoors as a calm learning environment which enables them to take risks without being anxious. Mental Health Foundation (1999, cited in White, 2011, p.87) advocates the use of the outdoors as unstructured learning enables learners to take risks and can depend on assistance from other peers or staff members if required. Therefore, the outdoor environment gives learners the confidence required to overcome their health and well-being. On the other hand, the Welsh Government (2010) notes that further challenges may arise when the risks require to take outweigh the resilient factors, showing that further measures are required in order to enhance the learner's health and well-being.

Chapter Three: Methodology

Throughout a research project, it is essential that researchers approach their investigations in an ethical manner (Austin, 2016; Bell and Waters, 2018). Ethics refers to principles which guide contact often established by a code of practice (Robson, 2002). University of Wales Trinity Saint David (2017) underlines the importance of researchers understanding ethical procedures in order to protect the interests of the participant. Hence, an application of an ethical approval was completed by the researcher prior to gathering primary research (see appendix one). This ensured that appropriate measures were considered to protect the belief of the participants (Denscombe, 2017). As acknowledged by BERA (2018), researchers hold the responsibility of ensuring that each respondent understands the study and should be treated fairly. As emphasised by Austin (2016), it is essential to ensure that each participant provides consent to participate alongside the management of the setting. Therefore, a covering letter and a consent form were produced in order to provide participants information in which expressed that their participation was voluntary (see appendix two and three). In line with BERA (2018) guidelines, administering measures for every adult or young person is essential. United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child agree to this such that every participant under the age of eighteen has the right to express their opinions only when they desire to disclose the information (Unicef, 2010).

In order to collate quantitative and qualitative data, a number of primary methodologies were used. As pronounced by McDonough and McDonough (1997, cited in Xerri, 2017, p.65), applying a variety of methodologies provides researchers the opportunity to combine data gathered from different sources which enhances its accuracy. Firstly, observations were conducted in order to study the educational setting which consisted of classroom observations and examination of the learners' work. As highlighted by Arthur (2012), observations are often conducted prior to additional methods as these are dependent on the information gathered from the initial observation. From this data, educational observations allow researchers to provide feedback which may improve the teaching and learning within the educational setting (ibid.). In this matter, observations were reviewed in natural situations to provide unbiased information. Nevertheless, this method may have hindered the reliability and validity of the information gathered as Cohen et al. (2011) convey that the presence of the researcher may affect the observations that reflect the behaviour of the learners. In this case, it was essential to ensure that a relationship was built through interacting with the learners with the aim for the observation to be unobtrusive.

Secondly, electronic questionnaires were distributed to a number of practitioners which entailed a combination of different questions in order to obtain the overall attitudes and opinions of the respondent. Denscombe (2017) asserts that the use of different questions keeps the respondents engaged when participating in the research and ensures that no pattern, whilst answering the questions, is formed. Contrastingly, Bell (2010, cited in Austin, 2016, p.81) and Bell and Waters (2018) note that the terminology used is potent in comparison to the types of questions asked, as it is said that respondents are not likely to answer the questions if they are not understood. Consequently, the validity of the questionnaire may decrease due to the shortfall of accuracy and honesty of the respondent which has been considered (Gillham, 2008). In order to mitigate against this issue, a pilot questionnaire was used in order to ensure that the questionnaire was understood. This questionnaire combined Likert scale, open and closed question which allowed comparisons to be made from all responses (Oppenheim, 1992). Open ended questions also provided respondents to reflect upon their views which provides rich data to the researcher; however, these demands added time and effort from the respondent in comparison to closed ended questions (Thomas, 2017). Closed ended questions also take shorter time to complete and analyse the data as Cohen et al. (2011) believe that structured questions provide the research with pre-coded data in which can be used to analyse and compare. Conversely, respondents are not provided the opportunity to support their answers. Although this was evident with the use of a Likert scale question, a five-point range allowed individuals to identify their strengths and agreements to statements. After all, it has been acknowledged following conducting the research that respondents are often gravitated by a mid-point which may not reflect their true perceptions (Newby, 2014, cited in Xerri, 2017, p. 66).

Additionally, group interviews were conducted with a selection of learners of Foundation Phase (FP) and Key Stage Two (KS2). The inclusion of a number of participants ensured an informal situation as O'Reilly and Dogra (2017) and Thomas (2017) voice that learners are likely to feel anxious when participating in qualitative methods. This provided opportunity for learners to share their opinions and experiences which generated a chain of responses. Steward and Shamdassani (2015) suggest that group interviews do not require learners to answer each question, but learners will tend to share their experiences when they have strong feeling on the topic. In this matter, a number of learners may not have participated if the methodology of a questionnaire for the learners were chosen as it is often found that learners favour talking in comparison to writing (Gillham, 2008). In order for learners to provide assent, learners were provided the opportunity to withdraw their participation with the use of traffic light fans to ensure the well-being of the learners (see appendix four). Similarly, face-to-face interviews were arranged with a number of practitioners within the school.

