

Task One – Photograph

An afternoon of free child led play in a woodland area.



(Source: Charnwoodforestnursery.co.uk, no date)

Task Two – Free play in a woodland area

It was time for free play and an afternoon of child led activities in the outside woodland area in the nursery. I went out to complete a risk assessment, checking the equipment, the ground and the fence surrounding the area. I removed some litter that had blown over the fence during the night. This is done to lessen any risks or potential hazards to the children and the staff.

The outside area has many potential learning opportunities for the children. The area consists of a tree, grass and earth areas, it has tyres and planks of wood and some small tree stumps, these were all checked for any hazards.

Once the risk assessment was completed, and I was happy everything was safe I went back to the class. We got all 16 children who are all aged five to change from their school shoes to their wellies or old trainers and to wear their coats by the door leading to the play area and with two other members of staff we took the children out to play.

They became very excited as they entered the safe enclosed area. Learning through play and exploring the equipment provided enhances the children's curiosity therefore they are free to explore as they wish.

Some ran towards the stumps; some ran towards the tyres under the tree and some to the planks on the tree stumps under the tree. The children were very excited to be in the outdoors and able to go where they wanted to. I observed the children for a while when I noticed a child (child A) repeating the same activity this is known as a schema, the schema was to jump in the tyre then walk across the plank of wood, but he kept falling off halfway over the plank. He got back on and crawled for the remaining part, stood up and jumped off the end.



(Source: Kindiejoes.co.uk, no date)

The child wanted my attention to show what he was doing. I immediately said, 'Do you want to try again?' and with excitement he ran to the tyre. I could see

he was rushing so I suggested 'What do you think will happen if you slow down a little bit?' he slowed down a little bit but, yet again he did not get to the end of the plank of wood and the other tyre. He was disappointed and I said, 'It doesn't matter, what if you slow down further?' He started the activity again and at a slower pace, but the same thing happened. He was really concentrating and was already understanding that he had to make changes to the situation to achieve getting to the other end. He tried again and as he was halfway over, he started to lose his balance, so he put his arms out and realised this helped with his balance on the plank. He got to the other end and was so excited to come and tell me. I said, 'That was amazing, you are so clever'. He ran to the tyre and said 'I'm going to do it again and I am going to use my arms this time '. I could see he stopped and said, 'I have to do it slow' He was starting to make a connection between concentration and speed to achieve the balance he needed to cross from one side to the other successfully. Understanding fast and slow and that to be able to balance he must go at a slower pace and with the aid of his arms balancing was achieved easier.

Once he gained confidence, he wanted to try the other planks under the tree, which were higher. He tried a few times but although he could not do it, I could see the determination to achieve the task. He said, 'I am going to keep trying because I learnt how to walk across the flat plank of wood, I will try again tomorrow'. He walked away from under the tree to the third tyre by the flat plank of wood and said, 'I'm going to make the walkway longer' and off he went to get the loose plank of wood from the bench and placed it from one tyre to another. He said, 'Why is this piece of wood different colour to the others?' I knew it had been out in the rain. 'Can you touch it, does it feel different to the other plank?' he replied, 'It feels colder and squishier' I

explained it had been raining. 'So, the rain has made the wood change colour' I replied 'Yes it has'.



(Source: The Empowered Educator, no date)

He found that the plank of wood was too long, he then moved the tyre, but the plank of wood fell. He called his friend (child B) and asked him for help. Together they moved the plank and the tyre closer to each other; child A once again placed the plank of wood down and again it fell. As a team they kept pushing the tyre until the plank of wood did not fall. Child A said 'Hooray, we now have a longer bridge', he then turned to child B and said, 'Do you want to have a turn? I will help you'. Child B smiled with excitement, he replied with 'Yes please and they both ran to the end of the walkway happily. Child A said to child B 'You have to go slow, or you will fall off, use your arm like this it will help you'. He placed both arms out either side to show child B. Child A had learnt in

one outdoor child-led free play session that speed needs to be adjusted and sometimes you need to adapt your actions to achieve an outcome, he had shown empathy towards another child to also achieve the task.

Child A learnt that he could not do everything straight away but by practicing at his own pace walking the plank and balancing became easier. This is demonstrated in Bruner's theory he believed that children could learn if it's at the right level for the child to understand. Child A also learnt about the world around him and by exploring and experimenting with items around him he could achieve building a bridge which gave him pleasure and a sense of achievement and the opportunity to share with others.

I included some loose part in the woodland area for the children to also play with. These were smaller pieces of wood, sticks, a few old sheets, ropes, magnifying glasses, pots and pans, jugs and some water in a bowl. There were also leaves from the tree.

