

Outdoor Learning



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The best classroom and the richest cupboard is roofed only by the sky.”

Margaret McMillan (c 1925)

Do you remember what you did outdoors as a child? Did you make daisy chains, climb trees, make mud pies or rose petal perfume? Did you build dens or play in the woods all day? Can you remember being totally absorbed outside, experimenting and making discoveries, physically challenging yourself and having fun? All Children need to be given opportunities and experiences like these for their all-round development, health, well-being, and learning.

The DfES Curriculum Guidance for the Foundation Stage states that:

“Well planned play, both indoors and outdoors, is a key way in which young children learn with enjoyment and challenge”.

(p25 DfES Curriculum Guidance for the Foundation Stage)

Practitioners *“provide rich and stimulating experiences (when they make good use of outdoor space so that children are enabled to learn by working on a larger, more active scale than is possible indoors)”.*

(p15 DfES Curriculum Guidance for the Foundation Stage).

The aims of this publication are:

- To ensure that practitioners understand why children need to play and learn outdoors all year round.
- To provide practical help and guidance on outdoor play and learning.
- To provide practical help and guidance on how to develop outdoor play.
- To share ideas, expertise and good practice from practitioners in Leicestershire schools and pre-schools.



Vision and Values

Some early years organisations and individuals working in the early years professions have expressed concern about children's lack of access to the outdoors and to the lack of status given to outdoor learning. This has resulted in the development of the 'Core values for high-quality outdoor experiences for young children'. These 'core values' were launched by Learning through Landscapes, the national school grounds charity, in Nursery World in 2004 and represent a shared understanding of what outdoor play should look and feel like for all young children.

Vision and Values for Outdoor Play

"The Vision for all young children is:

- *All children have the right to experience and enjoy the essential and special nature of being outdoors.*
- *Young children thrive and their minds and bodies develop best when they have free access to stimulating outdoor environments for learning through play and real experiences.*
- *Knowledgeable and enthusiastic adults are crucial to unlocking the potential of outdoors.*

The Core Values for high quality experiences for young children:

1. Young children should be outdoors as much as indoors and need a well-designed, well organised, integrated indoor-outdoor environment, preferably with indoors and outdoors available simultaneously.
2. Play is the most important activity for young children outside.
3. Outdoor provision can, and must, offer young children experiences which have a lot of meaning to them and are led by the child.
4. Young children need all the adults around them to understand why outdoor play provision is essential for them, and adults who are committed and able to make its potential available to them.
5. The outdoor space and curriculum must harness the special nature of the outdoors, to offer children what the indoors cannot. This should be the focus for outdoor provision, complementing and extending provision indoors.
6. Outdoors should be a dynamic, flexible and versatile place where children can choose, create, change and be in charge of their play environment.
7. Young children must have a rich outdoor environment full of irresistible stimuli, contexts for play, exploration and talk, plenty of real experiences and contact with the natural world and with the community.
8. Young children should have long periods of time outside. They need to know that they can be outside every day, when they want to and that they can develop their ideas for play over time.
9. Young children need challenge and risk within a framework of security and safety. The outdoor environment lends itself to offering challenge, helping children learn how to be safe and to be aware of others.
10. Outdoor provision must support inclusion and meet the needs of individuals, offering a diverse range of play-based experiences. Young children should participate in decisions and actions affecting their outdoor play."

Why young children need to play and learn outdoors

Young children need to be active to learn. Recent research has shown that movement is inextricably linked to learning. Children really do “move to learn and learn to move.” The outdoors offers them unique opportunities for growing and learning.

The outdoors is not *just* an area where children develop their physical skills, let off steam or have a break. Nor is it an area to go to as a ‘treat’ after the ‘real learning’ has been done inside. It is a place where much valuable learning can take place. Being outdoors should be an integral part of every young child’s day and an integral part of practitioners’ planning for the play and learning experiences for young children.

Children need space.

“Children want space at all ages. Space, that is ample space, is almost as much wanted as food and air. To move, to run, to find things out by new movement, to feel one’s life in every limb, that is the life of early childhood.”

