



**Moving away from the
traditional classroom:**

Outdoor education and learning.

ECIE6001

2014382

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The importance of educating the children of the world is considered of paramount importance. So much so, there are numerous policies, acts and conventions that promote and protect children and young people, preventing them from neglect in their

right to education. The UNCRC (1989) promotes the right for all children in accessing education in Article 28 and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (2015) Goal 4, promotes “inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all”. Although they do not state how this is to be achieved, merely that it should. The Welsh Council for Outdoor Learning (2018) recognises that outdoor learning can significantly contribute to fostering positive sustainable behaviours and attitudes in young people, supporting the Sustainable Development Goals (2015). White (2020) also argues that classrooms provide limited experience when learning about the physical world- water, earth, animals, plants, natural resources etc.- and the human world- individuals, social interactions, relationships and roles, further supporting the importance of outdoor education.

The writer has chosen a 3-16 school to compare and contrast the approach to outdoor provision. The school has 3 campuses, which the writer will refer to as Campus 1, Campus 2 and Campus 3. Campus 1 hosts nursery to year 1 children, Campus 2 hosts from year 2 through to year 6 and Campus 3 hosts years 7 through to year 11. The school has a free school meal percentage of 11.65 and 618 children on role. For the purpose of this essay, the writer has chosen to compare Campus 2 and Campus 3.

Campus 2 has 138 pupils on site, across 5 classes, each with direct access to the outside. Opening out to a patioed, canopied area, that houses tables and chairs. There is a shed that is stocked with gardening tools and equipment, for communal use. Estyn (Feb 2023) identifies that well developed outdoor areas as good practise in enabling children to thrive in their outdoor learning. This outdoor area can be viewed clearly through a large, windowed wall. Whilst each class has the access to the appropriate outdoor environment and engages in outdoor learning regularly, it is not always planned and purposeful, as Learning Through Landscapes (2024) promotes it should be. However, one class of mixed year 2 and 3 pupils has the opportunity to engage with outdoor learning activities on a daily basis. Estyn (Feb 2023) recognises this as best practise, when they say outdoor learning is an essential part of daily life in school, for all pupils. The children and class staff are encouraged to bring in appropriate outdoor clothing at the start of term, ensuring that they are well equipped so that opportunities for outdoor learning are not restricted by the weather, Estyn (Feb 2023). In the true spirit of Froebel (1843), the class teacher carefully plans all outdoor learning to subtext over the whole curriculum, to include each of the six areas of learning experiences (AOLE's, 2020). After starting off the school year learning about insects, using their outdoor learning time to search around the school grounds in small groups, using iPads to photographically record their findings. The children planted flower seeds in their garden area after learning about how to attract more insects to the school grounds and through further discussion began to recycle their break time fruit snack waste in a compost bin. Later, drawing and designing (Expressive Arts, 2020) their own bug houses, after using the internet responsibly (DCF, 2020), enabling them to later make their designs come to life. The children brought in recycled goods from home to use for their bug houses, this introduced the children to the sustainability goals of the United Nations (2015). Making the bug houses promotes biodiversity and further developed their knowledge of habitats (Humanities and Science and Technology, 2020). This is further supported by the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act (2015), of a more Globally Responsible Wales. Utilising the outdoor space of the sports field, the children sorted their recycled goods into categories according

to size, shape and material, promoting their maths and numeracy skills. When it came to making the bug houses the children were guided in using tools and equipment by the class teacher and learning support assistant (LSA), as more knowledgeable others, as theorised by Vygotsky (1978). The majority of the making of the bug houses was able to take place outside under the canopied patio, which the children enjoyed, promoting their health and well-being. Which Learning Through Landscapes (2024) acknowledges as needing a solid foundation in early years education, to address the increasing mental health challenges amongst children and young people today.

Through this planned inclusive provision, all students are able to take part in the learning experiences. Through open communication with relevant stakeholders, reasonable adjustments are made (Equality Act, 2010), to ensure barriers to learning are removed, as promotes Learning and Teaching Scotland in their Curriculum for Excellence through Outdoor Learning (2010). The Welsh Council for Outdoor Learning (2018) also supports planned activities outdoors that match abilities and developmental stages for individuals, for engagement that they recognise as key to learning outcomes. The children invited parents/carers into school at the end of term to give tours of the school grounds, showcasing their bug houses and the flowers in their garden. Estyn (May 2023) recognises that opportunities like this create strong family links and are considered best practise for schools.

