

Awe and wonder - Science, Mathematics, and the Outdoors.

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(Timms, 2014)

The Welsh government (2015) framework outcomes for children aged between three and seven years of age, promotes utilizing the outdoors and natural surroundings as a resource for children's learning. Although outdoor learning only became formally recognised in recent years, with the first forest school being introduced to the UK in 1995, and the early years foundation stage (2021) including the concept, in the year 2000. Many theorists previously discovered the benefits of outdoor learning. The Froebel Trust (2022) tell us that Froebel began

to advocate the use of outdoor learning when he opened his own school in the 1800s. Engaging with nature, and using natural resources is at the forefront of Froebel's principals. His beliefs have become widely applied throughout the world.

The Reggio Emilia approach (1963) has been recognised as essential to a child's development. The Reggio Emilia approach (1963) focuses on the natural environment, and the opportunities it provides to children. The natural environment, such as the one shown above, gives children the chance for stimulation. It allows children to explore, engage and challenge themselves. Natural learning has the potential to not only benefit physical health, but also to be able to capture children's attention, and keep them interested in developing their own learning (Moser et al, 2010).

Maynard et al (2013) states that the foundation phase for Wales, conducted research involving children in an early years setting. The study initially took place in a classroom environment and found that children alleged to be underperformers in an indoor environment, began to thrive when learning in an outdoor environment. The research project suggested that children embraced the freedom, challenges and opportunities outdoor learning provided for them. Children were given the chance to reconstruct themselves, and the study proposed that when children take part in practical outdoor learning, they are able to learn about themselves and discover their own interest.

As children are impulsively drawn to play, it is one of the best occasions to witness the potential of a child. Children's traditional learning experiences are often filled with assessments and test. These situations can cause children to become anxious, and these experiences may hinder children's creativity. When children are given the opportunity to learn through play in the outdoors, they are able to demonstrate their full capabilities without concern of failure. When children are playing, they do not feel they are being assessed or graded by their performance, and outdoor learning also allows children the freedom to discover their own abilities (Educational play care, Unknown).

Participating in outdoor learning in a natural environment, and engaging in play, offers children the opportunity for personal involvement. Learning in a natural environment can aid children to make the link between the concrete and the abstract. When children learn through play in these outdoor environments, they have the chance to discover several mathematical concepts such as symmetry, counting, fractions and volume, all while using natural resources (Natural resource Wales, 2021).

The Welsh government curriculum for schools in Wales (2022) reveals that mathematics and science play a key part in the lives of children. Science and mathematics will also continue to be vital in later life as children become adults. How these important subjects are taught to children may define their future.

The Welsh curriculum (2022) aims to help children to develop towards the four purposes of the curriculum. The four purposes aim to inspire children to become ambitious, creative, confident individuals and learners. Outdoor learning provides children with the opportunity to fulfil these goals.

This particular environment chosen, allows children the opportunities to learn the fascination of science and mathematics in the outdoors. The environment has been chosen to support children's Mathematical and scientific development, whilst also being engaging and fun. The environment chosen has the potential to develop several areas of a child's mathematics and scientific knowledge. This woodland environment enables children to be involved in projects such as collecting and sorting leaves. These tasks teach children about sequences, patterns, and fractions. In this environment, Children have the opportunity to play with logs, trees and twigs, and these types of activities facilitate children to explore 3D shapes, discover weights, heights, and various measurements. Children may set up a make-believe kitchen whilst playing in this environment. Adding water to mud whilst pretending to prepare a meal, teaches children about volume, exploring capacities, consistencies, and textures. All these skills are essential to the National literacy and numeracy framework (2015).

Encouraging children to discover nature and natural resources whilst learning outdoors, also aids children's scientific knowledge. Tovey (No date) states that Frobel believed Outdoor learning offers children an insight into the cycle of life and death. He expressed that the outdoors would inspire children to take care and protect the environment they live in, along with the plants, and animals. The Welsh governments foundation phase outdoor learning handbook (2009) supports this theory by stating that engaging in outdoor play activities, inspires children to learn other scientific concepts, such as, education about the different seasons, and how animals and plants adapt to a change in temperature. The river in this environment would contain tad pools, and an abundance of bugs. Visiting the site on different occasions, would allow children to observe and learn about the tadpoles four stages of lifecycle. Children will engage in the wonders of biology. Providing children with magnifying glasses and slides, in order for the children to closely observe the different features and colours of

insects and bugs, would give children a greater understanding of the animals around them. Children would be able to witness the changes to the trees, and the range of colours and textures of the leave during the changing seasons. The foundation phase framework (2015) section on knowledge and understanding of the world, encourages a vast majority of these learning experiences and scientific learning. The stream in this environment aids children in learning such scientific concepts as physics. Children are able to place items into the stream and predict if they float or sink. Participating in this outdoor play, teaches children about density and buoyancy. Giving the children the task of collecting items they would like to experiment with, would promotes greater cognitive abilities.

