

Section 1

The Photograph



(Source: Bell, 2021a)

Section 2

Feature 1: Loose branches, sticks, logs of different lengths and weights, and twigs.

Science and mathematical opportunities:

Children could create dens and various structures using the natural loose parts found in the woodland – opportunity for mathematical language including, longer, shorter than, under, over, up, down, to be introduced and encouraged by adults. Logs can be moved and arranged by children and used to walk along using their bodies to practice balance.

Longer branches or logs could be rolled or propped against tree stumps to create a surface to roll other objects down. Branches and sticks can be gathered to compare length, thickness or weight. Twigs can be used to create patterns and shapes. Sticks and twigs can be transformed into tools to stir, walk with, fight with. Additional resources can be available for children to access – bowls, jugs, water, tubs, knives and /or peelers. These may facilitate further exploration by the children to collect or use items to mix dirt and water and ‘cook’ with what they have found. Adults can introduce new skills involving real tools (knives and peelers) for whittling, modelling safe use, therefore extending and challenging children’s abilities, knowledge and experiences.

Curriculum Links:

Area of Learning - Science and Technology, progression steps (Welsh Government, 2020b):

- Explore and communicate different forms of energy
- Explore properties of materials and choose different materials for particular use
- Communicate the effect forces have on myself and on objects
- I can make design decisions, using my knowledge of materials and existing products, and suggest design improvements
- I can observe and describe ways in which materials change when they are mixed together

- I can safely use simple tools, materials and equipment to construct and deconstruct

Feature 2: Bracken/ferns and variety of other plant life.

Science and mathematical opportunities:

Mathematical exploration of collecting leaves and counting how many - resources provided to facilitate this could include tubs and pots. This may lead to putting leaves into sets or sorting into colours or sizes – adults can introduce relevant language and prompting questions - how many? Bigger, smaller, equal to, the same. Identifying and relating the counted items to a written representation of the matching number – Numicon and laminated/wooden numbers available for the children to choose from.

Looking at plants that are growing and comparing to those that have been collected from the ground/picked. Opportunities to discuss the seasons and revisit at different times of the day and year. Children could be provided with Ipads or digital cameras to make their own recordings of what they notice and are interested in. Magnifying tools and specimen pots could be added as resources for children to investigate the mini-beasts and bugs they may find when exploring the plant life. Non-fiction and fiction books may be made available to inspire and provide a reference for the children for example, The Hungry Caterpillar, Room on the Broom.



(Source: Wildwood Days, 2019)

Leaves, pinecones, sticks and other fallen objects can be used to make patterns or pictures and create art and sculpture. Adults could show examples of artists work using natural materials - for example Andy Goldsworthy, before going to the woodland area or take pictures of patterns that the children could copy or adapt.

Curriculum Links:

Area of Learning – Mathematics and Numeracy, progression steps (Welsh Government, 2020a):

- Forming quantities in different ways
- Communicate how sets change
- Represent and compare relationships between numbers and quantities
- Copy and extend patterns and sequences
- Demonstrate using objects equal and not equal
- I can group sets into categories and begin to communicate the rule used

Area of Learning - Science and Technology, progression steps (Welsh Government, 2020b):

- I can recognise that plants and animals are living things which grow
- I can identify, follow and begin to create sequences and patterns in everyday activities
- I can recognise patterns from my observations and investigations and can communicate my findings
- I can explore relationships between living things, their habitats and their life cycles.

Feature 3: Trees.

Science and mathematical opportunities:

Play and exploration of light and dark, shadows, from the sunlight coming through the branches. Using bodies to make shadows, questions adults can ask – where do you think the light is coming from? Can you make your shadow bigger/longer? Why do the shadows move? Extra resources provided could be paper and crayons/pencils to draw the outlines or colour the shadows of the trees on the floor.



(Source: Bell, 2021b)

Certain trees can be used to climb up, swing from using arms/legs, and balance along. These movements all encourage the children's vestibular sense allowing the brain and body to move together and build new skills and experiences. Rope and/or loose branches can be provided to create a swing from stronger branches – adults could make one with the help of the children, and spare ropes can be left for children to experiment with tying and hanging around and from branches and trees. Language used from adults and children can include, higher, lower, faster, slower, push, pull, backwards, forwards. Children can experience the effect they can have on the swing using their bodies depending on the forces they use including beginning to see how gravity works.

