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How can outdoor learning promote children's understanding of 'Places and People' for children aged 3-7?

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Frontispiece

This is to certify that the work presented in this research project follows results based on an investigation carried out by the author. This research project nor any part of it has been presented, or is being submitted in candidature of any award other than in part of the degree BA (Honours) in Primary Education with QTS of the University of Wales, Trinity Saint David, Carmarthen Campus.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

A current discussion that might be deemed significant in the philosophy underlying the Foundation Phase is the concept of outdoor learning. Various researchers including Wellhousen, Joyce and Bilton reinforce outdoor learning and the benefits associated in relation to child development. The research seems to emphasise the importance of the outdoor environment exposing children to learning opportunities that simply cannot be accessed when learning indoors. See appendix 8 for photographs of an indoor provision. Such an approach could be supported by the Welsh Government (2009) who indicate outdoor learning enhances a diverse range of children's development including social, physical, creative, cultural and personal. Furthermore, The BBC (2011) suggest that geography is declining in numerous schools as pupils are finding it 'boring' and 'irrelevant'. On reflection, it might be interesting to investigate outdoor learning and its contribution to children's understanding of geography across the Foundation Phase.

The objective of this research project is to examine the extent to which outdoor learning promotes children's understanding of 'Places and People' within the Foundation Phase. The term 'Places and People' refers to the element of geography within the Foundation Phase and skills are exhibited within the Area of Learning; Knowledge and Understanding of the World. The Welsh Government (2015) acknowledge that skills across the Foundation Phase should be effectively developed through participation in experiential learning activities that are both indoors and outdoors. This highlights the importance of outdoor learning, particularly for children aged three to seven.

The research project could potentially assist in professional development by enhancing knowledge and understanding of the humanities through an in depth reflection on particular pedagogy to maximise children's learning opportunities. BERA (2011) demonstrate educational researchers aim to extend knowledge and understanding in a diverse range of areas of educational activity from a variety of perspectives.

To formulate hypotheses for the research project, it could be speculated that children might appreciate the concept of learning outdoors. Additionally, it could be considered that schools

might predominantly use the outdoors to develop children's understanding in science and physical education (myself and living things and physical development). The hypotheses are determined from observations across various professional teaching experiences.

The author possesses a particular interest in the field of physical development and the importance of ensuring healthy lifestyles for all in Wales. The BBC (2015) outline children spend over six hours a day in front of a screen. This seems to demonstrate children spend a large proportion of their day using technology including television, mobile phones, iPad's and various other devices. The National Assembly for Wales (2013) suggest 19% of children in Wales are obese. This seems to imply that obesity levels in Wales might stem from the reliance on particular technology, both in and outside of school. On reflection, it seems that outdoor learning might be a way in which to address this issue as it develops children's 'health and fitness' (Welsh Government, 2009). Based on this, it might be intriguing to explore the concept of outdoor learning to study its effect on the development of skills under 'Places and People' within the Foundation Phase.

The research methods chosen to investigate the question include interviews and observations. A combination of both primary and secondary research should provide sufficient findings in order to decipher the extent to which outdoor learning contributes to children's understanding of 'Places and People' within the Foundation Phase.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The Humanities

Schools Council (1965) describe the humanities as a group of subjects which is predominantly concerned with men and women in relation to their environment, their communities and their own self-knowledge. These three aspects might correlate to history, geography and religious studies. Similarly, Kimber (1995) suggests the humanities comprise history, geography and religious studies.

A recent radical proposal by Donaldson (2015) demonstrates that a new curriculum in Wales should encompass six Areas of Learning and Experience, one of these being the humanities. This seems to suggest that schools should aim to develop skills across the whole of the humanities in comparison to exploring skills within one discrete subject area, for instance history. This might support a cross-curricular approach as various themes might be addressed through the teaching of the humanities. Such an approach might be supported by Hoodless et al (2009) who indicate the humanities offer diverse opportunities for a variation of topics of work, allowing practitioners to set high expectations and ensure learners to reach their potential. Contrastingly, Donaldson (2015) outlines that literacy, numeracy and digital competency allow for a diverse range of work topics to be explored and that the three curriculum areas should be delivered as a cross-curricular responsibility for all practitioners in Wales. This raises a point which suggests some practitioners might focus on the delivery of the national priorities in Wales, in contrast exploring the humanities.