Chapter Four: Results and Discussions

In this chapter, the researcher aims to analyse the primary data collated with the attempt to demonstrate how the use of outdoor learning in primary education can support well-being. This report can be found in appendix five.

Responses to Electronic Questionnaire

The questionnaire comprised of ten questions that were composed with the intention to aid this research project. This questionnaire was made available to each teaching professional within the school via email. 75% of the respondents were class teachers with the remaining 25% being a teaching assistant or a higher-level teaching assistant. Identifying the role of the participant was felt necessary in order to analyse and compare their views of professionals working within the FP and KS2. After analysing the data, 50% of the participants were KS2 teachers which highlights that the data gathered may predominantly reflect views about provisions for years three to six. Responses from the questionnaire can be found in appendix six.

Note: 1 participant equates to 12.5% (8 participants in total).

Question Three:
What does outdoor learning mean to you?

The third question of the questionnaire aimed to focus on the participants' personal views of what is meant by the term. As addressed by appendix six, the majority of responses emphasise that outdoor learning involves using an environment beyond the classroom. The outdoors becomes the central part of this experience and practitioners can provide experiences that may not be possible within the classroom. The importance of which was disclosed in Chapter Two. The Welsh Council for Outdoor Learning (2018) notes that effective use of the outdoors seeks to develop the individuals' knowledge, skills, attitudes and behaviour as a result of venturing outdoors. Interestingly, a number of responses received identified a few core characteristics of outdoor learning; participation, residential experience, self-confidence (ibid.). Throughout the research, it is apparent that these provision areas differ from each phase as it has been identified that the FP have different areas for all year groups whilst KS2 have outdoor classrooms. Examples of these provision areas include orienteering, adventure playground and an allotment area. In addition to this, 87.5% of respondents identified the forest as an outdoor provision area this is made available for all learners within

the school and one which is frequently used. Knight (2011) acknowledges that providing these natural spaces such as woodlands provide excellent provision to learners that may be challenging in urban areas.

Question Five:
How much time would you say that learners in your class have the opportunity to explore the outdoors as part of their learning each day?

Although provision areas were identified within the school, it was surprising to find that only one participant expressed that learners are provided more than fifteen minutes per day to explore the outdoors as part of their learning. This was interesting to note as the remaining seven professionals underlined that learners are provided below fifteen minutes. This seems to demonstrate that practitioners do not use the outdoors as frequently as possible. In retrospect, adaptations to this question have been considered as it has been acknowledged that the current option of '0-15 minutes' does not provide a clear indication whether or not the learners within their class are provided the opportunities to undertake outdoor learning. In order to overcome this in later research projects, it has been considered that an additional box for '0 minutes' would be applied. Nonetheless, Henley (2010) notes that a short period of time, at most five minutes can generate immediate improvements in mental well-being. However, the Health Education Authority (1998, cited in Bilton, 2010, p.24) propose that learners require an estimated hour per day of physical activity in order to maintain their health and well-being. Yet, due to the practitioners identifying the use of outdoor learning within timetabled lessons, it could therefore be argued that the suggested hour of activity could include playtimes.

