

Learning Environments Inside and Outside

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Experience Plan		
Experience: as a child centred approach the experience will allow children to utilise the forest and stream as an active learning environment, allowing the children to explore, play and experiment in an unstructured manner. With the use of natural resources, loose parts and school resources the children will be given free choice on how they would like to enjoy their experience and connect with nature.		
Number of children: 6	Age of children: 5-6 years old	Number of adults: 2
Location: Forest with shallow stream	Preparation time: 1 hour	Experience time: 3 hours
Resources: • Parental permission • Filming and photography consent • Register • Alcohol Gel • Medical equipment for individual children • First aid box • Mobile for each member of staff • Water bottles for every child • Bottle of clean water • Appropriate waterproof outdoor clothing and shoes • Pots and pans • Utensils • 6 iPads for taking photos or videos • Tarpaulin x1 sheet • Buckets x6 • Magnifying glass x6 • A3 paper • Natural loose resources include the following: trees, fallen leaves, sticks, insects, rocks, stream, water, slopes, mud, blackberry bush, low branches, weather, pinecones, plants, fallen tree		
Aim/s of experience: To provide the children with the opportunity to explore nature independently. The opportunities the setting and resources afford can provide cross curricula and holistic development. The experience can also enhance sustainable development and deepen the children's relationship with nature.		
Areas of learning and holistic development: This experience may support the following: Physical Development • Fine motor skills through handling insects, picking blackberries, collecting natural items such as leaves or stones, finger painting with mud or blackberries, mixing, molding mud, pouring.		

- Gross motor skills through carrying objects crouching, jumping, running, climbing, rolling, moving and handling rocks or sticks, building dens.
- Strength and flexibility.
- Encourages physical exercise which positively impacts on the child's health and wellbeing.
- Physical balance for example, walking over stepping stones across the stream
- Children may develop awareness of personal space
- Children may develop understanding of safety measures

Communication, Language and Literacy

- Children may share past experiences and knowledge of the outdoors with peers and adults.
- Children may communicate to each other as part of a team this may be through building a den or dam building in the stream.
- Listening to others
- Listening to the sounds of nature around them
- Children may express their achievements or fears with peers or adults during experience
- Sharing ideas with each other
- Developing social skills through negotiation and planning.
- Problem solving skills
- Children may use mud, blackberry juice, water to mark make using finger painting techniques or sticks.
- Children may develop new vocabulary linked to nature.
- Children may communicate with each other through role play.

Mathematics

- Manipulating objects for example sticks and stones and using them for counting, comparing and measuring
- Geometric skills through Experiencing natural 3D objects to develop their spatial imagery
- Understanding mathematical language and symbols such as taller, shorter, more, fewer, narrow, wide.
- Discovering and discussing different shapes and sizes of outdoor resources such as flowers, sticks, rocks.
- Using stones, sticks, leaves to make patterns and discovering patterns in nature such as tree stump's, insects, rocks.
- Children may use problem solving skills. For example, den/ dam building.
- Opportunity to develop positional language.

Personal, Social and Emotional Development

- Children may get 'lost' in their play allowing them to concentrate and persist for extended periods of time.
- Children may build confidence and self esteem through pushing their own personal boundaries, trying new things and overcoming challenges. For example, walking over stepping stones or climbing the fallen tree.
- Children may develop a deeper understanding of their own personal boundaries and the environment around them through risky play.
- Allowing the children to choose resources and activities gives them a sense of joy, independence and trust.
- Children may express their achievements or fears with peers or adults during the experience
- Children may show empathy to who face challenges and help encourage and support each other to achieve a particular goal.
- Developing social skills through negotiation, co operation and planning.

Understanding the World

- Children may learn how to relate, connect and show empathy towards nature.
- Children may explore their surroundings using all senses.
- Children may have the opportunity explore the features of living things.
- Children may observe similarities, differences, patterns and change.
- Children may make relations between past experiences in nature, deepening their understanding.
- Children may deepen their understanding of the changes of weather and the impact it has on nature.
- Children may deepen their understanding of the scientific attributes of nature. For example, liquids, solids, reflections in water, light through the trees.
- Children may develop understanding of cause and effect. This could be through, dropping stones in the water and watching the ripples.