Children also need their holistic development nurtured. Holistic development is centering not only on educational development but also supporting a child's social, emotional, and physical development. The benefits of outdoor learning on holistic development have been widely recognised. The foundation phase outdoor learning handbook (2009) state that the outdoors gives children the room to face challengers and risks, whist being in the confines of a secure environment. Outdoor learning and focusing on holistic development can allow children to create a positive association with education and learning.

RISK BENEFIT ASSESMENT

Location/Activity:	Woodland area	Date:	07/05/2022
Assessor:	Nikita Johnson	Review date:	07/05/2002

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

Activity	How will young people benefit from this activity?	Hazards and Risks	Who is at risk?	Precautions in place to reduce the risk of injury	Overall risk rating: L/M/H
Woodland environment	Allowing the children to play outdoors in a woodland environment, enables them to take part in activities that aid them in learning mathematics and science. Learning through play in an outdoor environment and using natural resources has been linked to the development of mathematic concepts such as, counting, volumes and fractions. Learning outdoors is also linked to developing scientific concepts such as, the changes in seasons and how animals and plants adapt to these climate changes.	The woodland environment may be contaminated with foreign objects, left behind from previous visitors. Such as glass or rubbish. The children may cut themselves on these said objects. The ground in this woodland environment is uneven, and the children may trip or fall. Playing in this environment will cause children to become dirty and wet.	Children and practitioners	Practitioners will need to carry out a safety check and risk assessment on the environment beforehand. This is to ensure no foreign objects have been left behind. Children will be made aware of the uneven ground and encouraged to be careful. Children will wear suitable waterproof clothing and wellies when in this area.	L
Gathering sticks, twigs, logs, and stones	Allowing the children to participate in activities such as, gathering sticks, twigs, logs, and stones, will enable them to develop	During this activity, there is a possibility of the twigs and sticks being sharp, and the children	Children	Practitioners will ensure that children will always be supervised when carrying out these activities. Children will also have the option to wear	M

	their mathematical skills. By Gathering these items, the children will be learning about patterns, sequences, and textures.	may cut themselves. The children could drop heavy rocks on their feet while playing and gathering stones. The children may try to put the items in their mouths, and this would be a choking hazard. Playing in this environment will cause the children to become dirty and wet.		protective gloves if they wish. Children will be taught not to put any of the objects in their mouths. During these activities, it will be ensured that at least one practitioner supervising the children will be first aid trained. Children will wear suitable waterproof clothing and wellies when in this area.	
Mud Kitchen	Allowing children to play in a mud kitchen, enables them to learn mathematical and scientific concepts, such as, volume, capacities, and textures. Children will learn how to mix different kinds of consistencies by experimenting with water and soil.	Children may try to eat items from the mud kitchen, as they will often imagine it is their food creations. The risk and hazards around playing in or near water, may include slipping in the water or potential drowning.	Children	Practitioners with ensure that children will always be supervised when near the water and carrying out these activities. Children will be taught not to put any of mud, water, or objects from the mud kitchen in their mouths. During these activities, it will be ensured that at least one practitioner supervising the	M

		Playing in this environment will cause the Children to become dirty and wet.		children will be first aid trained. Children will wear suitable waterproof clothing and wellies when in this area.	
Gathering objects for a floating and sinking activity in the stream	During this activity, the children will gather items from around the woodland environment and will endeavour to predict which items will sink or float. This floating and sinking task enables children to learn scientific concepts such as, density and buoyancy.	The risk and hazards around playing in or near water, may include slipping in the water or potential drowning. The children may try to put the items they collect in their mouths, this would be a choking hazard. During this activity, there is a possibility of the objects that children are collecting, such as, twigs and stones, being sharp, and the children may cut themselves.	Children	Practitioners will ensure that children will always be supervised when near the water and carrying out these activities. Children will be taught not to put any of the objects in their mouths. Children will have the option to wear protective gloves if they wish. During these activities, it will be ensured that at least one practitioner supervising the children will be first aid trained. Children will wear suitable waterproof clothing and wellies when in this area.	M