The importance of teaching Geography

‘A high-quality geography education should inspire in pupils a curiosity and fascination about the world and its people that will remain with them for the rest of their lives’ (Department of Education, 2013). Scoffham (2010:9) suggests making sense of the world around us, understanding how it is inter-related and furthermore, considering how it might change lies at the heart of geography. Similarly, Catling and Willy (2009) suggest geography is beneficial for learners to understand and appreciate the world through daily interactions by

exploring the ways it impacts us. National Geographic (2016) and Carter (1988) closely define geography as the study of places and the relationships between people and their environments. This seems to correlate with the strand 'Places and People' located within the Foundation Phase Framework.

The Welsh Government (2008) outline that Education for Sustainable Development and Global Citizenship (ESDGC) is percolates the subject of geography. 'ESDGC links the environment and the people who live in, and from, it' (Welsh Government, 2008: 4). This seems to be closely linked with the definition of geography, suggesting ESDGC and geography overlap considerably. Based on this, a central part of geography could focus on developing learners into global citizens. Such research might be supported by Catling and Willy (2009) who emphasise that a key purpose of geography is to encourage children to become thoughtful, global citizens. Contrastingly, Hoodless et al (2009) outline many people believe geography requires the ability to recall capital cities and facts about the longest rivers and the tallest mountains.

Reflecting on the past, geography seems to be evolving into an increasingly valued subject across the curriculum. In 1988, The Education Reform Act secured geography as a foundation subject. Following this, geography was then given priority as a key subject (HMSO, 1988). In the 1990's, geography became a statutory subject within the curriculum. A manifesto created in 2009 by the Geography Association aims to create a compelling place for geography in the curriculum. Geography was described as being fundamental for everyone (Geography Association, 2009). This seems to suggest geography is a subject that should be explored by all learners across the primary phase. In contrast, Wiegand (1993) outlines that a survey was carried out in 1978, suggesting work in geography at this time was described as superficial and there was little evidence of progression. Furthermore, Wiegand (1993:2) states that there was a 'lack of appreciation of the range of work that could be provided for young children' in addition to the fact that geography 'suffered a great deal of neglect'. This seems to suggest that practitioners might not have possessed a sufficient level of understanding of the ethos of geography in order to deliver effective lessons to stimulate learning, particularly for children aged three to seven.

Since the 1990's, various researchers have placed more of an emphasis on developing geographical concepts through the use of enquiry. Ofsted (2008) indicate geographical

enquiry encourages questioning, investigation and critical thinking regarding issues affecting places and people. Furthermore, Catling and Willy (2009) write that geography teaching should inform, stimulate and motivate children which is at the heart of enjoyable learning. This learning might be deemed experiential. Kolb (1984:38) states ‘learning is the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience’. Beard and Wilson (2006) similarly argue that experiencing something is a linking process between action and thought which creates an organic whole of continuity.

Conversely, Dewey (1997:25) writes that education that comes about through experience does not always mean that the experiences are genuine or ‘equally educative.’ This reduces the reliability of experiential learning as it might not always constitute to enhancing learning opportunities through understanding. An alternative learning style which might be deemed meaningful is learning by ‘rote’ which is characterised by the learner’s previous knowledge (Kyriacou, 1997). In comparison, Robson (2006) criticises rote learning by outlining it does not develop sufficient understanding.

Progressing into the year 2000, desirable outcomes were created for each phase within Wales for learners to address to assess their level of understanding within that particular subject area. In 2008, the Foundation Phase was established which is a developmental, skills-based curriculum for three to seven year olds in Wales, centralised around play-based pedagogy and encouraging learners to become creative and imaginative (Welsh Government, 2015). Furthermore, Scoffham (2010:25) states geography is ‘imbued with creative potential’. Similarly, Hoodless et al (2009) argues geography is rich in capturing enthusiasm, imagination and interest.

In 2008, Ofsted conducted a survey to evaluate the teaching of geography within primary schools. A decline within geography across primary schools became evident (Ofsted, 2008). Ofsted (2008) additionally outline that this decline in primary schools comprises lack of teacher knowledge and confidence, preventing them delivering engaging and effective sessions, thus impacting upon the learning taking place. This suggests practitioners should have a sufficient amount of knowledge and understanding of geography to ensure teaching maximises learning opportunities within the curriculum area. In favour of this, Grigg (2010) indicates strong subject and professional knowledge is important in becoming an outstanding teacher.