Expressive Arts & Design

- Children may take the opportunity to play through imaginative role play.
- Children may explore the different colours and textures of nature.
- Children may develop ICT skills by using the iPads to capture photos, patterns and sounds of nature.
- Children may use mud, water, berries to paint on the paper provided.
- Children may use the natural resources to create, mud monsters, a mud kitchen, art, potions, musical instruments, tools.
- Imagination development through the use of loose parts.
- Children may use berry juice and feather (used as a quill) to write or mark make.

Differentiation:

Children will be taken in mixed ability groups.

Children with 1:1 support will be assisted with their allocated adult.

Health and safety:

- Risk assessment to be completed.
- Adults to assist children to and from the forest.
- First aid kit to be taken.
- Water bottles for every person to be taken
- Individual medication to be taken
- Appropriate footwear and clothing to be worn by adults and children
- Adult to observe and assist (if needed) by the stream
- Adults to take mobile phones

Role of adult/adults:

Adult to assist the children to and from the premises safely.

Adult must ensure risk assessment is complete prior to experience and all health and safety measures are taken with them.

Adults will provide the children with resources such as loose parts.

Adults to ensure children are aware of their proximity boundaries and safety rules.

During the activity the adult is to observe the children, whilst being aware of the children's cue's when needing assistance.

One adult to stay near stream for health and safety measures.

Adults should observe and wait for cue's to be invited into children's play experience, therefore there may be an opportunity for the adult to use Sustained Shared Thinking encouraging further exploration and deeper thinking.

Adults may document learning through video, photos or written notes.

The experience:

Two members of staff will walk the children to the forest area just outside the school grounds.

Lay the tarpaulin on the ground and display school resources and loose parts. Use the first 10 minutes to explain proximity boundaries and safety rules for the setting.

Discuss with the children how to respect the environment. Examples of matters to discuss could be to handle insects carefully and making sure to place them back where they came from, only collect leaves on the ground and not pick healthy leaves from the trees.

Explain to the children that they have permission to use any of the school resources if they wish, although the children do not have to use this equipment if they prefer not to.

Allow the children to go and explore the environment and have fun.

The children may invite you to join their play and exploration. This may provide an opportunity for the adult to use Sustained Shared Thinking to extend their thought process and deepen their understanding.

After two hours of free exploration, regroup the children to discuss and review their experience.

Example questions could be:

What did you explore?

What did you find out?

What did you enjoy about the experience?

What did you dislike about the experience?

What resources would you like to bring next time?

Write down the children's findings for future reference to ensure the child's voice is heard.

Ensure the setting is left as it was found to limit the mark made upon the environment. Actively involve the children in this process to allow them to develop an awareness of how to look after the environment.

Collect school resources and return to school.

RISK BENEFIT ASSESSMENT

Location / Activity:	Forest with shallow stream- exploring the natural environment	Date:	18/09/20
Assessor:	Sinead John	Review date:	18/09/21

The boxes in the table below will expand as you type into them; pre-entered text is simply for illustration. You should delete irrelevant items and replace with text relevant to your circumstances.

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?	Possible hazards	Who is at risk?	PRECAUTIONS in place to reduce the risk of injury	Overall risk RATING: L/M/H
Stream Exploration	The shallow stream allows children build dams, look for wildlife and explore this habitat. This activity supports gross motor skills through moving rocks and replacing them, problem solving skills, teamwork, changing the direction of the water flow. It also allows for observation of plants and water creatures.	- Slips, trips and falls. - Cut grazes and abrasions, sprains or broken bones. - Risk of drowning. - Getting very wet causing discomfort. - Dropping rocks on feet.	Children and adults	- Children will be supervised by the stream at all times by an adult. - Safety rules regarding use of the stream will be briefed at the beginning of the session. - Suitable waterproof clothing and footwear will be worn by both adults and children. - Sections deeper than approximately 20cm will be out of bounds. A section of the stream will be chosen and checked by a member of staff prior to experience.	Low