The provision taking place with this particular class on Campus 2, is due to the excellent collaboration between the class teacher and LSA. The careful planning, of lessons and resources, means that the children have consistency in their experiential learning, Dewey (1938). The children develop their fine and gross motor skills by digging and planting seeds and in using the tools and equipment safely, they develop responsible behaviour and risk-taking skills. The one challenge that the writer noted on Campus 2, is the lack of a whole school/site approach to outdoor learning. Considering the equal access to available resources, could it be that they are not confident in how to use it in their foundation education planning. As the Outdoor Learning Handbook (2009) states, "The outdoors is not an extra to the Foundation Phase: the Foundation Phase and the outdoors are inseparable".

There are 429 students on Campus 3, aged 11-16 years old. The only regular planned outdoor learning that takes place is by 2 groups of year 10 and 11 students who chose Agricultural Studies as an alternative curriculum choice. As the vocational qualification is assessed by coursework only, it is a popular choice amongst children who are perceived to be less academically able, as acknowledged by Fit for Future Education in Wales White Paper (2019) and is promoted towards ALN (Additional Learning Needs) students. Montessori's (1920's) thoughts regarding the engagement of young people in real life sustainable skills, as Montessori partnership (2024) states, is reminiscent of the approach taken towards students on Campus 3, the writer believes. The feeling of belonging and self-development that the students achieve by participating together, promotes their basic needs (Maslow, 1943), enabling them to progress and reach their potential. As part of their course of learning the students travel off-site once a fortnight, as their timetable permits. This challenge is recognised by Quibell, Charlton and Law (2017), as one that school leaders face in scheduling and implementing effective outdoor learning opportunities, under the pressurised environments of schools in the current climate. Contradictorily, the UNCRC (1989)

promotes “the development of different forms of vocational education” in its Article 28 b). These Agriculture Studies children alternate their time between visiting a community eco garden, where they plant seed potatoes, which they are unable to regularly tend to due to the afore mentioned timetabling restraints and visiting nearby farms. This means that the class teacher uses their personal time before and after school, tending to the crop, so that the students can achieve success. Whilst this could be perceived as a negative experience, there is an unexpected positive result. The students appreciate the efforts of their teacher, and this has led to the development of a respectful relationship, which Dix (2022) believes is the substance needed to develop positive relationships between staff and students, in order to achieve behaviour nirvana. When taking up to 30 students off-site, this classroom management is key in keeping students safe. During their visits to nearby farms, students are given the opportunity to participate in activities such as lambing, feeding animals, looking at the latest farm machinery and watching cows being milked all through the latest technological advances. These outdoor learning opportunities enable the students to deepen their learning through experience, or just as an add-on, as LTL (2022) states.

In conclusion, it is clear to the writer that the key to any successful practises in schools, lies in a whole school approach and a well-planned curriculum. From the allocation of ample planning, collaboration and reflection time, Estyn (Oct 2023), working together to achieve a common goal, Estyn (May 2023), can result in education programmes with cross curricular learning. Providing an inclusive and equitable education for all learners, regardless of age or ability. Just as the Welsh Council for Outdoor Learning (2018) believes organisations should work together, so should all the levels of staff in a school. Inspired by Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (1979) with the child at the centre, supported by class teachers, heads of phases, heads of AOLE's, the senior leadership team and the full governing body, they should work together in delivering an education suitable for the needs of children today. The disparities of learning provision are clear for the writer to see, and it is cause for concern, not only in the equity of provision for students, but also amongst staff. Whilst it clearly written in the frameworks and guidance for foundation learning, there is little support for implementation in secondary settings. Causing a divide amongst a collective of staff such as in this school, does not promote a healthy foundation for a whole school approach to be achieved. Outdoor learning should be engaged in with a whole school approach., which Dix (2017) acknowledges can be difficult for teachers that have become ossified in their teaching methods. Something that the Fit for the Future Education in Wales (2019) white Paper concludes, when it states that teachers are not adequately trained to deliver in the revised curriculum (2022). The introduction of new ways of working relies on the positive attitudes and growth mindset (Dweck, 2017) of all staff, to ensure Wales is producing learners equipped with the skills needed for the future.