Curriculum Links:

Area of Learning – Mathematics and Numeracy, progression steps (Welsh Government, 2020a):

- Movement, direction and position

Area of Learning - Science and Technology, progression steps (Welsh Government, 2020b):

- I can show curiosity, question how things work
- Show basic properties of light
- Identify harm and act to reduce risk
- I can investigate different forms of energy and how it can be transferred
- I can communicate the effect forces have on myself and on objects

Section 3**RISK BENEFIT ASSESSMENT**

Location / Activity:	Woodland clearing	Date:	9 th September 2021
Assessor:	Anna Bell	Review date:	9 th April 2022

ACTIVITY	How will young people BENEFIT from this activity?	Possible hazards	Who is at risk?	PRECAUTIONS in place to reduce the risk of injury	Overall risk RATING: L/M/H
Swinging from rope/branches attached to trees	Supports children's growing awareness of their body and how they can use it to exert force. Fine and gross motor skills can be practiced repetitively to grip and manipulate the rope or branches. Opportunity for turn taking which will develop social skills. Children exposed to viewing the area from a different perspective and become aware of gravity.	Rope burns to hands or legs. Fall onto rough ground with possible cuts/bruises or other injury. Swing could hit other children or adults nearby causing bumps or head injury.	Children and adults	Adults model how to climb onto swing and have discussion with children about how best to support each other when getting on/off. Talk to children about where the swing may go and how to walk safely around the area. Children that are nervous can practice hanging upside down/swinging on lower-level branches.	L

Walking/sitting on woodland floor	Children can experience what different surfaces feel like under foot. Will see and feel how the weather changes the environment – can jump in mud, crunch twigs and sticks therefore become more aware of their senses. Opportunities to experience the effect material (footwear) has on what they are walking on. Children will learn how to control their bodies and use arms to balance stimulating their vestibular senses.	Roots and/or uneven ground could cause children or adults to trip and fall injuring themselves. Clothes could be ripped or get caught on loose branches.	Children and adults	Ensure suitable clothing such as waterproofs, trousers and warm layers are worn. Children must have sturdy footwear such as walking boots/shoes or wellies. Talk together about what they need to look out for underfoot for example holes, roots and brambles. Ask children to give ideas on ways of moving through the area – holding hands, walking carefully to begin with instead of running.	L
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Using loose branches/sticks/logs to build dens or other structures	Encourages children to work together and negotiate ideas and experiences – aiding social development. Fine and gross motor skills practice. Opportunity for enabling children to experience and become more aware of their sense of proprioception through lifting and moving different weighted objects. Understanding of materials and their properties. Sense of achievement through learning from trial and error.	Splinters from wood. Heavy logs/branches could be dropped causing bumps, bruises, cuts. Hands/fingers could be trapped causing injuries such as cuts and scrapes or even breaks.	Children and adults	Model and discuss with children how to lift and move heavy items. Agree before activities how many children would be suitable in a particular area so that they can make good use of the space. Consider mixing peer groups so that younger or less confident children can learn from and work with older or more confident children. Ensure an adult is close by the activity so that children can ask for help if required.	M
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ACTIVITY	How will young people BENEFIT from this activity?	Possible hazards	Who is at risk?	PRECAUTIONS in place to reduce the risk of injury	Overall risk RATING: L/M/H
	Experience of gravity and forces – rolling, leaning, bending.				

Investigating the bracken, ferns, and other plants, including trees and insects and wildlife	Opportunity for life cycle investigation – through the plants as they discover saplings and comparison to older plants – also through the insects, larvae, caterpillars, butterflies, eggs, bird's nests. Mathematical investigation and play – counting, sorting and comparing sizes as children collect different objects. Understanding of the seasons and the changes in the environment through this.	Children and adults could be stung/irritated by nettles or other poisonous plants and scratched by brambles/branches causing cuts and sore hands/arms. Possibility of being bitten or stung by insects – causing irritating skin or allergic reaction. Stomach upset from children picking up or touching plants/berries and putting in their mouth.	Children and adults	Ensure everyone is aware of the woodland boundaries – using markers or flags. Demonstrate the rule of - can you see an adult? Can you hear an adult? Play a game to check children's understanding. Talk with children about what might happen to them if they are stung/bitten – how they may feel – what can they do – for example find an adult who can wash/rinse their hands. Discuss why we should never put things in the mouth and have suitable provision for cleaning hands – wipes/bottled water, and wash hands when back indoors. Adults to check area regularly for unwanted rubbish or signs of littering/glass/dog mess.	L
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ACTIVITY	How will young people BENEFIT from this activity?	Possible hazards	Who is at risk?	PRECAUTIONS in place to reduce the risk of injury	Overall risk RATING: L/M/H
	Pattern making and mark making opportunities using the found items from the woodland. Light and shadow play experimenting with how the light comes through the branches and changes in different parts of the woodland.	Risk of coming across dog faeces or dead/rotting animals. Could pick up or tread on rubbish or broken glass causing cuts or infections. Children could wander off into other areas of the woodland and become lost.			