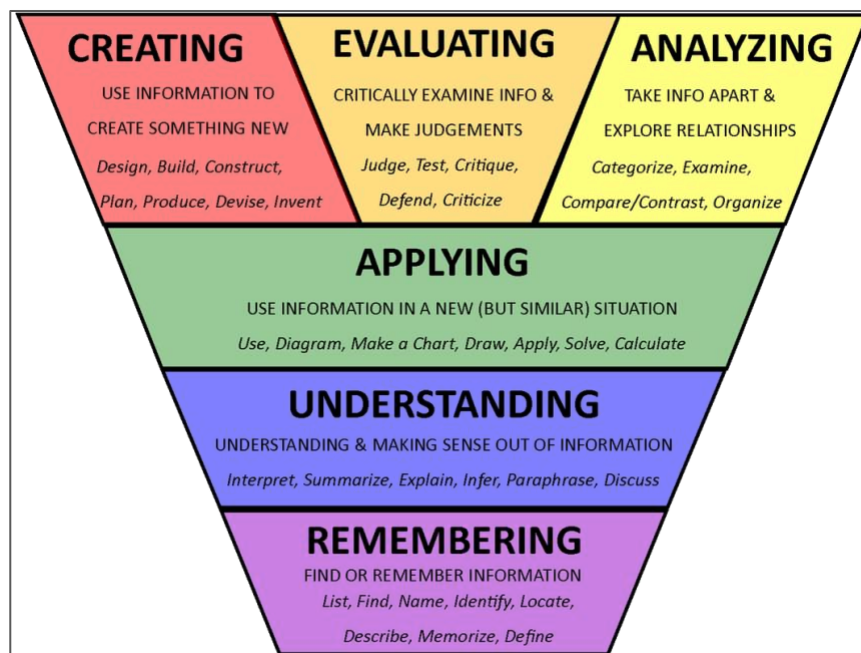
The importance of teaching outdoors

A growing body of educational literature provides a rationale for practitioners utilising the outdoors as part of their pedagogy, particularly within the Foundation Phase. The Welsh Government (2009) demonstrates that the outdoors and the Foundation Phase are inseparable. This seems to suggest that the outdoors should be used consistently to ensure learners within the Foundation Phase can establish the provision as a regular learning environment. The Welsh Government (2007) argue outdoor learning assists in the development of transferable skills including motivation, time management, communication and team building. Such skills might be deemed essential for lifelong learning and useful for the development of independence. The Welsh Government (2015) reinforce independent learning by outlining 'the Foundation Phase environment should promote discovery and independence'. This seems to suggest the ethos of the Foundation Phase aims to develop independence in children aged three to seven across Wales.

Joyce (2012) suggests outdoor learning did not exist in the middle ages. This seems to imply most learning took place indoors in a formal manner. Oglivie (2013) argues that in the 1920's, teaching methods predominantly concentrated on 'ramming in' by rote learning whereby teachers aim to address the '3Rs' (reading, writing and arithmetic) by a means of book-based knowledge. This seems to suggest no or little time was spent learning outdoors as teachers focused on the development of skills through didactic experiences and the recalling

of facts. On reflection, this might correlate to the bottom platform of Bloom's Revised Taxonomy (see figure 1), suggesting only lower-order thinking skills were being developed at this point in time in contrast to the upper platforms whereby higher-order thinking takes place.

Figure 1 – Bloom's Revised Taxonomy (Google Images, 2016).



By the mid 1970's, it was believed that more 'enduring learning took place when people were living it and participating in an experience' (Oglive, 2013: 672). On reflection, this might have given the concept of learning outdoors a foundation, suggesting experience-based learning was a more effective way to learn. Progressing into the 1990's, there was an indefinite mismatch between theory and practice in schools in terms of outdoor learning (Oglive, 2013). This seems to suggest schools were aware of the concept of learning by doing and its benefits, however schools might not have fully utilised their knowledge to implement the practice within schools.

In 2000, the element of risk was highlighted as a potential barrier in terms of outdoor learning. Oglive (2013) outline 'living is and always will be a risky business'. This seems to highlight the concept of risk being consistent in everyday life. Bilton (2005) describe parental

concern as a barrier of outdoor learning opportunities across schools due to the worry of risks. Upon the researcher's reflection, the benefits of outdoor learning could outweigh the barriers suggesting practitioners should implement strategies to overcome these factors. Bilton (2005) supports this by advocating the importance to overcome barriers in order to ensure the outdoors can be fully utilised in developing essential skills. Solutions might include: discussing the importance of outdoor learning, sending out articles to alert parents of the risk associated with a lack of exercise and the conduction of a thorough risk assessment.