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
Forest Exploration	Forest play offers a cross curricula and holistic benefits in developing gross and fine motor skills, mathematical and literacy skills. Exploring the forest allows children to use the natural world for a purpose and enhances imagination, creativity and wellbeing.	- Slips, trips and falls. - Cut grazes and abrasions, sprains or broken bones. - Eating (poisonous berries) - Stings (thorns, prickles, nettles)	Adults and children	- Children will be supervised by adults - Safety rules regarding use of the forest will be briefed at the beginning of the session. - Suitable waterproof clothing and footwear will be worn by both adults and children for protection of potential falls and becoming wet. - Brief about plants that could harm us - Brief about poisonous berries - No item in mouth rule applied	Low
Mud Play – Soil	Mud play offers a range of skill development. It can allow for creativity, messy play, role play, imagination, teamwork and social skills. It can develop scientific skills through mixing materials and measuring volume. Mud play also supports sensory awareness.	- Illness if mud were to be eaten. - Infection or illness caused by contaminated mud. - Mud may get into eyes.	Adults and children	- Wash hands thoroughly after activity - No material in mouth rule. - Check soil for contaminations such as animal faeces.	Low
Mud Play – Utensils	Using utensils during mud play can develop fine and gross motor skills through pouring, whisking, spooning motions. Children will also learn how to use real life tools to enhance their play.	Cuts, grazes and abrasions through misuse of equipment or equipment that is in bad condition.	Adults and children	- Ensure all resources and equipment is checked prior to activity and at the end. - Ensure children understand how to use equipment safely.	Low

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
Climbing and exploring a fallen tree	This activity enhances physical development, gross motor skills, independence and confidence.	- Slips, trips and falls. - Cuts, grazes and abrasions. - Sprains or broken bones. - Branches may be at eye level	Adults and children	- Children will be briefed about potential dangers of the fallen tree and what hazards to look for. - An adult will observe children when using the tree. - Adult to assess area around tree ensuring there aren't any brambles or nettles children could fall/step/jump into. Ensure no fallen branches in way. Make sure ground is clear and tree is clearly accessible from all directions. - Adult to assess the ground underneath the tree and look for and remove any stones, large or spiky logs - Brief children to be aware of pointy branches	Low
Mixing Mud and Water	- Children will become aware of how water can make surfaces slippery and how to take caution - Children will learn how adding water to mud changes the texture and consistency. - Children may use mud to create art developing their creative skills.	- Slips, trips and falls causing cuts, grazes, abrasions, sprains or broken bones. - Getting wet may lead to discomfort	Adults and children	- Adults to supervise slippery surfaces. - Suitable waterproof clothing and footwear will be worn by both adults and children for protection of potential falls and becoming wet.	Low

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
Picking Blackberries	- Children will develop an awareness of how to respect nature which links into the Education for Sustainable Development and Global Citizenship (ESDGC). - Children may use a few berries to create art creating their creative skills.	- Cut grazes and abrasions from thorns. - Slips, trips and falls into blackberry bush. - Eating the berries may cause choking.	Adults and children	- Suitable waterproof clothing and footwear will be worn by both adults and children for protection of potential falls, scrapes or stings. - Children will be briefed to be aware of thorns and stinging nettles. - Although blackberries are edible the no item in mouth rule will be applied throughout activity, including blackberries.	Low