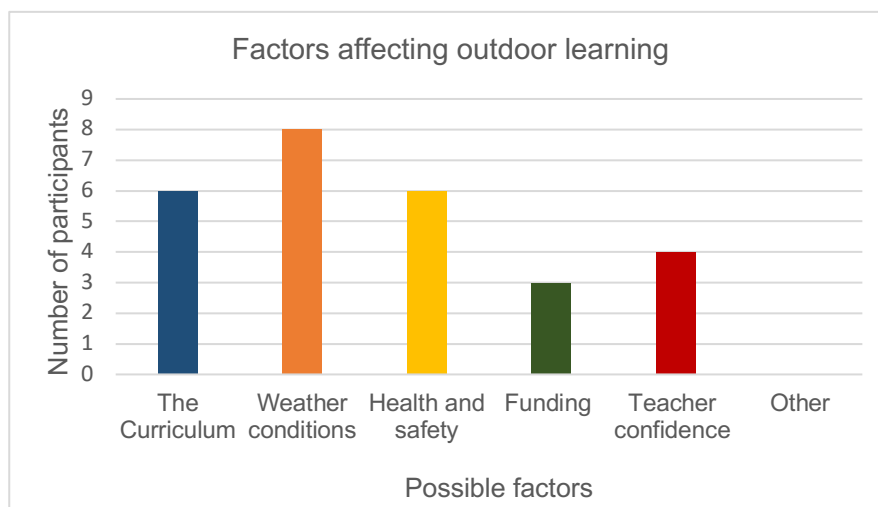
Limitations of the use of outdoor learning have been addressed by question six. As emphasised by Figure two, 100% of the respondents identified that the weather was one factor which hindered the use of outdoor learning. During a structured interview, the class teacher noted that considerations to weather is important as practitioners are required to think of the learners' safety. In addition to this, they added that "learners are going to be focused on how cold they are in comparison to what they are learning" (see appendix seven). This contradicts the opinion of Knight (2011) who identifies that poor weather conditions are impossible when learners are provided appropriate clothing. Bilton (2005) explains that learners require to participate in this valuable opportunity which should not be weather dependent. During an interview, a class teacher further agreed to this whereby they assert that learners are enticed to use as what she described as an "ever-changing environment" (see appendix eight). The things which the learners may observe one day may not happen the next. Alternatively, Maynard and Waters (2007) recognise that practitioners are often reluctant to take learners

outdoors in poor weather conditions with a raised possibility of complaints from parents as a result of learners returning home with wet or muddy uniform. This suggests that outdoor learning should not be weather permitted, and practitioners should provide or encourage learners to bring appropriate clothing to maximise learning opportunities. Appropriate clothing may include a raincoat and wellington boots.

Alongside weather conditions, the curriculum was identified by 75% of the respondents as another barrier affecting the use of the outdoors which is further discussed in questions seven. It is apparent that all respondents have recognised that the use of the outdoors is predominantly used within the FP in comparison to KS2. One respondent suggested that this is a result of the FP having the use of the outdoors embedded within the curriculum whilst the use of outdoor provision areas in KS2 are in development. Similarly, another respondent states that the “FP tend to use the outdoor provision areas a lot more within their daily provision.” As recognised by DCELLS (2009), outdoor provision and the FP are inseparable. However, although it is perceived that predominantly the younger the learners are, the more experience they have outdoors, a teacher during an interview identified that the curriculum for 2022 will value the outdoors extensively (see appendix eight). As recommended by Donaldson (2015), every individual should have the privilege to undertake learning beyond the school through authentic learning experiences highlighted within the twelve pedagogical principles (Impact Wales, 2018).

Additionally, 50% of the respondents identify teacher confidence as an added factor which inhibit opportunity for outdoor learning. As reflected upon question eight, 75% of respondents highlighted that they were neither satisfied nor unsatisfied for the training provided by the school for outdoor learning. Although it has been acknowledged that some practitioners are confident with the use of the outdoors, one practitioner during an interview disclosed that “further training opportunities may ensure further use of the outdoors alongside the use of the different areas may be considered” (see appendix seven). This seems to suggest that further training opportunities may develop practitioners’ confidence. Estyn (2011) supports this concept by demonstrating that training in the use of outdoor learning encourages greater usage, thus, this can positively impact on the experience received by learners.

Figure 2: A graph to show the factors that affect outdoor learning

**Question Nine:**

Please provide examples of how you use the outdoors to develop the well-being of the learners within your class.

Responses for this question highlighted a vast variety of ways in which the outdoors is used to support the well-being of the learners. One practitioner emphasised that everything that can be taught within class can in theory be accomplished outdoors. Another demonstrated that the use of the forest can develop the creativity of their learners. Contrastingly, these responses suggest different viewpoints of the use of the outdoors as one view is seen as an environment for everyday teaching and the other view suggests a specific area and how it may be used to develop a specific skill. This session required learners to use natural resources to create a picture. White (2011) believes that effective outdoor education relies on practitioners encouraging learners to engage with their creative faculties. Due to this activity being pupil initiated, the work produced by the learners varied (see appendix eight). This suggests that outdoor learning might facilitate a constructivist approach, placing the learners at the centre of their learning (Knight, 2016). Positively, Estyn (2019a) demonstrates that a child led curriculum can develop the learner's self-esteem and self-confidence. Donaldson (2015) further initiates the importance of pupil-led learning as he states that the learners' voice should be taken into account in accordance to the UNCRC. As highlighted by Article twelve, every individual has the right to express their views and opinions (Unicef, 2010). Interestingly, further examples in appendix six demonstrate the use of ICT and creativity which are suggested by BBC News (2011) to be subjects that are not used frequently outdoors.