A risk assessment 'enables those involved to weigh up whether precautions are adequate or if more should be done to prevent harm to staff, pupils or others' (London Borough of Bexley, 2013). In contrast, the completion of a risk assessment might not directly prevent accidents from occurring. Similarly, the researcher might raise the question as to whether a risk assessment should be conducted for children's everyday outdoor play time? The Welsh Government (2009) reinforce this concept by outlining outdoor learning should enable children to take appropriate risks. Similarly, Edgington (2014) emphasises the importance of children being provided with the opportunities to assess the element of risk through the outdoors. In 2008, the Foundation Phase was introduced to Wales involving the 'participation in experiential learning activities that are both indoors and outdoors' (Welsh Government, 2015), suggesting the ethos of the Foundation Phase encompasses a combination of outdoor learning and hands on learning experiences.

White (2011: 50) states 'the outdoors offers an extremely rich environment for all senses, including the kinesthetic sense'. Similar views can be reinforced by Bilton, Edgington and Joyce who reinforce sensory learning through the outdoors. Such research is evident within the Revised Foundation Phase Framework which states learners should become actively involved in 'activities that allow them to use their senses, to be creative and imaginative' (Welsh Government 2015:10). This seems to imply that the use of the outdoors might be a successful way to enrich sensory learning experiences, particularly within 'Places and People'.

Wellhousen (2002) suggest outdoor learning promotes the physical health of young children. Similarly, the Welsh Government (2009) demonstrate outdoor learning contributes to healthy living education. This raises the point of outdoor learning supporting physical health of children, particularly across the Foundation Phase. Public Health Wales (2015) have a vision

to create a healthier Wales. In addition, the BBC (2014) declare that over one in ten children are starting school obese in Wales. This highlights outdoor learning as a significant teaching strategy that could address levels of obesity in Wales, thus aiming to achieve a healthier Wales.

The Welsh Government (2009) recognise the importance of creating effective outdoor provisions and resources, implying practitioners should create a variation of continuous provisions to support learning outdoors. Knight (2011) writes that it is fundamental for learners to have an appreciation of the natural environment in which they are educated. Conversely, it seems evident that some schools might have more space than others. See appendix 1 for photographs of outdoor provision in current school. Based on this, the creation of continuous provisions might be more complex for some practitioners in contrast to others. Nevertheless, the Welsh Government (2009:2) outline one small environment is full of ‘specialist stimuli such as weather, sounds, smells and textures which can enrich and enhance a child’s learning environment’. This implies that all outdoor learning provisions have the potential to enrich a child’s learning experience, despite its size.

How can outdoor learning promote ‘Places and People’ in the Foundation Phase?

Estyn (2011) highlighted outdoor learning as good practice within the Foundation Phase. This combines the research from Catling and Willy (2009) and Knight (2011). Catling and Willy (2009) indicate geographical enquiries should involve engagement with the world through fieldwork. Knight (2011) similarly write children should experience the full range of nature and the environment. This suggests that the teaching of ‘Places and People’ might be favourable through the use of the outdoors as geographical enquiry might be delivered through fieldwork. The term ‘fieldwork’ predominantly suggests working outdoors as children tend to learn by doing. Furthermore, ‘one of the notable changes in geography teaching in the primary school over the last 20 or 30 years has been the steady increase in outdoor work’ (The Plowden Report, cited in Education England, 1967).

However, some practitioners might be unable to conduct fieldwork on a regular basis due to time and pressure. Donaldson (2015) speculates that a combination of the curriculum and expectations tend to place practitioners under increasing pressure, suggesting less fieldwork studies might take place, particularly across the Foundation Phase. On reflection, the end of

Foundation Phase statutory testing might put additional pressure on practitioners, suggesting there might be less of a focus on outdoor learning within geography, particularly in year two. Contrastingly, The Geographical Association (2015) outline fieldwork and enquiry assist in promoting children's ability to analyse and evaluate. This seems to suggest that fundamental skills are essentially developed through the use of the outdoors, indicating children's understanding within 'Places and People' might be hindered if the outdoors is not utilised frequently.

Scoffham (2010) signifies the importance of learning outdoors specifically in geography as it should allow children to test out ideas to assist them in extending their 'Knowledge and Understanding of the World' (Welsh Government, 2015). Similarly, Catling and Willy (2009) indicate children should be stimulated through the use of the outdoor environment within geography. Such an approach might be supported by Bruner who reinforces discovery learning as a means to explore facts and relationships independently.