Margaret McMillan (1930)

- Space to learn through being physically active across all areas of the curriculum.
- Space to develop a range of physical skills and opportunities to experiment and refine these with help and encouragement from adults. e.g. crawling, rolling, walking, running, jumping, climbing, skipping, hopping, pushing and pulling, pedalling, balancing, throwing and catching.
- Space to challenge themselves and to take risks in a secure environment.
- Space to move freely without constraints. This can often be more difficult for them inside.
- Space to work on a larger, more active scale, in keeping with their stage of development.

- Space to work collaboratively.
- Space to be alone and space to be social.

Children need freedom

The outdoors gives young children freedom that is uniquely different to that they experience inside the setting.

- Freedom to move and be active. Outdoors can give endless opportunities for challenge both physically, through moving in a variety of ways impossible inside, and intellectually, through discovering, exploring, experimenting, observing and problem solving.
- Freedom to be in control of their own learning, to make decisions, to be creative in ways which do not exist indoors.
- Freedom to develop their independence and follow their own interests.
- Freedom to be boisterous, active, noisy and messy.
- Freedom to experience a range of feelings from excitement to being calm and sitting quietly, relaxing and watching the clouds.



Why young children need to play and learn outdoors

Children need to experience the elements and begin to learn to appreciate the environment

- Playing outdoors every day, all year round gives children the opportunity to have first hand experience and learn about the changing seasons and the environment.
- The ever-changing outdoor environment gives children many experiences that are not possible inside.
- Outdoor learning is the beginning of enjoyment and appreciation of the environment and how to care for it.
- Outdoors gives children direct contact with birds, plants, mini-beasts, and other natural materials.

- Be in an environment that is more conducive to their particular learning style.
- Use more active learning modes
- Be more assertive, imaginative or creative.
- Persevere and concentrate for longer.

One practitioner gave the following example of how a child benefited from the development of their outdoor provision:

“We had one child who hardly spoke a word when inside the playgroup. Then we started to go outside every day and this child began to talk. It was as if he had come home.”



Outdoors provides an inclusive environment

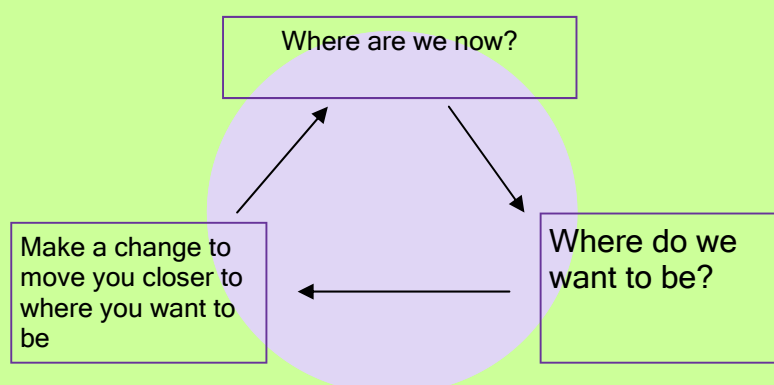
Outdoor play and learning caters for all children's abilities, interests and learning styles. Outside children can:

- Have the space they need to be active learners.

Getting Started

Before making any plans for the outdoors do the following:

- Ask the children in your setting what sorts of things they would like to **do** outside. This will give you ideas about what you might start to develop. For example children may want an area to dig in, somewhere to sit with their friends, somewhere to hide or make a den, somewhere to be active etc.
- Discuss as a whole staff what outdoor play experiences you want to provide for first, based on what the children said they would like to do. Think of the resources you need to start to acquire for these activities and experiences. Many of these resources will already be available in your setting.
- Then ask yourselves:
 1. "Where are we now?"
 2. "Where do we want to be?"
- Organise a meeting to explain to parents and carers why outdoor learning is so important for their children. Inform them of your plans to develop the outdoor area. Now would be a good time to ask for volunteers and help with resources.
- Now do something to make a change to the outdoors focusing on building up resources for one area or learning zone at a time. If the children's requests are based around imaginative play then concentrate on building up resources for this area first. In time you can begin to increase the number of areas or zones for learning outside and build up the stock of equipment and resources required.



Eventually try to provide for the following areas outdoors:

1. An area where children can be imaginative
2. An area where children can relax and be social
3. An area where children can be creative
4. An area where children can be active.

Meeting the challenges

Developing an outdoor area or introducing outdoor play all year round will undoubtedly present you with some challenges. Many of these can be easily overcome so do not be discouraged.