<i>Issue / environmental feature</i>	<i>Damage that could occur</i>	<i>How to lessen negative impact</i>	<i>Resources needed</i>	<i>Who is responsible</i>
Blackberry bush	Collection of all berries on the blackberry bush	Only pick a few blackberries ensuring there is an abundance left for the animals of the habitat.	N/A	Adults and children
Tree climbing (fallen tree)	Breaking leaves, branches, sticks off tree may deplete resources and could destroy habitat.	Children will be briefed to only collect fallen leaves and sticks and not to break branches from trees.	N/A	Adults and children
Collecting natural materials	Damage to living trees/flowers.	Ensure only fallen leaves and flowers to be collected.	N/A	Adults and children
Dam building	Rearranging rocks may damage or disturb water habitat.	Children will be encouraged to stay at a specific area of the stream to lessen the disturbance.	N/A	Adults and children
Litter, School equipment and resources.	If left behind these items may litter the environment and potentially endanger forest species.	Ensure all litter and school resource is taken back to school to limit mark made on environment.	Bag for carrying litter. Containers for resources.	Adults and children
Insect/ bug hunting	Harming insect life or squashing	Explain to children how to carefully handle insects/	N/A	Adults and children

	insects. Changing site biology.	bugs found and return them where they were found. Limit over collection of insects. Adults to model sustainable behaviour.		
Trampling undercover plants and growth during experience	Overuse of one area could potentially damage growth, expose bare ground which could lead to losing plant life and changing diversity.	Avoid using areas where plants are flowering. Try to use a range of areas for activities to avoid overly trampling one area. Monitor areas for potential damage in order to respond to protect the environment.	N/A	Adults and children

The learning experience was placed within the environment of a forest with a stream running alongside it. This setting was chosen for this particular experience as the environment lent itself to holistic learning. This supports the thinking of many early year's pioneers such as Steiner, McMillan and Froebel, who discuss within their theoretical research how the outdoor environment allows children to holistically develop through the use of the natural resources available. Continuing the theories of these historical early years pioneers' there has been extensive research and on-going research over the years on promoting the benefits of outdoor play in the Early Years. Many people including (Donnelly et al., 2016; Ouvry & Furtado, 2019; Ouvry, 2000) agree that the positive benefits of learning through play in the outdoor environments include increased physical activity benefitting the health of children, cognitive improvement, improvements in mental wellbeing and improved cardio metabolic health. These benefits have been considered by Professor Graham Donaldson and incorporated into the New Curriculum for Wales. An important aspect of the New Curriculum for Wales is the Health and Well being area of learning and experience (ALOE) highlight how the outdoors positively impact the physical health and mental well being of children (Welsh Government, 2020).

Not only does outdoor learning improve physical health, but it can also support the holistic development of children notes Rickinson et al., (2004). Children's personal, social and emotional development can increase through group work, problem solving and enhanced social and communication skills when learning in nature states Harris (2017). Worrell and Houghton (2018), explains how spending vast amounts of time in an environment such as the forest can also promote personal well being benefits including improved sleep and mood along with learning about spiritual meaning through connecting with nature. Friedrich Froebel, a pioneering nineteenth century educator, believed children should be given long periods of time in nature to create space for play and exploration through child led first hand experiences (Tovey, 2016). The forest experience promotes Froebel's thinking offering children over two hours of child-initiated play. The forest allows for space which promotes expansive movement and enhances kinaesthetic awareness. The stream and the forest combined allows for

the children to explore and investigate how the world works through sensory rich, first hand learning.

Knight (2009) notes how the importance of learning in the outdoors has influenced policy and pedagogies in Scandinavian countries such as Denmark, Finland and Norway. It is argued that Finland's continuous success in Programme for International Student Assessments is partly due to their high regards for the importance placed on outdoor learning. England, Scotland and Wales have adopted similar pedagogy. The Department for Children, Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills (2008), notes that the initial intention of the Foundation Phase for Wales was for a curriculum based on active learning, play and experiential learning, with a strong emphasis on the use of the outdoors environment. DCELLS (2007) explains that the Foundation Phase for Wales offers an holistic curriculum covering seven areas of learning; Personal and Social Development, Well Being and Cultural Diversity; Language, Literacy and Communication Skills; Mathematical Development; Welsh Language Development; Knowledge and Understanding of the World; Physical Development and Creative Development. The forest setting chosen for the experience allows for potential development in all seven areas of learning, allowing the children to make deeper connections within their learning through a hands on and child lead experience. This type of learning experience extends and complements the work carried out within the indoor classroom of school.