When child A and B had enough of walking the plank, they went to investigate what loose parts were available. They looked at them with wonder and I could see the curiosity on their faces. Child B said to child A 'Shall we take the sheet and put it over the higher planks of wood, and we can make a den'. Child A said, 'That's a good idea' They draped the sheet over, 'It's not big enough' so he ran to get the other sheet and placed that along the plank next to the other sheet, 'That's better we can both fit under the sheets now, this is like camping in a tent', they both laughed.



(Source: Muddy faces, no date)

Child B said, 'I'm going to make a fire so we can have a bbq' and off he ran to get the sticks, he noticed the jugs and water, he spent time pouring water on the sticks and he called Child A over. Child A said, 'If your pour water on the sticks it will change colour.' Before he gathered the sticks, they played with the water pouring it on a few sticks and watched if the colour changed. I asked them both why did they think the sticks changed colour. We discussed how water makes items wet. They then piled the sticks up like a campfire but kept some back. Child B said to Child A we can put sausages at the end of the stick to cook. Child A ran off and came back with some leaves, he put them on the stick, and said 'These can be our sausages'. They played happily but unfortunately it was nearly time to go back inside and home, when I told the children that it was time to go back into the class the children showed their disappointment. I reassured them that we would come out again the next day and they can resume playing camping. They jumped with joy and shouted out

'Hooray!'. Which I thrived on, knowing they had enjoyed their time playing outside.

Task Three - Risk Benefit Assessment

RISK BENEFIT ASSESSMENT

Location / Activity:	Cylch Meithrin Pontarddulais/Outdoor Area	Date:	20/9
Assessor:	Eira Mainwaring	Review date:	21/9

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.

Experience exploring outdoor space in photograph	How will young people BENEFIT from this activity?	Hazards and associated risks	Who is at risk?	PRECAUTIONS in place to reduce the risk of injury	Overall risk after precautions RATING: L/M/H
Uneven ground	Opportunity to walk, balance, jump, investigate the science of gravity	Slips, falls or trips	All	Suitable footwear to be worn by children and practitioners. Practitioners to monitor at all times	Low
Walking on the planks of wood	Opportunity to learn how to balance Investigate the science of gravity Exploring movement, speed and direction Different weight and sizes of the planks of wood Different textures if the wood is wet or dry	Falls, breaks and injury such as cuts Splinters from the planks of wood Slipping if wet	All	Awareness of the surroundings Discuss the risks with the children First Aid Kit Constant supervision	Low

Experience exploring outdoor space in photograph	How will young people BENEFIT from this activity?	Hazards and associated risks	Who is at risk?	PRECAUTIONS in place to reduce the risk of injury	Overall risk after precautions RATING: L/M/H
Exploring the greenery and woodland	Learn about different textures, colours, small living things, Connection to nature Learn about the world around them The opportunity for curiosity	Allergies to certain plants Injury if they run into the branches Low lying branches	All	All medical forms are checked before hand Discuss the risks of putting plants and leaves in their mouths Removing any low lying branches	Low
Contact with soil	Normal childhood experiences Open ended sensory material Exposure to good microorganisms to develop an effective immune system. Children learn good hygiene practices	Consuming the soil Allergic reaction Dog or cat faeces Litter thrown into the play area from the car park Wet floors Slips, falls or trips	All	Providing hand washing provisions for and after play before going back into the classroom Practitioners to provide a hand washing bucket with warm soapy water Hand washing routines to be established and learn good hygiene practices Children are made aware of slip hazard and a mop is placed to dry spills Children are urged to maintain a strict no-consumption schedule in this area Soil is checked for any contaminants A risk assessment is carried out before the children enter the play area and any faeces found are disposed of immediately Children to be made aware on the signs of contaminants that could cause them harm	Medium
Pieces of natural materials	Provide opportunity for imagination Fine and gross motor skills from gathering, lifting, sorting, and carrying	Placing small items in their mouths	Children	Any children likely to explore by putting items in their mouths are identified All children to be made aware not to put small items in their mouths Extra supervision may be required	Low

Experience exploring outdoor space in photograph	How will young people BENEFIT from this activity?	Hazards and associated risks	Who is at risk?	PRECAUTIONS in place to reduce the risk of injury	Overall risk after precautions RATING: L/M/H
Secure fence and gate making the area enclosed	Make the children feel safe and free to play as they wish The sense of freedom	A child escaping on to the carpark through a gap in the fence Being run over by a moving vehicle. A stranger catching their attention or entering the premises without permission	All	Making staff aware if the children spot anything unusual in the fence or gate Awareness of approaching a stranger Discuss the risks of the road and vehicles Constant supervision from practitioners	Low
Wet/Dirty clothes and shoes	Children practice skills of changing shoes and dressing themselves Children will learn to be responsible for their own belongings	Children getting cold	Children	Suitable footwear to be provided by parents, ideally wellies during wet weather and old trainers during dry weather Provide a suitable area for putting on shoes and coats Wet and muddy wellies/trainers to be removed before entering the building after play	Low