"We have no money to develop outdoor play".

- Getting started with outdoor learning does not need expensive resources or fixed equipment.
- Use flexible resources that can be changed into whatever the children want. (See the resources list at the end of this section for lots of ideas.)
- Any outdoor area can be used. The pictures below show how even the most uninspiring area can be developed to give children many opportunities for both child-led and adult-structured play and learning experiences.



Getting Started

Our area needs clearing/we have no fence/we have no outside area.”

- Involve parents, grandparents and other members of the community with clearing and cleaning jobs.
- Rope or cone off an area if there is no boundary. Simple home-made fencing panels can be used too.



- Use the immediate environment if there is no outdoor area attached to the setting. E.g. parks, walks in the countryside or into village/town.



“Parents don’t want their children to go outside.”

Working with parents is a crucial part of the practitioners work. When parents support children’s learning this has a very positive and beneficial effect on children’s attitudes to learning in general. Practitioners will need to help some parents to understand the benefits of regular access to outdoors.

Here are some practical suggestions for practitioners:

- Inform parents about all aspects of the curriculum including outdoor learning.
- Meet with them to explain how their children will benefit from outdoor play and learning.
- Involve them as well as the children in the planning stages.
- Seek out and use their expertise and skills.
- Be prepared to respond to their concerns in an understanding way.
- Include information about outdoor learning in the induction process.
- Be committed and clearly explain the reasons for wanting children to be playing outside.

Getting Started

- Reassure parents that risk assessments are carried out regularly.
- Explain the need for children to have a stimulating environment, experience challenge and learn how to recognise and manage risk - an essential life skill.
- Display the Vision and Values statements.
- Explain that with suitable clothing getting wet and dirty is not a problem.
- Show parents video and photographs of the children outside.

“We are worried about safety”

Minor accidents like bumps and scrapes occur all the time when children play. These are acceptable and possibly desirable as it is through these accidents that children learn and develop. Risk and challenge are essential to play too as children develop their confidence and self-esteem when they challenge themselves and do something which for them feels risky. For a four year old this can be as simple as walking unaided along a balance beam.

What practitioners must do to make a safe environment is:

- Ensure that the physical environment is safe and without hazards.
- Carry out regular risk assessments of the physical environment, resources and fixed equipment.
- Regularly discuss with children safety, risk and challenge.
- Ensure that the outside area is safe enough for children to have a go at any type of activity.
- Ensure that staff and children are dressed appropriately for the weather conditions.
- Write a ‘safety policy’ to pass on to parents and carers.
- Ensure that staff are vigilant.
- Regularly maintain equipment and outdoor areas.



The Adult's Role

“Young children need all the adults around them to understand why outdoor play provision is essential for them, and adults who are committed and able to make its potential available to them.”
(Vision and Values statement.)

To ensure that staff understand their role in supporting children's play and learning outdoors settings need to:

- Model good outdoor practice to all staff.
- Ensure that all the adults in the setting understand the value and importance of outdoor play through visits to other settings and training.
- Ensure that adults understand how the special nature of outdoors develops and enhances children's development and learning.
- Ensure that staff are comfortable and have somewhere to sit in order to listen to and observe children at times when they are not directly involved in playing with them.
- Raise awareness of the necessity for suitable all-weather clothing for themselves.

We asked practitioners from around the county what they did when they were outside.

“Plan and resource. Model play and language.”

“This week we have had camping equipment outside. I joined in the role-play, modelling language and playing alongside the children. The children set out the camp by themselves this time, as previously it had been set up for them. We talked about setting up the tent and equipment, lighting a camp-fire and cooking breakfast. Some of them had been camping so they could share their experiences with the rest of the group.”

The children found twigs for the camp fire in the school grounds. There was a lot of talking, turn taking and negotiation.”

Nursery nurse working with reception class.



“Challenge stereotypes”

“We play lots of physical games with the children outside including football and chasing. Pity we have no men so they could push the dolls in the buggies but we do challenge any comments we hear about what girls and boys can't do.”

Playgroup assistant

“Encourage children to challenge themselves. Help in developing confidence and physical skills.”

“We encourage them to challenge themselves physically, perhaps by going a little higher on the climbing frame or balancing but they know we are there if they need us. You have to keep telling them they can do it and giving them strategies rather than telling them to be careful all the time.”