Dillon et al. (2006) and Peacock, (2006) both reported that learning in outdoor environments provide more memorable and stimulating learning experiences. Tovey (2007) also emphasises how the outdoor is a unique environment which offers rich learning opportunities that are not available indoors. The outdoors offers less constraints than the indoor environment, allowing children to experience more freedom to explore and experiment. The extra space the forest environment affords also encourages more movement possibilities increasing physical activity and both fine and gross motor skills. On the contrary, lack of outdoor space was one of the main barriers during the piloting phase of the Foundation Phase for Wales with Siraj-Blatchford et al. (2002) reporting that many settings did not have access to suitable outdoor areas therefore limiting the amount of time children spent outdoors. However, this experience within the forest lies on the outskirts of the school grounds making use of

the wider environment and exploring the benefits it has to offer to children and their learning journeys.

Although outdoor play offers many benefits to children's development, Frost and Shutterby (2017); Moore (1997); Gill (2010) highlights that recent studies explain how children are losing contact with nature through several restrictions which affect their access to the natural world. Through new digital attractions that the indoors offer combined with the perceived ideas that the outdoors pose as a safety threat can have a negative impact children's development. Whilst some perceive outdoor time to be critical for healthy whole child development others perceive time in nature as a privilege. Louv (2005) raises the alarm of a decrease in children's time spent outdoors labelling it as 'Nature Deficit disorder' and notes how this can affect the rise of childhood obesity, attention disorders, and depression. Ecological literacy and nature connectedness become weakened by this disorder, however increasing time spent in more natural surroundings such as the forest and stream chosen for this learning experience can reverse the effects of nature deficit disorder.

The forest and stream experience opens up numerous opportunities for the children to experiment in risky play. Many researchers have also explored the benefits of risky play in the outdoors and even though the outdoors can present many risks, risky play can provide children with opportunities to test their limits, explore boundaries and challenge themselves this is reported by Little and Wyver ([2008](#)); Sandseter ([2007](#)); McFarland and Laird, (2018). The Welsh Government values the importance of outdoor play by including it in the (2015) Foundation Phase Framework, stating that through outdoor play children have the opportunities to experiment and take risks to become 'confident explorers of their indoor and outdoor environment'. However, although Wales has put much emphasise on the importance of outdoor play Muñoz (2009) explains that It has been widely discussed how the role of parents, guardians and teachers acting as boundary setters in relation to children's use of outdoor spaces can set limitations on how children utilise the outdoors and how much time they spend in the natural environment. It is important for practitioners to communicate with parents about the benefits of risky play and learning in nature. Working in partnership with parents to achieve common goals can have a positive impact on children's holistic development (Kambouri-Danos et al., 2017). Communication to the parents on what

the experience would entail and parental consent forms would be carried out prior to the forest experience. It is the adult's responsibilities to assess and manage the level of risk when supervising children during the forest experience. Children should be given the chance extend their knowledge and test their own abilities without being exposed to 'unacceptable risk'. All children are exposed to minor injuries such as bruises and grazes during childhood and whilst these incidents can be upsetting to those involved it can also impose a positive impact on the children by allowing the children to assess consequences to their actions or choices; although children must be protected from serious injuries. Furthermore, the risks and benefits of this experience have been carefully thought through, with a risk assessment put in place to identify, control, reduce or eliminate any potential hazards to ensure the health, safety and well being of the children and adults during their time in the forest.