Task Four

Brussoni (2019) states the importance of children's outdoor play for healthy development, and it is being understood more and more through research and observations. Furthermore, White (2016) advocates for high quality outdoor provision for children and believes the whole educational curriculum can be learnt outdoors. There are many advantages to outdoor play for young children's physical, mental, cognitive, and social development but emphasis is needed on altering cultural norms so that children can play outside every day. To achieve the best outcome to outdoor play, interventions to lessen parents' and professionals' worries, increased training for professionals, changes to policies, and enhanced urban design for better settings and natural play areas even if the space is limited is needed (White, 2019).

According to Richardson (2013) the outside environment offers aspects that cannot be supplied on the same scale or in the same manner indoors or that are either distinct from those found indoors, for instance the space and freedom to move. Furthermore, Bento and Dias (2017) suggest practitioners that appreciate the unique qualities of the outdoors understand that it offers a vastly distinct and comprehensive setting for fostering children's wellbeing and physical learning.

Children can gain knowledge according to nidirect (no date), about own safety by learning the ability to experience risks and assess the risk themselves by finding solutions, this is gained from experiences from outdoor play. Finding a risk and benefit balance through risk assessments is essential in keeping everybody from harm (Harper, 2018). Curtis (cited in Community Playthings, 2013) states adults will always be there to supervise children's safety and should offer safe alternatives to risky situations instead of stopping the children engaging in the activity. Harper (2018) and Bottrill (2022) both agree outdoor play gives children a variety of opportunities to test their own boundaries and engage in daring activities under the safety net of adults and the atmosphere they have created. Minimising risk can be achieved by negotiating rules of how to stay safe with the children, this makes it more real and meaningful for the children.

Every child has the right to encounter and appreciate the important and the unique qualities of being outside and to play, as stated in Article 31 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNICEF, 2019). When young children have

unrestricted access to stimulating outdoor surroundings for learning through play and hands-on experiences, they thrive, and their bodies and minds develop at their best. The benefits provide the child with a break from the demands of everyday life, it helps to reduce anxiety and stress improving well-being, mental health and it aids in topping up vitamin D from the sun and being in the fresh air (Early years alliance, 2022),

This can only be achieved by adults and practitioners as stated in The Welsh Curriculum, Welsh Government (2022b) who are knowledgeable, passionate, and curious themselves, it is essential to maximising the possibilities of the outdoors. The practitioners should encourage children to explore the natural world around them. Vygotsky's theory underpins this by scaffolding the knowledge the child has and encouraging further learning. Practitioners should ask open ended questions such as 'What do you notice about the difference between this plank of wood and this one?' It is also important to welcome and answer children's questions, even if the answer is unknown. These foster observation skills, scientific inquiry, a positive attitude towards curiosity and learning and further discussions.

It is important to incorporate mathematics such as counting and measurement into outdoor activities. For instance, counting the number of steps it takes from one side to the other of the plank of wood. According to Bottrill (2022) playing with mathematics allows it to be liberated from constraints and transforms it into something enjoyable. The idea is to make maths more relevant and meaningful for the children by incorporating mathematical understanding or even lack of it, into their experiences. This is accomplished through problem solving, language, memory, symbolic processing, hearing, and physical coordination for counting, skills that underlie mathematics. Providing hands-on exploration activities such as building simple structures, for instance moving pieces or planks of wood to make a bridge or a road.

Bakar *et al.* (2020) and Bakar (2021) studies both conclude it is beneficial to take photos of activities including outside activities as it allows for reflection and discussion of what has been learnt at a later stage, allowing for communication skills enhancement. Additionally, the activities can be reflected upon, stimulating the children's imagination and to inspire for further scientific investigation (Britisch,

2019). Permission should be attained allowing photographs to be taken by the nursery or school from the parents or guardians of the children and appropriate measures in place to protect the children and staff (NSPCC, 2022).

Children are "little scientists," according to Piaget (cited in Aubrey and Riley, 2022), who learn through experimenting and making mistakes in their play environments. Discovery and investigation fuels curiosity through shapes, symmetry, colours, order, patterns, and quantity exploring, increases the mathematics which leads to further exploration. Asking questions such as why, how, when and what also fuels further investigations and understanding the science. Furthermore, a study by Franco, Shanahan and Fuller (2017) states nature provides the perfect place to use and stimulate each sense, sight, hearing, smell, touch, and taste to its fullest with natural sounds and smells underpinning experiences of nature. Children learn through senses by touching different textures and patterns found naturally in the environment, for instance the roughness of the bark on the tree or the tickle of a caterpillar crawling across the children's hands, sound from the birds, the wind blowing, running water, traffic, recreational and industrial noises, sight from different shapes, colours, movement of objects such as tress blowing in the wind and the leaves falling off the tree, and the smell from the flowers, soil and the trees, and taste from growing food naturally in garden patches and consuming them. Children only think with the information accessed through the senses experienced, by using own bodies this provides the brain with the raw data it needs to learn about the world (White, 2016).