Playgroup Leader

The Adult's Role

“Set up problem solving activities, and get them to do the thinking.”

“I asked groups of children to try out different types of bubble mix. One was commercially produced, one was made with soap and water and one was made with water and washing up liquid. They had to decide which mix they thought made the best bubbles. They had a wonderful time trying out the mixes and chasing after the bubbles. The activity provoked a lot of discussion about which mix they thought was best.”



Reception class teacher.

“Support children’s interests, needs and learning styles”.

Here is one teacher’s account of how she planned for 2 half terms using the children’s interests and ideas.

“As a means of promoting the use of the outdoors we decided to ask the children what sort of things they would like to do outdoors. We told them they could decide what our weekly focus should be. In no time at all we had our 6 weeks planned.”

Plans for ‘Exploring the Great Outdoors’

Week 1 6.6.05 - Minibeasts.

We found minibeasts and made them using natural materials. The week culminated in an ‘Ugly Bug Ball’

Week 2 13.6.05 - Hunting for other wildlife.

We became explorers searching for every kind of animal at the lagoon in our wildlife area.



The Adult's Role

Week 3 20.6.05 - Groundforce.

During this week we changed our garden and produced our very own water feature, including 'a wishing pond'.



Week 4 27.6.05 - Camping holidays.

Tents and other camping equipment were brought in to school so that groups could embark on an expedition, which involved cooking beans on a stove.



Week 5 4.7.05 - Football crazy

A football stadium was built and skills were practised. This week ended in 'match of the day' music and all.

Week 6 11.7.05 - Cool Games.

At last the children had the opportunity to role-play all their favourite heroes; Scooby Doo, Power rangers, Thunderbirds and Spiderman.

The children were so excited and enthusiastic. Each Friday we would ask the children what kinds of things they would like to do for the following week. By doing this we could try and ensure that we had the resources necessary as well as books, which fitted in with their theme. The children brought in many resources from home and our last half term was busy to the very last day. It was wonderful to see the children using all the skills and knowledge we had taught them to initiate their own learning.

At the beginning of this academic year we have asked a new class of children the same question. This time we have had a completely different set of interests and needs shown. These children wanted to read books, have a barbeque, play hide and seek, have races, sing, dance, play on bikes and scooters, go to the park, get fit, paint pictures, 'do Christmas' and play at animals.

We have now embarked on our 8 Weeks of 'Whatever the Weather'. This title was chosen as, no matter what the weather, we intend to spend most of our time outdoors".

Whatever the Weather'

Week 1 - 24.10.05
Weather Books and Stories.

Week 2 - 31.10.05
Bringing the Outdoors in.

Week 3 - 7.11.05
Eating Outdoors.

Week 4 - 14.11.05
Let's Go to the Park!

Week 5 - 21.11.05
Being Active.

Week 6 - 28.11.05
A Musical Extravaganza.

Week 7 - 5.12.05
Outdoor Art.

Week 8 - 12.12.05
A Christmas Garden.

Outdoor Learning in Action

Some accounts from practitioners of their experiences in developing outdoor learning.



A. Planning outdoor learning across all areas of the curriculum.

Nicola Middleton, reception class teacher.

Personal, Social and Emotional Development:

We find that children socialise with a wider variety of children when they are playing outside and the play encourages turn taking and negotiation skills. Some activities, such as using the parachute, enable the whole group to work together towards a shared goal.



Communication, Language and Literacy

Outdoor learning provides plenty of opportunities for language development and we often have a role-play activity outdoors.



Outdoor Learning in Action

We often set up a reading area outside with cushions, shade if it is a sunny day, and a collection of books in baskets. These may be topic-related, poetry, picture books or a selection of the children's favourites.

When we have small world outside we try to put non-fiction books alongside for the children to look at. For example, if we have the sea creatures in the water tray we will lay out some non-fiction books about whales, sharks and octopuses. The children often stop to look in the books and this enhances their play.

Outside is a good place to develop children's handwriting patterns on a large scale. We do this with painting along wallpaper or using big brushes with water to make marks on any surface.



Mathematical Development.

We use outdoors for a number of counting activities as well as large scale measuring. The children initiate plenty of problem solving when they are in the outdoor environment such as, "How many boxes do we need to make train carriages for all of these passengers?"