In summary of the literature review, there is an abundance of research to suggest geography is fundamental for all children to explore in addition to the importance of young children learning outdoors. Through the use of secondary research, it seems as though there is little research to indicate how the use of the outdoors contributes to the understanding of 'Places and People' for children aged three to seven. The subsequent chapter discusses the chosen methods utilised to collect the primary research to assist the researcher in answering the speculated question.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Throughout the research project, it is crucial to ensure the researcher adheres to the appropriate ethical practices and techniques, particularly when conducting primary research. Rubin and Rubin (1995) emphasise the importance of the researcher understanding the ethical obligations throughout research in order to protect all participants involved. Conversely, Homan (1992) argues ethical obligations are no longer central to the research once a letter of consent has been provided. Nevertheless, Walliam (2011) outlines all participants should be treated respectfully before, during and after the research. On reflection, lack of mutual respect could result in a variety of implications for the researcher and all participants involved. In following the appropriate ethical procedures, the researcher must ensure all participants are shown consideration and respect throughout the entire project. BERA (2011) similarly support this view by stating

‘all individuals should be treated fairly, sensitively, with dignity, and within an ethic of respect and freedom from prejudice regardless of age, gender, sexuality, race, ethnicity, class, nationality, cultural identity, partnership status, faith, disability, political belief or any other significant difference.’

Primary research was undertaken using a variation of methods. Prior gathering of primary research, an application of ethical approval was completed by the researcher (see appendix 2). Once granted approval, the following stage involved a figure of authority from School A providing consent by reading and signing the ethical approval form. Johnson and Christensen (2014) recognise guidelines that should be followed to ensure research participants give informed consent before they can participate in any study. Furthermore BERA (2011) highlight the importance of participants having the right to withdraw from the research for any or no reason, and at any time and it is crucial to inform all individuals of this right. This seems to suggest that showing participants respect and diligence throughout the research might be fundamental in ensuring individuals continue to participate with the research. Furthermore, in relation to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, all children have the right to privacy and right to express their views (UNICEF, 2016). This suggests children are not obligated to participate in the study and they have the right to

express any views and opinions they feel necessary.

Interviews:

Creswell (2014) highlights an interview as a means of unstructured, generally open questions intended to elicit views and opinions from the participants. This seems to suggest interviews enable participants to reflect on experiences, providing the researcher with a broad range of data to utilise. In gathering qualitative data, it was mandatory that questions were open-ended, thus allowing the participant to extend and elaborate on their opinions. Open ended questions have been described as valuable as the participants provide answers in their own words (Johnson and Christensen, 2014). The researcher interviewed a variety of individuals including the Foundation Phase coordinator, class teachers, and pupils from different year groups. When interviewing the adults during the study, the researcher provided the professionals with the list of questions prior to the interview, allowing the participants to make notes for their responses (see appendix 4 for list of questions). Additionally, due to lack of time for research in school, some interviews took place as part of a recorded phone call. The researcher aimed to identify the extent to which participants feel the outdoors contributes to the teaching and learning of geography. On reflection, it was evident that some children felt under pressure when being recorded, thus reducing the reliability of the method of data collection. Based on this, it was important to make the interview as informal as possible to ensure children were comfortable and honest in their responses.

Observations:

Throughout the short time provided to gather primary research, the researcher had the opportunity to plan and deliver geography lessons using both the indoors and outdoors. This method was selected for data collection as it allowed the researcher to gain an understanding of children's perspectives towards outdoor learning. Throughout the sessions, the researcher was able to evaluate various factors including changes in behaviour, understanding and engagement. Arthur et al (2012) recognise observations as successful if they are taken place in small groups to allow the researcher time to observe and record behaviours. On reflection, it might have been more efficient to take one small group outside in contrast to three to effectively record observations of all individuals.

Chapter 4: Results and Discussion

Throughout this chapter, the researcher aims to discuss and explain the results of the findings which were analysed after collecting all primary data. In order to increase the reliability of the results, the researcher aimed to produce a combination of both quantitative and qualitative data.

Prior to conducting the research, the author felt it was crucial to gain an understanding of children's interpretations of geography. A group of year one and year two children were asked what they thought 'Place and People' is about. These particular year groups were selected as the researcher felt any year below might find difficulty in recognising the words associated with the study. When asked the question, not one child was able to link 'Places and People' with any geographical related skills, suggesting this phrase might not have been directly shared with the children when exploring geography. On reflection, it was decided to introduce the word geography as part of the question. The theme of the question was also altered by asking individuals to create their own definition or words that demonstrate what geography means to them. A hundred percent of the six children that were asked had the ability to create a brief definition of geography linking to its key concepts including the identification of countries, locations and different lives around the world (see appendix 3). Nevertheless, Anderson and Arsenault (1988) recognise the importance of interviewing a wide range of participants in order to increase the reliability of the findings. This seems to suggest six children might not be a sufficient amount of participants to interview in gaining reliable, valid results. Upon reflection, the reliability of this study might have been enhanced by asking at least ten children from each class, therefore assisting in the researcher's professional development through an understanding of the project.