		The children could drop heavy rocks on their feet while playing and gathering stones. Playing in this environment will cause the Children to become dirty and wet.			
Observing tadpoles in the stream	Engaging in this activity, will allow the children an excellent insight into scientific concepts, such as, Biology. The children will have the opportunity to observe tadpoles and monitor the four stages of their lifecycle.	The risk and hazards of participating in the activity, may include slipping in the water or potential drowning. Playing in this environment will cause children to become dirty and wet.	Children	Practitioners will ensure that children will always be supervised when near the water and carrying out these activities. Children will wear suitable waterproof clothing and wellies when in this area.	L

Den building	Den building is an excellent activity for children to partake in. Children will have the opportunity to work as a team and build problem solving skills, and teamwork skills. Participating in this activity also gives children the opportunity to experiment with mathematical concepts, such as, heights, lengths, and weights,	The risk and hazards associated with den building, may include the den collapsing onto the children while they are inside playing. The children may try to put the items they are using to build the den, in their mouths, this would be a choking hazard. During this activity, there is a possibility of the objects that children are collecting, such as, twigs and stones, being sharp, and the children may cut themselves. Children could drop heavy logs or rocks on themselves. Playing in this environment	Children	Practitioners with ensure that children will always be supervised when carrying out these activities. Children will also have the option to wear protective gloves if they wish. Children will be taught not to put any of the objects in their mouths. During these activities, it will be ensured that at least one practitioner supervising the children will be first aid trained. Children will wear suitable waterproof clothing and wellies when in this area.	M
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Pound (2005) How children learn, describes how most theorist and practitioners are aware that children learn through play. The role of the adult is to provide children with the opportunity for open play. Play does not need to have a required result. However, Pound (2005) suggests that practitioners can find the concept of open play difficult. Early years practitioners can be uneasy about the lack of control around open play and may prefer to set up activities or task with required rules. However, learning through play is the chance for children to engage in their own interests. Adults must allow children to take charge of their own play, to achieve their own goals, and come to their own conclusions. The curriculum guidance for the foundation stage (2000) states that children do not differentiate between working and playing, and neither should early years practitioners.

Rose and Rogers (2012) explain how the role of the adult in an early year's setting is a challenging and complex task. Adults involved with working in an early year setting have a vast amount of responsibility. Pugh (2018) outlines that when working in an early years setting, the role of the adult is incredibly varied, however, to work with children, certain personality traits and qualities are needed. Early years practitioners need to be passionate about education, and enthusiastic about enabling children to reach their full developmental potential. Early years practitioners need to be good listeners and successful communicators. As stated by the NHS (2019) children often struggle to express themselves, they can become frustrated and act out, or become upset. Working in the early years requires adults to be patient and empathetic.

An adult's role is not only to educate children but also be a career, enabler, and an advisor. The role of the adult in assisting children to progress and achieve, means having the skill and

knowledge needed to lead by example. Early years practitioners should always take advantage of any opportunity or funding that would enable them to further their skills and education. The Welsh governments (2018) publication on what really works for the early years? Describes how the enthusiasm for high quality early years education, should be shared by everyone involved with working in the early years sector.

In line with article 2, 28 and 29 of the UNCRC (1990) every child must have their physical, social, and developmental needs supported and protected, regardless of race, gender, or culture. It is a child's right to have access to education., and it is the role of an adult to not only ensure children have this right granted, but to also support and encourage this learning (Department for children, school, and families 2009). To enable children to become confident learners, they need to experience risk. However, allowing children to experience risk, needs to take place in a controlled environment. The Welsh government (2020) keeping learners safe, explains that it is an adult's role to create and maintain a safe learning environment for children. The Welsh government (2020) also states that it is an adult's responsibility to take practical measures, in order to decrease the risk of any harm to children.

Pilcher (No date) describes how within the guidelines of health and safety, taking risk is beneficial to children. Risk taking is a significant part of a child's development. It is the role of the adult to provide children with the chances to experiment with their own ideas and be given the freedom to safely find solutions to problems and explore their limits. Providing children with these freedoms, assists them in the development of their risk management skills.

There is further evidence to support the theory of standing back and allowing children to attempt tasks alone. Malik (2017) states that Vygotsky's zone of proximal development, describes how it is an adult's role to aid children in achieving goals, rather than completing the tasks for them. This learning, also known as scaffolding learning, allows children to achieve success in activities that they previously would not have been able to accomplish alone. Maybin et al (1992) explains how both Vygotsky and Bruner relate to scaffolding as a method for adults to support children in their learning. They state that is it an adult's role to assist learners towards developing new levels of understanding and new skills.