We can make long number lines outside and construct on a larger scale with different materials, which is good for shape and space work. Mathematical language is always used outside with comparisons such as bigger, smaller, longer or heavier being talked about in all sorts of play and observations. Outdoors also allows children to make more mess - which is useful when you are teaching capacity!



Knowledge and Understanding of the World.

When children are outside they cannot help but learn about the world around them, with the changing weather and seasons under their noses. Our children love being given magnifying glasses, nets, tubs and being nature detectives. They investigate mud, under stones, trees and plants.

Outdoor Learning in Action



They love their new weather boxes giving them resources appropriate to the day's weather and now really enjoy rainy days!

We try to take the children out into the local environment to give them knowledge of the place where they live as well as local events - such as the fair that visits once a year.



Tuff spots are invaluable for making different environments with small world equipment such as Polar lands with sugar, glitter, glass stones and polar animals or a bug world with compost, leaves, twigs and a variety of minibeast models. Non-fiction books alongside make these meaningful learning experiences.

Creative Development

The children enjoy painting outside and it can often give them a stimulus for their art. They can also play imaginatively on a larger scale such as a car wash with buckets, hoses and the wheeled toys.

We have streamers in our windy day box and the children love dancing about with them outside so we now have a tape player with them so they can have music on too.

Musical instruments are difficult to allow the children to use independently inside because, being in an open plan setting, they can disturb others. To overcome this we put a box of instruments outside on a rug. Along with this we put a tape player that the children operate independently and can play along to.

Physical Development

This is the easiest area of learning to develop outside and we give plenty of opportunity for the children to develop their gross motor skills. Although we have bikes they do not go out every day, as we like to use wheeled toys that encourage collaborative play such as the taxi bikes or pull along trucks. We also have equipment to develop balance and coordination. Large scale weaving is a lovely activity to offer outside. This helps to develop fine motor skills. We also use equipment such as beanbags, hoops, and bats and balls regularly.

The children love constructing with large boxes. We use the ones that the children's fruit is delivered in. These are lightweight and we have a constant supply!

Outdoor Learning in Action

What children have said about - *Creativity.*

"You can experiment more and be a scientist because you can use more things."

"There are lots of things to see and you can be messy outside."

"You can do drawings and mix things together when you are making pictures."

"You can do tree rubbing and stick leaves on."

"You can see hear and smell more things and be more creative."

We have a growing area, where we grow vegetables and flowers. The children really enjoyed growing carrots, which they harvested, washed and chopped up for all to taste in our milk bar. They learned so much from this hands-on experience and thoroughly enjoyed themselves.

Other outdoor activities include: chalking on the path, drawing in soapy sand, painting with water and large brushes, noisy activities like the work bench and tools (this reduces the noise level indoors), hoopla, skittles, ball games, croquet, hopscotch, parachute games, action rhymes, movement to music, story time, play dough and painting - the list is endless.

B. Using the Outdoor Area

Deb Luckett, playgroup leader.

We have direct access to a secure outdoor garden area, which we use as much as possible throughout the year. Children love to be outside, even children who are reluctant to try a new activity will want to take part in something if it is taking place outdoors.

We view our outdoor area as an extension of our indoor area. Children are able to move freely from the indoors to the outdoors. We plan for both adult led and child initiated learning to take place outside, and to cover all six areas of learning.

Outside children can extend their role play to a larger area, they can explore nature and the environment and bring their findings indoors and draw or write about their discoveries. One child found a snail and brought it in to show other children, this started lots of conversation about where they found the snail, where it lived and where the children lived. Some children decided to make snails out of play dough, another child decided to draw a snail on the whiteboard and others looked at the snail with magnifying glasses.



What children have said about - *Facts.*

"The sun is brighter, the lights are better and the colours are nicer outside."

"There is more space and you have more energy because you can run around."

"You get lots of fresh air and there are more things to see and find - you get more ideas outside."

Outdoor Learning in Action

C.. Making it Happen

Kim Price, playgroup leader.

We dreamed of having our own secure outdoor area. We have a mobile on a school playing field and had only ever been able to take children out for a twenty minute run around in the school playground. Learning experiences were limited, we all had to go out together as there was no safe boundary fence and all the staff could do was supervise the children.

We heard about a Local Network Fund for charitable organisations, like our playgroup, to support children and young people in former mining communities. This looked promising but there were lots of hurdles to jump before we could secure it.