Based on the evidence, it seems as though practitioners might be using the word 'geography' in contrast to 'Places and People' when delivering sessions in the Foundation Phase. This seems to suggest lessons might be structured as formal, subject-based sessions. The Welsh Government (2015) outline children should learn how to express their ideas, opinions and feelings with imagination, creativity and sensitivity within 'Places and People'. Upon reflection, children might not be provided with these opportunities if geography is taught in a formal

manner.

Moreover, Child A associated the word geography with ‘the world’ which follows Halocha’s (1998) definition of the term, who describes geography as a world that is constantly changing. Based on this definition, it seems as though Child A perceives geography as a broad subject covering a variation of areas. Similarly, Child E defines geography as ‘everything around us’ which seems to support Scoffham’s (2013) suggestion that all young geographers should investigate and explore everything around us. This raises the point that the participants might have a broad perception of geography as it seems to be relevant in everyday life.

Contrastingly, Child D defines geography as ‘maps’. This suggests that this particular participant might only recall geography as being linked to map work due to his or her experiences. Bird (2000:82) outlines ‘geography is not just about maps: it is also about the environment and how people live and work in other countries.’ This seems to suggest geography encompasses a variety of elements and map work is just one small proportion of this. Nevertheless, the Welsh Government (2015) recognise the importance of map work, emphasising it is an effective way for children to learn through first hand experiences in the Foundation Phase.

Interview – Children

Two children from year one were interviewed to gain an understanding of their experience of outdoor learning in geography (see appendix 12 and 13). It was highlighted the children were not fully aware as to what geography was. Based on this, the researcher assisted by prompting the participants by providing instances whereby they might have engaged with a geography-based session. When asked if the participants have lessons outside, one of the children responded with ‘sometimes’. Beames et al (2012) writes that outdoor learning should be integrated into teachers’ daily timetable, suggesting children should be familiar with the outdoor environment as a learning provision. Based on the response, it seems as though lessons are taught outdoors less frequently than suggested by various educational researchers including Scoffham, Knight and Wellhousen.

Upon interviewing the individuals, the researcher asked the participants to elaborate on a

recent outdoor treasure hunt that they had participated in (see appendix 12 and 13). In the description, the participants outlined they engaged with a treasure hunt as they were ‘looking for rhyming words’. This seems to suggest the individuals used their map work skills in a literacy-based session, implying that the teaching of geography outdoors might be utilised in a cross-curricular approach. Barnes (2015) supports this concept by demonstrating all things that surround us individuals in the physical world can be understood from multiple perspectives. Similarly, Donaldson (2015) illustrates teaching individual subjects prevents essential cross-curricular learning from taking place. This seems to imply that the learners were able to develop a variation of skills including Language, Literacy and Communication Skills and Knowledge and Understanding of the World through the use of the outdoors.

Interview – Class Teachers

Throughout the research, it appeared most practitioners promoted the use of the outdoor environment in their teaching. The year one class teacher stated ‘children need to gather a sense of the world’ (see appendix 5). Similarly, the year two class teacher outlines that it is important for children to ‘learn about the world around them’ (see appendix 6). In support of this, Owen and Ryan (2001) demonstrate geography allows children to make sense of the world. This seems to suggest geography is beneficial in developing this skill. This could be deemed fundamental for learners across the Foundation Phase as making sense of the world might be crucial for them to become global citizens and to be aware of current issues in the twenty first century, supporting the discussion in chapter two.

Conversely, the year one class teacher additionally stated that sessions outdoors are ‘equally as successful’ as they are indoors (see appendix 5). This supports Joyce (2012) who outlines practitioners have been urged to value the outdoors just as much as the indoors. Nevertheless, Beames et al (2012) indicate children should be spending more time outdoors. This seems to demonstrate practitioners should appreciate the natural environment and aim to enrich a child’s learning experience through the use of the outdoor environment as frequently as possible.

The reception class teacher (see appendix 9) state the ‘fluctuations in weather’ hinder outdoor learning opportunities. Knight (2009:26) puts forward a strong point which states ‘there is no such thing as bad weather, only bad clothing’. Estyn (2011) also propose that children who

are denied of opportunities to learn outdoors could miss important mile stones in their development. Similarly, Bilton (2005) recognises the weather as a potential barrier but goes on to explain children should not miss out on the valuable outdoor learning opportunities. This seems to illustrate that weather conditions should not determine whether or not practitioners take children outside. It also indicates practitioners should be prepared for the fluctuations in weather by ensuring children have appropriate clothing for instance rain coats and wellington boots, thus aiming to maximise learning opportunities outdoors.