Cremin and Arthur (2014) explain how it is not just the resources and environment that make for effective learning experiences, but knowledgeable, nurturing and skilled adults are also vital in creating, sustaining and nurturing children's learning. The adults in this experience will firstly ensure the forest and stream have been checked for potential hazards. All potential risks would be taken in for account and written in the risk assessment. Children will be briefed at the start of the sessions about any dangers to look out for, proximity boundaries and how to use resources correctly. Rogers (2018) explains how it is the responsibility of practitioners in early years settings to supervise at all times to ensure the safety of the children but at the same time find a balance to allow them to explore their curiosities independently to respect the competent child. This being said, the adults will be situated in positions where they can see and supervise the children and close enough to help if a child is in need of assistance. Adults will be mindful not to disturb a child's play cycle and will watch for children's cue's to be invited into their play. When an adult is invited in, it is then the knowledgeable adult may seize the opportunity to ask open ended questions and participate in Sustained Shared Thinking to 'provoke speculation and extend their imagination' (Harris and Williams, 2011), deepening their thought process. Adults will provide children with a range of school equipment and loose parts. It will be the child's decision to use them or not and how they choose to use them. Loose parts in a natural environment such as the forest can create affordances to young children, enhancing their curiosity and creativity through the use of materials which 'do not dictate the type

of play children engage in' (Änggård, 2011). To ensure that experiences at the forest and stream are kept child centred it is important for the adults to discuss with the children about how the experience went. This will give the children the opportunity to suggest resources they would like to bring next time. Revisiting the experience on a regular basis will allow the children to revisit their learning in order to consolidate their experience.

The groups chosen will be of mixed abilities. This will allow from children to learn from each other and promote, tolerance and understanding between peers. Children with Special Educational Needs benefit from learning in nature for many reasons. Suttie (2018) notes how nature reduces stress hormones, improves one's immune system and restores depleted attention therefore benefitting in healthier, happier and calmer children. Time spent in nature can be fundamental for the development of children with Special Educational Needs. The experience allows children to enhance their sensory sensitivities pulling them away from noisy indoor classrooms and artificial lighting and sounds. The gentle sounds of the tree's and stream may be therapeutic for children with Special Educational Needs, enhancing their well being (Homan, no date). Children who struggle under the constraint of indoor classrooms may have the chance show different skills and strengths in the forest. This is where the adult can document learning for evidence of developed skills, skills that may not be witnessed in the indoor classroom. Although the experience is aimed to be inclusive to every child, there are elements of the setting that may restrict children with mobility disadvantages accessing the particular part to of the forest. This could be taken into consideration with future plans when designing a learning experience in nature in order ensure every child has the opportunities to participate.

Bentos and Dias (2017) explain how the opportunities for children to explore in nature allows them to develop emotional connections to nature therefore raising respectful attitudes towards the natural environment which helps enhance positive lifelong ecological and sustainable behaviours. This is agreed by Burris and Burris (2011) with their report stating that the more children are connected to nature the more likely they are to protect the environment. This also poses positive links to the New Curriculum for Wales. Nature Days (2018) notes that one of the four core purposes of the new curriculum is for children to 'become ethical citizens which involves gaining knowledge

of nature and empathy towards the Welsh environment'. Sustainable discussions will take place at the start of the experience, this raises the awareness of children on how to respect their surroundings. An environmental audit will be completed prior to the experience to ensure adults and children limit their mark made upon the forest and stream. This links into the Education for Sustainable Development and Global Citizenship (ESDGC), which is an ethos embedded in schools throughout Wales. ESDGC encourages the development of thinking skills by promoting positive values, attitudes and behaviours towards the environment. Connecting with the natural environment of the forest and stream offers opportunities to work within the ESDGC ethos by engaging children in 'practical active citizenship' therefore raising the standards and awareness of ecological and sustainable behaviours (Tinney and Hirst, 2018). The adult's role in regard to ESDGC is to model sustainable and ecological behaviours. This will promote the children's relationship with nature allowing them to empathise with their surroundings.

To conclude, along with benefits and possible improvements, the natural environment of the forest and stream provides a rich learning experience for the children. The child centred approach will allow children to utilise the forest and stream as an active learning environment, allowing the children to explore, play and experiment in an unstructured but safe manner. The experience can also enhance sustainable development and deepen the children's relationship with nature. This experience is designed to provide opportunities for meaningful learning in all areas of the curriculum.

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