We approached the school and the local authority as the land belongs to them. The Head Teacher was very supportive. We spoke to the governors of the school too producing a sheet with bullet points on outlining the reasons why outdoor play was so important for young children. We did this in order to convince them that there were sound reasons for giving part of the school field to us. The governors approved the idea. We applied for £7000. This would go some way towards providing us with a secure fence around the mobile, a slabbed area, a grassy area, a digging area and an area with seating. We also had some fund raising events too to make up the rest of the money we needed.

We could only access the grant if we could confirm that we would remain in the mobile for five years. That caused us a few sleepless nights as we were leasing the building on a yearly basis. However with support from the Local Authority we were able to secure a commitment from them that we could lease the building for a five year period. Next our mobile had to undergo a survey to see if it would last for 5 years. Eventually even though there were times when we thought it might never happen, we were successful.

This whole procedure had started in 2003 and work on the ground started in the Spring of 2004. We opened the outdoor area in October 2004. Now children can come and go as they want to and we have noticed a significant difference in them in a number of ways. They are calmer and because they know they can go out when they want, they don't all want to go out at the same time and we usually have a steady trickle of them coming and going during our sessions although there are times when we do all go out together. Children go out all year round. We have a display in the foyer with photographs to show parents what children get out of being outside. It is so good seeing the children enjoying all that the outside can offer.



What children have said about - *Feelings.*

"It makes you feel calmer. It's not so noisy and you can learn better."

"You feel excited because you can run around. I feel miserable in the classroom - I like open space."

"I feel sad if it's cold or if the wind is strong."

Outdoor Learning in Action

C. Outdoor Learning Journey

Ruth Sharpe, playgroup leader.

After we moved in to our new Pre-school unit on the outskirts of our community college campus, it felt right to explore all of our new surroundings including outdoors. This was something the children very much wanted to do. Mud became the story of our lives, coping with it and eventually learning to enjoy it! In the beginning we were venturing outside two or three times a week.



Our staff team felt the need to do something structured and adult directed while we were out so we did circle games, took out hoops, balls or bean bags each time. This was good but it somehow didn't feel quite right, as it was the adults who made these decisions. Going out on wet and cold days started to become a problem too. Some children came with suitable clothing for going out while others didn't. This also applied to adults in the setting. We decided to have a staff meeting to discuss and share a vision of what we felt we wanted outdoor experiences to be for the children and ourselves. At around the same time two of us embarked on the Learning Through Landscapes outdoor learning training and so our journey truly began.



Our first priority was to talk to all parents and ask them to bring their children prepared to go out every day whatever the weather. We built this information into our induction time for new parents too. We also asked for donations of coats, wellies and rainwear so that we had our own supply just in case someone did not have their own or forgot.

We began to video our outdoor sessions to show parents the fun we were having and how this was benefiting children's all round development and learning. We showed this as they came to collect their children. Slowly but surely it all began to come together.

Parents got involved in other ways too. Dads helped us with den building and to solve our welly and shoe storage problem, one

parent made us a shoe and welly store. We also bought a small plastic greenhouse to use as a drop off point outside for wet and muddy wellies.



Outdoor Learning in Action

We asked the children what they wanted to do and where they wanted to go outdoors and we listened to them as they chatted incessantly while we were out. We took ideas from what we heard children saying and fed these into our plans.

At first getting outside took forever and a day...26 coats...26 pairs of wellies. However this was worth the time and effort. It just seems to happen now. Children help each other and are very skilled at getting dressed.

Children don't ask if we are going out, as they know it is a daily event. They now check our visual timetable to see when it will happen. They have an outdoor basket and can fill it with things they want to take out.

We can see how going outside has had a very positive effect on the children's confidence, self-



esteem and imagination.

We have seen a different side to the boys some of whom really thrive in the outdoors. The arrival of a male member of staff has given them a louder voice too.

After a year we feel we have come a long way. We are totally committed to outdoor learning. We can confidently deal with any concerns from parents as the children gain so much from their experiences outdoors and their enthusiasm for it speaks volumes.

This is what they say:

"Rolling down the hill is my favourite"

"I love the trees and especially the mud"

"If you look up this tree you can see heaven and after that it's space"

"I like to be a princess outside, can we find somewhere to live?"