Additionally, Malaguzzi (cited in Bradbury and Swailes, 2022) proposes that children are capable, inquisitive, creative, and can support own learning process. Working with children to explore their hobbies and curiosity may increase willingness to learn and to acquire science and mathematics skills through being exposed to engaging situations that encourage curiosity and active learning. Moreover, Virtual Lab School (2023) and Bottrill (2022) propose that these experiences can be experience in outdoor settings, where dynamic spaces like woodlands, parks, and fields have the kind of unstructured resources that inspire children to use their imaginations and engage in creative thinking, which also supports scientific and mathematical thinking. Children need to make connections with the natural world and ultimately a deep rooted and primal connection to the soil, trees, the earth, the sky, and themselves (Bottrill, 2022). Therefore, Storli and Sandseter (2019) argues that parents have a

crucial role in ensuring that children have access to the outdoors and the kinds of contexts that have a high play affordance, where they can make creative use of the surroundings and materials provided, the affordance theory by Gibson (2014) demonstrates the objects provided shape the perception of what is possible to do with them. Similarly, the loose parts hypothesis by Nicholson (1971) contends that children's engineering and critical-thinking abilities grow in settings with a variety of variables or loose parts, which are open-ended, transportable materials that encourage problem-solving by allowing children to build, manipulate, change, destroyed and explore, empowering imagination (King, 2022).

A study by Flannigan and Dietze (2018) demonstrated how loose parts improves children's engagement with science and mathematical learning. Loose parts can add depth and quality to outdoor play through providing the freedom to develop play experiences based on own ideas and goals, rather than the play being predetermined by the materials and surroundings. However, Spencer *et al.* (2021) highlights that such outdoor play with loose parts can be limited as adults do not always recognising the value of open-ended play in the outdoors. This is due to practitioners' own beliefs and personal experiences and upbringing can influence teaching and practice methods, influencing fears associated with children injuring themselves during risky play with loose parts.

Wales promotes play as a priority, this is stated in The Curriculum for Wales, Welsh Government (2022a) and the Curriculum for funded non-maintained nursery settings, Welsh Government (2022b). It focuses on a holistic approach allowing for learning which is meaningful and exciting for the children. The Curriculum for Wales is underpinned by many theorists to help practitioners to make each child feel the security of cynefin a sense of belonging where people and the environment is familiar and recognisable.

Bruner's theory (cited in Aubrey and Riley, 2022) believed children learn and develop skills through discovery, gaining new knowledge and building on previous knowledge learned, called scaffolding, and fostering a deeper understanding and a longer retention of understanding. Piaget's theory (cited in Aubrey and Riley, 2022) sees the practitioner taking a step back and only observing, allowing activities to be child-led and to progress at the child's own speed and to change directions of play if they

wish at any time. It is also paramount that practitioners are also interested in providing engaging and authentic experiences in exciting and effective safe environments but are willing to help if needed. The observations collected are used to plan exciting and relevant environments to correspond with the children's interests. Early childhood education pioneers like Friedrich Froebel, Maria Montessori, and John Dewey all emphasised the importance of movement, physicality, and doing in young children's lives and learning (White, 2016). Montessori theory (cited in Bradbury and Swailes, 2022) agrees with Piaget (cited in Aubrey and Riley, 2022) that the process of learning should progress naturally for each individual child. The child should be at the centre of own learning. Children are naturally curious and are capable of independent learning.

Through providing outdoor spaces for children to play, explore and learn, practitioners are supporting children in becoming competent as the children learn through different activities. Dewey (cited in Aubrey and Riley, 2022) believed this is important and enables children to be actively by interacting in own learning process. While ensuring the children are supported by practitioners who have provided a space that creates opportunity for excellent development results. Incorporating all the above strategies and techniques into outdoor activities and play can create a rich learning environment where children can naturally develop their mathematical and scientific understanding while connecting with the natural world around them.

John Rosenow (cited in Community Playthings, 2013) states "We need to help children learn to love the earth before we ask them to save it", allowing children the opportunity and the joy of nature and the freedom it brings at an early age will be a positive lesson to learn, will have a positive impact for years to come and it is adults and practitioners' responsibility to teach and give them the experiences and information needed to achieve this.

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