Question Ten:
'Outdoor learning provided opportunity for health promotions.' Do you agree or disagree?

During the research, it appeared that the minority of practitioners promoted the use of outdoor learning to support the well-being of their learners. A number of participants identified that “breathing in fresh air can only have a positive impact.” However, Waite (2008) and the Welsh Government (2019a) connote that practitioners’ intentions have gone beyond this and suggest that practitioners integrate well-being within other areas of the curriculum. Yet, it is necessary to note that one practitioner suggests that outdoor learning requires to be purposeful in order to propose health promotions which reflects Beams et al.’s (2012) perceptions highlighted within Chapter Two.

Furthermore, it has been identified that “classroom based activates do not suit all types of learners.” This suggests that the outdoor environment provide alternative teaching approaches which may not be fostered within the classroom which complements Estyn’s (2019c) view identified in Chapter Two. As discovered within an interview, the practitioner noted that the outdoor environment has had a positive impact on an individual with global delay (see appendix eight). The outdoors has enhanced their communication skills significantly and their confidence to communicate with their peers in comparison to the classroom. Brewer (2016) acknowledges such benefits for learners with special educational needs as the outdoors relieves stress, anxiety, develops their social skills and motivates learner. This initiates that the use of the outdoors can have a positive impact on every learner, despite their capabilities. However, 25% of participants identified that a number of learners are not provided the opportunity to go outside beyond school which complements Palmer (2015) belief in Chapter Two. As stated by a participant, “I have had children too afraid to walk in long grass.” Hence, regular opportunity is important to a number of learners to overcome this. Further responses can be seen in appendix six.

Interviews with Learners

Learners were interviewed to gain an understanding of outdoor learning (see appendix nine and ten). In order to gain an insight to their experiences of how outdoor learning supports their well-being, the researcher felt that it was necessary to identify their understanding on well-being. Most KS2 learners expressed that well-being was a term used to describe an individual free from ill health. Similarly, Estyn (2019b, p. 1) conveys this by saying that this usually refers to an individual’s “physical or mental condition or state, and the extent to which it is free from illness.” Child D further identified their understanding by identifying that this is a key element within one of the four curriculum purposes. As Donaldson (2015) asserts, every individual

should have the opportunity to become healthy confident individuals. This is a national priority which has been underpinned within the Well-being and Future Generations Act for Wales (2015) (WG, 2015a).

Adaptations to these questions were considered for learners within the FP by requiring the learners to identify their feelings when learning indoors and outdoors to analyse their well-being. It is apparent that a number of learners felt positive emotions within the outdoor environment in comparison to learning within the classroom. Equally, the admiration for the outdoors was demonstrated by KS2 learners as one individual reported that “there is more freedom outside than inside the classroom.” Another learner reinforces this by suggesting that “the classroom is very small, so the outdoors is very important.” This demonstrates that the outdoors facilitates space in which may not be provided indoors. Pollard (2008) and Bilton (2010) articulate that practitioners should consider the organisation of the space as this can impact on the quality of learning. McMillan (1930, cited in Tovey, 2007, p.77) underlines the importance of effective space as learners of all ages require space as much as food. This illustrates that the space provided within the outdoors can enable or constrain learning, unless used effectively. However, Rogers and Evans (2008, cited in Bilton, 2010, p.43) outline that boys may require more space than girls. Interestingly, one participant emphasised that the outdoors assists their confidence as “everyone watches you including the teacher” when indoors. It could be suggested that providing a sense of freedom albeit within boundaries may support learning. Yet, during the interview, it is essential to note that a handful of learners identified that they disliked the outdoors. One particular FP learner showed an angry emotion to represent their feelings as they disclosed that they are afraid of going outside. Identifying this reason through effective questioning would have been beneficial.

It has been agreed by all KS2 participants that outdoor learning supports their well-being. Responses show that the outdoors “is a relaxing environment unlike the classroom”, “keeps us healthy and fit” and positively impacts their emotions. Tovey (2007) identifies and maintains the view that outdoor develops learner’s confidence as they interact in an environment of uncertainty. This suggests that learners will develop their resilience to overcome situation. As acknowledged in Chapter Two, such capabilities allow learners to rebound from setback which can help reduce depression and anxiety (WG, 2010). It is suggested that learners are more confident outdoors as it has been identified that several learners of FP and KS2 do not associate the outdoor environment with learning, but associate outdoor learning with play. As illustrated by a learner, “Going outside allows us to clear our heads and switch off from doing any work.” Therefore, an overall feeling of enjoyment, motivation, thrill and pleasure will be experienced through this approach to teaching (Unicef, 2018). However, Bilton (2010) implies

that indoor and outdoor learning must work simultaneously as outdoor learning may inhibit the learning indoors. This implies that practitioners are required to maximise the use of the outdoors alongside learning within the classroom.