When interviewing the Foundation Phase Coordinator (see appendix 10 and 11), it was described that geography assists in the development of ‘exploratory skills’ (see appendix 10 and 11). Based on these findings, it might be suggested that ‘exploration’ might underlie the ethos of the Foundation Phase as children are encouraged to use all of their senses and enjoy learning by exploration, enquiry and experimentation (Welsh Government, 2015). Bilton and Crook (2016) reinforce this by outlining outdoor exploration is an essential component of a child’s learning and development.

When constructing the interview, the researcher felt it was appropriate to ask a question as to produce quantitative data. This is demonstrated within the last question (see appendix 4). Johnson and Christensen (2014) demonstrate close-ended questions expose all participants to the same response categories and allow standardized quantitative statistical analysis. This seems to suggest that the use of a close-ended question within an interview might be valuable as they produce results that can be compared to one another. Conversely, it is recognised by Wellington (2015) that the use of a quantitative question in an interview should be avoided as it is seen as an exaggerated approach. This seems to reduce the reliability of the use of quantitative data when conducting interviews. Based on this, the researcher ensured only one question was central to producing quantitative findings. In terms of the results, 100% (four out of four) of the participants responded with ‘yes’ when asked if outdoor learning supports children’s understanding of geography within the Foundation Phase. This suggests that although some practitioners might face barriers in terms of the outdoors, it is still a useful strategy in supporting children’s understanding of ‘Places and People’ across the Foundation Phase. This supports Scoffham’s (2013) suggestion that outdoor learning enhances children’s understanding of geography as it allows children to explore their local environment.

Observations:

The researcher was able to demonstrate how the outdoors can be utilised in promoting children's understanding of 'Places and People' across the Foundation Phase by planning and delivering activities (see appendix 14 and 15). The theme of the term was 'fantasy and fiction' and the class were reading *Zog* by Julia Donaldson. Based on this theme, the children created their own maps of the playground (indoors), then followed their map and verbal instructions by the group to find Zog (outdoors). See appendix 16 for a video of the children participating in this outdoor activity. On reflection, it was useful to record observations from both indoor and outdoor environments in order to make direct comparisons.

It was evident that the outdoors was a valuable resource as it offered hands-on learning experiences whereby the learners used their senses to see, touch, smell and hear the world around them. Catling and Willy (2009) and the Geographical Association (2009) support this strategy as they outline children develop their geographical understanding by exploring the natural environment through the senses. In support of this, Child A (see appendix 12) stated 'I love playing in the mud'. Upon reflection, some practitioners caution children to stay out of the mud, however this might interfere with a child's desire to develop sensory awareness. Based on this, it was evident the learning experience the children experienced outdoors simply could not be accessed indoors. The use of the outdoor environment assisted in children developing vocabulary specific to the task and were eager to ask relevant questions. Such skills are reinforced by the Welsh Government (2015), outlining children should develop and communicate using an increasing range of vocabulary and ask questions to try to find answers.

When comparing the sessions (see appendix 17), it was evident that a variety of aspects of the sessions were different including behaviour, engagement and understanding. Through the observations, it appeared children were significantly more engaged when taught outdoors. This was illustrated by the way in which the children responded to the task. Such findings can be supported by Joyce (2012) and Knight (2009) who indicate outdoor learning has the ability to hook and engage learners instantly. Furthermore, Griffith and Burns (2012) suggest child motivation and engagement is directly correlated to their level of understanding. This suggests that the more engaged a learner is, the more they might understand. Upon reflection, the fact that outdoor learning assists in engaging learners, suggests children could develop their understanding further in geography.

When observing the interaction of the learners and the environment, it was interesting to identify children's confidence increase throughout the task, particularly more introverted individuals. Tovey (2007) argues outdoor learning raises confidence as they are placed in situations of uncertainty. Dewey (2008) indicates children learn more when in the suspense of uncertainty. This seems to suggest outdoor learning might support individuals who might find indoor tasks challenging. When returning to the classroom, it was evident that the learners were able to recall on their experiences outdoors and reflect upon their learning. When on the playground, it was intriguing to see how the individuals were seeking ways to develop skills further from the task into their independent play activities. For instance, learners chose to blindfold each other and use their knowledge of directions to navigate children around the playground. Such an approach might be reinforced by the ethos of the Foundation Phase which outlines children should 'practise and consolidate their learning through play' (Welsh Government, 2015:3).