Word count 1,760

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Choi Ah (2023)

Little Gems



Choi Ah (2023)

57% OF CHILDREN SAID
THEY WERE MORE LIKELY
TO BE ACTIVE IF THEIR
PARENTS WERE!

Public Health England (2015)
Coventry Wildlife Trust (2018)
Learning (2018)



Harvest Aid (2021)

Nature and Nurture!

Inspired by Froebel
(1836) this is an
opportunity to
claim a plot for
your family to
work and learn

'Little Gems'
is a group for
families with
children aged 3-7
years.

Meeting every
Saturday
and
Sunday

at 10am-12pm
throughout the
year, at Coastal
Allotments, Upper
Solva!



Harvest Aid (2021)

STUDIES SHOW REGULAR TIME
OUTDOORS NOTABLY IMPROVES
CHILDREN'S READING, WRITING
AND MATHS SKILLS!

Harvest Aid (2021)
(2018) (2019) (2020)
The English Language (2021)

What you need :-
suitable footwear
old clothes
enthusiasm
and a growth mindset!
(However, we do encourage

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RISK BENEFIT ASSESSMENT

Location / Activity:	Whitesands Beach/ Walking and sea swimming	Date:	17.07.2023
Assessor:	Sian Davies	Review date:	

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
Walk to and from the beach	Promotes low impact physical activity for mental health and well-being. Builds physical and mental stamina, improving confidence and resilience. Educates students on road safety/awareness. Provides opportunity for risk-taking in a controlled and supported manner. Educates the students on their surrounding area, <i>cynffig</i> . Promotes a sustainable approach to travel. Inclusive, experiential learning. Equitable learning opportunities.	- Oncoming traffic whilst walking to the beach. - Sunburn. - Injury from walking. - Insect bites. - Contact with public. - Adverse weather conditions. - Inappropriate pupil behaviour. - Pupils with physical and medical needs. - Dehydration.	Pupils, staff, public	- Groups to avoid walking on and next to roads as much as possible, using coastal paths to mitigate this. 1:12 staff: pupil ratio. - Walking in groups for the entire journey, always monitored by staff. - Pupils to walk in no more than double file. - Pupils only to cross roads where staff are preset. - Safety brief prior to leaving the school site, to inform pupils of dangers and reinforce expectations of behaviour and conduct. Reiterate protocol for reporting any safeguarding concerns students may have. - Pupils with disabilities or additional needs to be transported by car to the beach. - First aid kits to be brought on visit. - First aid trained staff in attendance. - Staff vigilance in monitoring behaviour. - Pupils to always remain in groups. - Forecast to be checked regularly prior to departure. Trip to be cancelled if weather endangers pupils of staff. - Pupils have been told to bring sunscreen, appropriate footwear and clothing in letter home to parents/carers. - Pupils and staff told to bring reusable water bottle. - Staff in attendance will have mobile phones, with each other's contacts stored. - Pupil consent forms evaluated prior to trip. - Pupil medical information to be assessed prior to trip and appropriate adjustments and barriers to participation addressed.	L

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
Swimming in the sea	Promotes low impact physical activity for mental health and well-being. Builds physical and mental stamina, improving confidence and resilience. Provides opportunity for risk-taking in a controlled and supported manner. Promotes and educates a sustainable method of physical exercise.	- Risk of drowning. - Jellyfish stings. - Weaver fish stings. - Pupils with physical and medical needs. - Tides and currents.	Pupils, staff	- RNLI given prior notice of beach visit to ensure sufficient staffing. - RNLI to give a safety talk on arrival at the beach. - Pupils given allotted times for swimming, restricting numbers in the water. - Staff to remain vigilant, especially when those with medical needs e.g. diabetes are in the water. - Only pupils with parental consent of water confidence/capabilities allowed in the sea. - RNLI lifeguard hut with first aid equipment. - Pupils to remain between the lifeguard safety flags whilst in the sea.	L
Beach activities.	Promotes low impact physical activity for mental health and well-being. Builds physical and mental stamina, improving confidence and resilience. Provides opportunity for risk-taking in a controlled and supported manner. Promotes and educates a sustainable method of physical exercise. Encourages social communication with peers. Inclusive, experiential learning through play.	- Inappropriate pupil behaviour. - Pupils with physical and medical needs. - Dehydration. - Tides	Pupils, staff	- Briefing prior to departure, behaviour expectations explained for safety. - Safety car with 2 members of staff available in case of emergency. - Pupils to remain within the coned area of the beach to minimize contact with public. - First aid trained staff on duty. - Pupils have been told to bring sunscreen, appropriate footwear and clothing in letter home to parents/carers. - RNLI lifeguards in attendance to monitor tides.	L