Although the majority of learners identified that they have not used the outdoors this academic term, they disclosed a number of provision areas which complement the findings disclosed by the practitioners (see appendix eleven). The learners expressed that they have “learnt about the life cycle of a flower”, “learnt about habitats” and “went to the forest and made a den for the lions.” These findings demonstrate that the learning conducted outdoors is purposeful and memorable. As previously recognised in Chapter Two, Woodland Trust Scotland (2015) connotes that direct contact with the environment may build knowledge which last a lifetime. However, one learner conveyed that they cherish and remember both indoor and outdoor learning, topic and subject dependent. As pronounced by Cremin and Arthur (2014), practitioners should follow the learner’s interests in order to motivate the learners and encourage them to take responsibility for their own learning. As outlined by Joyce (2012) and Knight (2013), this can be delivered through outdoor learning experiences as they can provide a hook to learning to encourage learners to participate.

Observations

Observations of learners within reception were conducted in order to compare their participation during indoor (lesson one) and outdoor learning (lesson two) (see appendix twelve). From analysis, Figure three shows that the learners obtain a level of three and above when participating in activities beyond the classroom in relation to Leuven’s scale of involvement (Emotionally Healthy Schools, 2019). The term ‘involvement’ was established in order to portray how well the activities planned was tailored to the learner’s development (WG, 2008b). In effect, it was observed that these learners were not easily distracted during outdoor learning as this scale suggests that a deeper level of learning is achieved when achieving level four or above. In effect, it was observed that the target pupils further developed their skills of creating pictures from natural materials within the classroom. As identified by the Welsh Government (2015b), learners are required to practice and combine their learning through play. Nevertheless, it has been acknowledged that the learner’s levels of well-being will fluctuate during the day which suggests that this may not reflect a true reflection. In this case, it has been considered that further participants will be observed to draw upon a pattern formed when conducting further educational research in the near future. Yet, these findings illustrate a correlation between their levels of engagement and well-being. Effectively, a

positive well-being will positively impact learner's academic achievement, involvement and success (Public Health England, 2019).

Figure 3: A table to show learners' level of well-being and involvement

Target Pupil	Level of well-being		Level of involvement	
	Lesson one (indoors)	Lesson two (outdoors)	Lesson one (indoors)	Lesson two (outdoors)
Child A	3	4	4	4
Child B	3	4	2	4
Child C	2	3	2	3

Chapter Five: Conclusion

Reflecting upon the objectives of this educational research project, Chapters Two and Four have emphasised how the outdoor environment can support the health and well-being of learners in primary education. The wide range of benefits include increased fitness, confidence, resilience and social interaction through first-hand experiences (Plymouth University, 2016). In this case, a hands-on approach to teaching foster the views of Dewey, Piaget and Gardner which may be difficult to achieve within the classroom. However, outdoor learning does not require a particular pedagogy, as it appears to possess elements of a variety of theories of learning; behaviourists, constructivists, social constructivists and multiple intelligences (Waite and Rea, 2006). Thus, it is suggested that outdoor learning is a pedagogical choice which may ensure that the lessons taught are more engaging and memorable, assisting learners to reach their full potential.

However, as shown by primary research, practitioners are met with challenges which constrain the use of the outdoors. These factors include curriculum constraints, weather conditions, teacher confidence, funding and health and safety. Yet, procedures such as a risk assessment and training can be implemented to overcome the challenges as research demonstrates that the benefits outweigh the challenges. Hence, the curriculum for 2022 fosters the use of the outdoor learning environment which may positively impact the use of the outdoor as an approach to teaching throughout the primary sector (Donaldson, 2015). From analysing the primary data, it has been recommended that schools should invest in providing practitioners with appropriate training in order to develop the practitioner's confidence. Effective training may include managing, planning and evaluating the use of outdoor learning (Estyn, 2011). In effect, appropriate training may allow practitioners to utilise the outdoors frequently.

By conducting this research project, the researcher has developed their understanding of how the outdoor provision areas can support the well-being of learners. In turn, the researcher has gained confidence and will be encouraged to use the outdoors with the aim to deliver this approach to teaching in the near future. However, the researcher feels that it is necessary to continue researching this topic in order to develop a deeper understanding as it has been acknowledged that the data gathered may contrast to the findings commenced during the summer term. Nevertheless, every practitioner should maximise the use of the outdoor as outdoor learning experiences are necessary for the development of the learners and their physical, social and emotional well-being.

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