Chapter 5: Conclusion

In finalising the research project, the author aims to synthesise the findings presented in order to form a conclusion. The overall aim of the research was to identify how outdoor learning promotes children's understanding of 'Places and People' across the Foundation Phase, highlighting ways in which practitioners might utilise this resource to develop geographical based skills for children aged three to seven.

Throughout the study, reference has been made to a diverse range of educational literature that suggests there is a strong relationship between outdoor learning and children's understanding of geography. It has been recognised by a diverse range of educational researchers that fieldwork is a valuable attribute in promoting the understanding of the world around us through hands on, experiential learning (Bilton, 2005). Furthermore, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child state all children have the right to education (UNICEF, 2016). This suggests it is the responsibility of the practitioner to ensure all individuals are supported in developing geographical skills to ensure learners are equipped with the relevant skills to become independent, global citizens within twenty first century education. A way in which this could be addressed might be through outdoor learning in geography or 'Places and People'.

Attention was raised when teachers recognised the weather as a potential barrier which might hinder outdoor learning opportunities. The research indicates outdoor learning plays a vital part in developing geographical skills such as 'asking and answering questions, making observations about the world they live in and expressing opinions about where they live' (see appendix 5). This suggests children should be exposed to these opportunities to develop valuable skills. A strong statement put forward by Knight (2009:26) states 'there is no such thing as bad weather, only bad clothing'. This seems to summarise the attitudes practitioners should have towards outdoor learning, implying teachers should seek to expose all individuals to these experiences.

An additional barrier that was identified was the level of risk children are exposed to. Through secondary research, it was evident parents often worry about the level of risk

children are involved in, preventing outdoor learning from taking place. Upon reflection, a risk assessment could be conducted to minimise these risks, however, research suggests children are highly encouraged to be independent in their assessment of risk by developing their sensory awareness, particularly in the Foundation Phase. This signifies the importance of young children engaging with low-level risk activities when outdoors.

The predominant conclusion of the study was to identify how the outdoors promotes children's understanding of 'Places and People' across the Foundation Phase. This was explored through observations and delivering outdoor geography sessions upon a recent professional teaching experience. Beames et al (2012) writes that there is something special about the outdoors that provides learning opportunities that cannot be easily developed indoors. Similarly, Garrick (2004), Scoffham (2010) and Joyce (2012) support this argument. Beames et al (2012) suggests outdoor learning stimulates exploration, adventure, creativity, discovery, investigation observation and curiosity. Such research suggests the outdoor learning experience is far more valuable than the indoor experience. On reflection, it seems as though outdoor learning experiences enrich learning opportunities by creating an engaging, diverse, stimulating learning environment.

An additional summary that was identified through interviewing was that 'map work' was highlighted as a common skill developed through outdoor learning in geography (see appendix 5, 7 and 9). Bird (2000) recognise geography as being about the environment and how people live and work in other countries in addition to the exploration of maps. This suggests practitioners should aim to develop a variation of skills within 'Places and People' through the outdoors in contrast to developing map work alone. Contrastingly, Catling and Willy (2009) writes that maps raise many important and relevant issues.

In combining both primary and secondary research, it seems evident that the outdoor classroom might not be utilised as frequently as recommended. Child A (see appendix 12) recalls having sessions outside 'sometimes'. On reflection, an alternative proposal might be for schools to aim to deliver a particular percentage of their teaching time outdoors, for instance 20%. In order for schools to overcome this, schools could possibly create a checklist to record these sessions in order to evaluate their effectiveness, particularly in the Foundation Phase.

In addressing the speculated hypotheses, the researcher predicted children would appreciate the concept of learning outdoors. Through observations, it was evident children were significantly more engaged outdoors (see appendix 17), suggesting they appreciate the outdoors as a learning provision. An additional hypothesis constructed suggested schools would predominantly use the outdoors to develop understanding in science and physical education. In combining educational literature and interviews, it seems that the heart of geography lies outdoors and practitioners aim to use the outdoors in a variation of subjects as frequently as possible.

Through the exploration of this topic as a research project, the author has gained confidence in the use of the outdoor classroom to support learners in their understanding, particularly within 'Places and People' for children across the Foundation Phase. A combination of both first hand experiences and interviews has allowed the researcher to deepen knowledge and understanding in this particular curriculum area. In summary, a clear scope for the outdoors has been identified by ensuring the size of an outdoor space should not hinder learning opportunities as it could prevent the development of essential skills, attitudes and understanding within 'Places and People'.

Chapter 6: Reference List

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