Making marshmallow sticks using tools to whittle and peeling bark from fallen branches	Development of fine motor skills. Offers opportunity to exposure to challenge – building confidence as ability and skill increase. Experience of cause and effect as they whittle away the layers of bark to expose what is underneath. Opens discussion around heat and fire – children can wonder about what may happen to the stick and the marshmallow when they become hot.	Children could slice, scrape, or cut their fingers and/or hands. Splinters from the sticks or branches. Potential to stab or hurt themselves or each other with sharp sticks.	Children and adults	Demonstrate and practice holding and using the tools with the children before using them for real. Remind children of the direction they should cut to reduce knives slipping onto fingers/hands. Ensure the children only have access to the tools when an adult is supervising. Less experienced children to start out using potato peelers before knives. First aid kit available with plasters and bandages. Small, well supervised groups.	M
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Section 4

An environment that is rich in natural resources which lend themselves to become anything a child can imagine, open-ended, with potential that encourages curiosity (Tovey, 2017a and Tovey, 2017b) demonstrates how Froebel's approach to learning links closely with Nicholson's theory of loose parts. Tovey (2017b) suggests that in play there may not be a right or wrong idea, this provides the environment for children to learn and develop their skills in problem solving without feeling under pressure.

According to Gibson, Cornell and Gill (2017) child-led outdoor play can be most effective in supporting the development of independence and cognitive skills, when adults introduce engaging materials – loose parts, and take a step back rather than attempting to lead activities. Gibson, Cornell and Gill (2017) believe there is a lack of evidence in research studies currently, to back up the theory that loose parts play has a positive impact on children's cognitive development, however through a study of a collection of research by Gull et al. (2019) it was found that there were words like divergent thinking, open-ended, manipulated, constructive, colours, and shapes included in the articles. This language can be directly linked to mathematical thinking and learning which can develop the first stages of early mathematical understanding and curiosity (Keith, 2018). Loose parts that can be found in the natural environment for example stones, pebbles, leaves and sticks, can all be used by children to explore and investigate the patterns that they can see all around them. Noticing and exploring pattern (Keith, 2018) can help children to build the fundamental understanding of mathematics, how things can be organised and connected. Rahardjo (2019) states that loose parts are beneficial in children's play due to the fact they can be used and reused in any way the child wishes, thus allowing open-ended potential for creativity and broad thinking, and giving them value. Through a variety of loose parts there are opportunities for children to communicate what they have learnt (Rahardjo, 2019) and respond and use different materials according to the child's process of thinking.

The adult's role, argued by Gill (ND) that attitude plays a part by approaching outdoor learning from a positive perspective, giving children the freedom to find out what they are capable of therefore allowing mistakes to happen – this in turn creates an environment

to learn. Adults must allow children to succeed and enjoy the feeling of being able to achieve. This is reflected in the approach taken by many Scandinavian outdoor Kindergarten where Pedagog's trust the children in their care to 'take care of themselves' (Roberts and De Jong, 2016) by assessing what they are comfortable doing. Barrett (ND) agrees that confident, knowledgeable adults should trust the children to follow their own learning and treat them as people in their own right with an attitude of discovery together, scaffolding children's learning as required by listening to what they are interested in.

Sandseter and Kleppe (2019) have compared many approaches to outdoor play and risky play across different countries and suggest that without exposure to risky play, there could be a negative impact on children's future well-being, ability to judge risks and could cause anxiety. The Froebel approach to Forest schools (Tovey, 2017b) highlights children should not just be allowed to be in the outdoors but that the practice of encouraging them to assess, take risks and manage them can help overcome fears and become capable and confident in their own ability. For example, learning to walk across a wobbly log unaided or climb branches to a swing can be scary for a child who has never had the opportunity before. They may fall or slip to begin with, but with a sensitive, supportive adult (Tovey, 2017b) who is concerned with the benefits of the challenge, the child will experience not only the scientific concept of forces and energy but develop physically and emotionally. The New Curriculum for Wales (Welsh Government, 2020b) is supported through this way of learning as children can become more knowledgeable about their own bodies, build resilience and not be afraid to take risks and face challenge. Holistic movement through outdoor play has links with executive functions of the brain (Wyver, 2019) enabling children to develop their working memory and become more flexible and creative in their cognitive thinking. By taking part in activities such as swinging, lifting branches/logs, climbing trees, children will be activating their proprioceptive system (Humber Sensory Processing Hub, 2020), benefitting them by helping to regulate their brain, be more alert and able to learn. The association and feelings that a child will have with the action of swinging from a tree, for example, the exhilaration of being up high or hanging upside down, will enable them to attach meaning to the experience and be able to connect this to future investigations. Therefore, when discussing how gravity can affect the body, the child will remember the sensation (Duglan, 2015) and relate it to the concept.