The UK-based charity Learning through Landscapes (2023) states that "Outdoor learning in education is a planned and purposeful approach that uses activities and resources to enhance learning, mental health and wellbeing, and environmental awareness". Supporting this was theorist Froebel (1853), founder of the kindergarten (translating to child's garden), when he believed that if children were given the

opportunity to be outside, they would develop a sense of wonder about nature and be more likely to want to help shape a sustainable future. Froebel's belief in educating the whole child in their development, socially, academically, physically, emotionally and spiritually, through play "is the highest expression of human development in childhood". As White (2020) agrees, when they say that laying the right foundations for future education purposes, is vital in the early years and learning outdoors plays its part in that foundation. The Welsh Government lays out further clear guidance in its Outdoor Learning Handbook (2009), when it says that outdoor learning is not merely taking activities outside, but rather an attitude of mind or philosophy. By providing ample opportunities for shared learning experiences between staff and students, through growth and creativity, both will grow in their confidence of outdoor learning. Dewey (1958) believed in the ideology of shared experiential learning between teachers and children, so that teachers may then use those experiences as a teaching tool moving forward. Another advocate for early years learning in the outdoors was Dr Maria Montessori (1906), so powerful was her belief that children should have unfettered contact with nature, "In her ideal world, there would be no separation between the indoor and outdoor classroom.", Montessori Partnership (2024). Although Montessori's early work was focussed on young children, in the 1920's she began to look at adolescence and observed that they needed provision that enabled them to understand themselves and their place in the world. By proposing residential schools where adolescents could be part of a community and develop real life sustainable skills like farming, so that they could meet the worlds challenges and become global citizens. A goal shared by the Welsh Government in the four purposes of its curriculum (2022).

Whilst the writer recognises there are many key themes the role of outdoor education provides, such as social language and literacy, being physically active and engaging with the natural environment, this literature review will focus on the three key themes of sustainability, mental health and well-being and experiential learning.

NHS England's report on the Mental Health of Children and Young People (2022) declared findings of 18% of children aged 7 to 16 years as having a mental disorder, which the WHO (World Health Organisation, 2022) acknowledges may also be referred to as mental health conditions, such as anxiety and depression. 61.2% of 11- to 16-year-olds with a probable mental disorder felt unsafe at school and were less likely to enjoy their learning. As O'Brien (2005) reports, educational experiences in the outdoors impact positively on children's confidence, social skills, communication, motivation, physical skills and knowledge and understanding. As is known from studies such as Simonoff et al. (2008), there is a comorbidity between children with autism spectrum disorders and psychiatric disorders such as anxiety and depressive disorders. Natural resources have a myriad of ways that they can be used and have high play value, which is why they are often used in therapeutic play to support children's emotional health and well-being. Along with the space and freedom that being outdoors provides, it can be a necessary resource to help feel good about yourself, mentally and physically, and to feel a sense of purpose, when helping to address mental health concerns. In response to the consultation on the Residential Outdoor Education (Wales) Bill (2022), the Welsh NHS Confederation (2024) agrees that in particular, residential outdoor education has the power to improve the mental health in children. Therefore, reducing the pressure on CAMHS (Child and Adolescent

Mental Health Services) and the wider NHS services. It is through the preventative approach of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act (2015), that ensures national and local governments, health boards and other specified public bodies work together to improve the well-being outcomes for Wales. By investing money, time and resources in early intervention, children would receive a foundation of education to help develop the skills needed to address their needs for development, relieving the need to intervene later in life.