Hayes et al (2017) explains Bronfenbrenner's ecological model of human development. This theory is based on the belief that the closest environment to a child, is the most influential. According to this theory, early years settings are the second most influential environment to a child. Taking these finding into consideration, Graham-Clay (No date) describes how effective

communication between early years practitioners and caregivers, is essential to meeting the developmental needs of a child. The role of an adult is to ensure there are no barriers in communication between practitioners and caregivers, as this can be detrimental to meeting the needs of a child. During the early years, children are also learning the vital skills needed to become competent and knowledgeable adults. During the early years, children's views on equality and justice, and right and wrong are being founded. It is imperative that children are guided by skillful and educated adults during these influential years. It is the role of the adult to aid children in maturing into capable and just adults (Rose and Rogers, 2012).

One of the roles of an adult working in the early years sector, is to ensure they are educated in identifying additional learning needs in children. The Welsh government (2018) learning disability, improving lives program, has been put in place to ensure that children with additional learning needs receive the support they need, and also have access to the correct services. Adults involved in the early years sector must make certain that they are well versed with these policies and how these services can be accessed.

The children Act 2004 states the importance of multiagency working together to provide support for children and families. Multi-agencies collaboration can also be essential when ensuring a child's learning and developmental needs are being met. Studies from the early year pupil derivation grant (2018) show that children from disadvantaged backgrounds are often delayed in their learning and development, compared to children from more affluent families. It is an adult's role to liaise with any multiagency necessary such as flying start, families first or the social services, to ensure disadvantaged children are receiving the support they need.

Adults working within an early year setting have a duty to provide children with resources to develop their learning. However, practitioners are often faced with financial restrictions, due to local authority budgets (Welsh government, 2022). Outdoor learning can solve some of these issues, as the outdoor environment has its own natural resources. Early impact (No date) demonstrates the benefits of using loose parts as resources. Loose parts consist of objects with no fixed objective. Loose parts are objects that can become anything in a child imagination. Loose parts in a natural environment are also cost effective, as they can be used multiple times and become something different during every activity.

Flannigan and Dietze (2018) studies, show that providing children with loose parts, allow children full use of their imaginations while learning. In this particular woodland environment, loose parts may include sticks and rocks, with children being able to vision and transform them

into such objects as magic wands or swords. Children may collect similar logs in order to build an imaginary fire, aiding in organizing abilities. Rocks or stones may become precious gems or small animals. Loose parts could also be added to the environment shown above to inspire further learning. Loose parts such as string, fabrics, pegs and tubes or piping could encourage den building, costume design and creating echoes using the pipes. All of which leads to children undertaking their own learning, and nurtures their problem-solving skills, and critical thinking skills.

Engaging in sustained shared thinking with children is beneficial to their learning and development. Sustained shared thinking allows adults to work together with children to hear their ideas and collaborate to find solutions. Sustained shared thinking gives adults the opportunity to create an authentic dialog with a child. It is the role of the adult to encourage sustained shared thinking. Adults must ensure that conversations remain positive, and adults should not use sustained shared thinking as an opportunity to teach children new things, such as terminology. Sustained shared thinking should be used as a chance to share knowledge with a child, and learn each other's thought process and ideas (Brodie, 2019).

To encourage a child's learning and development, Adults need to be modeling metacognition. Price-Mitchell (2015) says that when adults model metacognition, they are teaching children how to regulate their behavior and become aware of their own mental state. Teaching children metacognition strategies from early years, can aid children to become more resilient. Humans can be self-critical, however, metacognition thinking, teaches children to manage and overcome challenges, instead of leading to a negative feeling about themselves (Jacobson, No date).

One of the most important roles of an adult is ensuring children are safeguarded. The Welsh Government (2021) keeping children safe in education, affirms that all adults working with children must understand their safeguarding responsibilities. This is also in line with the Welsh assembly government education act 2002 where it states that all educational establishments have the responsibility to safeguard and promote the welfare of children. A child's welfare is the responsibility of everyone who comes into contact with them, No one practitioner is responsible for safeguarding a child (The department of education, 2021). When working in the early years sector, adults must be mindful to abide by the UNCRC (1990) article 3 that the best interests of the child should always be the main priority.

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