McLachlan, Flear and Edwards (2010) link Vygotsky's theory of how concepts are formed with children learning through action and direct interaction with the world around them and that it is not enough just to teach or show the concept. A mathematical idea or concept will mean more, then if it has real life meaning and relates to the experience of that child. When thinking about the concept of measuring length and introducing vocabulary such as longer and shorter than – instead of asking a child to record different objects they see in a classroom – the opportunity to discuss and put the concept in to practice in an outdoor situation building dens as discussed in Section 2, with different lengths of branches will become a practical experience in a real context.

The adults role in affordance, by teaching/showing children the skills they need to progress their learning of science in the outdoors – is not enough to have an area outside which is rich in resources (Campbell and Speldewinde, 2020) but adults who have the experience, time and knowledge of how to support and scaffold children's play.

Listening to children working through a problem using their metacognitive talk it is possible for the adult to observe and assess where a child's understanding is (Tovey, 2017b). Tunnicliffe (2015) agrees, stating that recording the understanding and progression of a child through mapping, provides the basis for creating new challenges to develop learning in particular areas. To capture, take notice and be involved in (when the children allow) these conversations, there needs to be sufficient staffing levels to make quality observations which require time to be near or with a group or an individual. Time, or the lack of time can be a challenge in some settings, this may be linked to the adult's view or attitude towards outdoor experiences, as referred to by Duglan (2015) where practitioners felt time was a constraint in the organisation of resources, concluded that through a change in attitude they were able to give more time. White (ND) highlights that time is an important factor in enabling children to develop uninterrupted to become absorbed in their problem solving, come away from and go back and continue with projects, such as construction. This can be a challenge in settings where adults are restricted by the imposed timetable or use of shared areas for activities such as lunchtime.

As they become aware of different mathematical concepts, children need time to return to and try out their own ideas in an unhurried way but at different paces (Keith, 2018). For example, in *The Photograph* (Section 1) the area gives affordance for children to explore and collect various leaves and other natural objects that they could arrange or group to make patterns or create art. Children may start to create a pattern in one way, become distracted by another child's creation or objects they have collected then return later to add to or change their own creation.

By moving, collecting, rolling and covering themselves or the items (loose parts) they have available, children are able to think through physical action (Atherton and Nutbrown, 2016). Adults can support these repetitive, schematic behaviours by watching children closely and noticing what the interest of the child is, then responding by providing further opportunity to extend their interest (White, 2020). It is possible to encourage social interaction which will foster a sense of well-being, through adults observing children who have similar interests (White, 2020) and providing resources to further their investigation. For example, individual children could be exploring the idea of making a place to hide or leaning branches against a tree and crawling through; the adult is able to supply tarpaulin or rope for the children inspiring a den building project. Scientific and mathematical exploration (how long does the branch need to be? How many do we want?) will then work alongside negotiation skills, sustained shared thinking as children discuss how to tackle problems with a shared interest or schema. Construction activities with a variety of loose parts for example when building structures or dens, allow children to use what they already know of the real world and put their theories into practice (White, 2020). An adult who has observed and listened to the children's questions and thinking could provide paper and pencils to aid further planning and design exploration.

Working together, on a physical challenge outdoors, for example den building, will support children to develop and share how they think (Cremin *et al.*, 2015) and become aware of each other's thought processes by communicating while experimenting through trial and error. Cremin *et al.* (2015) believes that this helps children to build on their own scientific understanding and see their world from alternative perspectives. Being given the trust and time to consolidate interests and ideas can provide children with the ability to

self-regulate (McCree, Cutting and Sherwin, 2018) and build relationships with their peers and adults. This can benefit children who may have suffered from early childhood trauma, or have come from disadvantaged backgrounds (McCree, Cutting and Sherwin, 2018) as learning outdoors can remove the pressures children may feel when contained within the classroom. However, Harper (2017) acknowledges that children will come with a mixture of different previous experiences, therefore adults that are effective at supporting and extending children in their scientific and mathematical journey will ensure they are meeting the individual needs of the child (Thornton and Brunton, 2010).

To successfully understand, meet and challenge a child's learning, Thornton and Brunton (2010) show how adults can reflect and improve through the Reggio Approach on the provision of the resources available and in the affordance of the setting. This could be through displaying and documenting a variety of evidence of the children's creations, for example through photographs, drawings, and artwork where children can see it and be proud of what they have done. Campbell, Jobling and Howitt (2021) explain that the adult role should involve child-led, child-directed investigation with the adult understanding when to introduce more challenging activities that the child would not instigate if left to themselves due to the limits of their experiences at home. Adults can inspire and encourage further exploration through their enthusiasm and open questions (Campbell, Jobling and Howitt, 2021), using language that models' communication in a scientific way.

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