There can be confusion over the use of outdoor education as purely promoting environmentalism, rather than sustainability. Whilst recognising the need to be 'eco-friendly' to benefit the environment and reduce the impact of human behaviours on nature, sustainability has a deeper complexity. Sustainability or sustainable development focusses on global social justice, through participation and empowerment, as Jeffs and Ord (2017) surmise. In 1997, UNESCO revealed their vision for a sustainable future through education by promoting curriculum reform that required a teaching, learning and assessment process, with emphasis on building a sustainable future. "Students need to learn how to reflect on their place in the world and to consider what sustainability means to them and their communities", UNESCO (1997). Through this education for sustainability, children and young people can be creative contributors and informed citizens of Wales and the world, Welsh Government (2022). As White (2020) concurs, children need to have the creative capacities to tackle the economic complexities ahead of them. Through its Statements of what matters (2002) Area of Learning Experience (AOLE) Humanities, the Welsh Government also promotes the need for the children of Wales to experience exposure to their locality, in order to develop an understanding of societies, past and present. It is through this understanding that it is hoped the children will become aware of how past actions impact the future sustainability of their world. Insisting that this exposure is woven throughout the curriculum and particularly through PSE (Personal and Social Education), so that children are prepared in their rights, responsibilities and challenges ahead, ESDGC (2008). Experiencing the natural world through local landscapes helps to cultivate a sense of belonging, *cynffin* (WG, 2022), which Maslow (1943) believed was essential in order for children to be in a position to learn.

Froebel (1853) recognised that children were stimulated by learning in which they were active participants in, and which gave them a sense of fulfilment in their developmental education. Acknowledging that this fulfilment not only focussed on the academic achievement, but also the social and emotional education and the importance of recognising these factors in a whole child belief. This is supported by Maslow's Hierarchy of needs continuum (1943), with regards to love and belonging and safety and security. Bruce (2012) further supports this with his beliefs of the deep links between well-being, self-confidence and self-esteem sharing in the fulfilment of a rich intellectual life. The need for a wholeness and unity in experiential learning is still not fully understood or embedded Bruce (2012) believes, nor is it widespread. The need for universal acknowledgement, a united global approach, instead of competing in world tables, such as Pisa (Programme for International Student Assessment). If the belief in experiential learning is genuine, then paying 210,000 Euros to measure, compete and compare the knowledge of our young people should be irrelevant, as it is not needed for our children to learn what is beyond their biological maturity, Bruce (2012). As part of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (2015), the

agenda's plans for the people, the planet and the prosperity of all countries involved, are to stimulate action through 17 goals and 169 targets. Whilst it can be agreed that every child deserves the right to education as per the UNCRC (1989), does it then require the meeting of nations to assess each other as to how much progress is being made. It questions if the goals are about sustainability, or just another way of countries to rank against each other.

The researcher found that there was evidence amongst early years practitioners, theorists and government, that the foundation years of children's education should incorporate regular outdoor learning opportunities. This early period in children's development provides opportunity for a unified, deep and meaningful learning, Bruce (2012). Through being outdoors children are given the freedom to express themselves and experience learning at their own pace, for the outdoors holds provision waiting to be harvested, White (2020). Building an appreciation for not only the outdoors and nature, but of local landscapes and how they form part of that community. From this, children learn that they have a responsibility to help protect and promote that community in a global aspect, recognising their role in the future of their world. Through giving experiential learning opportunities to children, it is known to not only stimulate their academic learning, but also develop their self-confidence and self-worth, Maslow (1943). In engaging in learning outside of the traditional classroom walls and textbooks, it allows room for children's multiple intelligences to be displayed freely, Gardener (1983). The researcher does query the conflict of the UNCRC's (1989) Article 28, promoting the right for all children, up to 18 years of age, to an education and Article 31 "the right of the child to rest and leisure, to engage in play". As the experiential outdoor learning, that benefits the mental health and well-being of children, whilst promoting sustainability also, is so explicit in the foundation years and far less explicit at secondary school age. They are still children, with the same desire to learn whilst 'doing', through play and nature. As Christie, Beames and Higgins (2016) acknowledge, secondary schools are restricted by firmer timetable boundaries. With little flexibility within the school day/week/term/year, due to constraints such as national testing and curriculum objectives, 'fitting in' outdoor learning experiences can be seen by staff as an additional task. Which is why the researcher agrees that outdoor learning should be recognised as a pedagogy and should form part of a school curriculum in a secondary setting. As LTL (2022) believes, learning outside is not an add-on, but rather an opportunity to deepen learning through experience.

Word count 1668.

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