"I'm standing here to stop the moles coming out of this tree".

What children have said about - ***Good things and Bad Things.***

"You can walk around more and talk to your friends. You can see wildlife and learn more."

"You can run around and play games and it's fun."

"You can get fresh air and work without an adult."

"It can be cold and wet. Sometimes I fall over."



Some resources and ideas to get you started

Some inexpensive - often free - resources to help you get started with outdoor learning.

- **Den building resources** - Old sheets, blankets, sleeping bags, boxes, groundsheets, pop-up tents, and tunnel, string and ropes, pegs, suitcases and picnic baskets.
- **Ride-on toys** - (Use for imaginative play with box or tent houses, dens, shops or car washes). Buckets, sponges and cloths for vehicle washing. Chalk for drawing roads on the ground. Home made traffic lights and stop/give way signs.
- **Growing resources** - Plant pots, bags of compost, seeds and plants. Some garden centres are willing to donate pots. Spades, rakes, hoes, gardening gloves, trowels and buckets
- **Mark making** - Chalk, buckets of water, a range of brushes, feathers and sticks, natural materials for printing, paint, paper, pens, crayons, pencils, slates and chalks, sand, mud.
- **Books, stories and rhymes** - A range of books that can be taken outside. Laminated signs, poems and rhymes, baskets for books, groundsheets, carpet squares, picnic blankets.
- **Role-play and small world play** - Tuff spot from a DIY store. This can be filled with sand, compost, water, ice, jelly, or rice, with animals and/or people and vehicles. Sweeping brushes, dust pans, picnic baskets, and cases, dressing up clothes, buggies and dolls.
- **Physical** - Plastic bread and milk crates to build with, climb on and jump off. Chalk to draw lines to walk/balance on. Log slices to jump off, old trees and tyres.
- **Natural materials** - Pine cones, acorns, conkers, stones, twigs, leaves and shells. Logs, for minibeast habitat. Woodlice will come in droves if the logs are set up in a quiet

- corner, kept wet and undisturbed for a time. Or for small world and imaginative play, they double as stools or tables and for physical development they can be stood on and jumped off providing they are large and flat
- **Water** - Hose linked to outside tap - otherwise buckets of water, water tray, water pipes and guttering, plastic spiders, floating and sinking materials. Shells, stones, plastic pond and sea creatures. Watering cans, lengths of tubing, funnels, and jugs.
- **Weather boxes.** These are a particularly effective and inexpensive way of using the outdoors all year whatever the weather. The following was compiled by a group of practitioners on a recent Learning Through Landscapes course.

A Foggy day box

Resources/activities:

- bike lights
- torches/glow sticks
- high visibility clothing
- reflective strips
- cameras
- Kipper and characters (from Oxford Reading Tree scheme)
- chiffon, organza.net fabrics
- tracing paper
- white tissue paper
- sound- instruments, fog horns, tubing, flexible hose and horn blowing.
- cones/tubes- Horn blowing
- mirrors to collect droplets
- light house
- cans for telephone
- binoculars.
- quoits trail, ropes.

Prompt cards showing:

- road markings and cars and bikes with lights
- children wearing reflective clothing crossing the road

Some resources and ideas to get you started

- children enacting a foggy day story using props
- water tray, lighthouse, boats and rocks
- children shining torches on to sheets
- trails, directional play - children holding onto rope.

Books

- 'The Foggy Day' - Oxford Reading Tree
- 'Mog in the Fog' - Helen Nicoll and Jan Pienkowski
- 'The Lighthouse Keeper' stories
- 'Elmer'
- non fiction books about weather.

Songs and Rhymes

"Here We Go Round the Mulberry Bush".



A Rainy Day Box

Resources/activities:

- access to water outside
- sponges
- rubber glove with holes
- objects to float
- funnels
- waterwheels
- shower curtain

- ground sheet
- containers of various sizes/shapes/materials to catch rain- different sounds made
- torches and cymbals etc. to simulate thunder and lightening
- ring games in the rain
- go for a rainy day walk
- paint to paint on floor/walls in the rain (weak powder paint solution) to see what happens
- make a rain forest with small world imaginative play
- make your own swamp and floods outside
- create a waterproof den to read books under and listen to sounds
- corrugated plastic to make a waterslide. Colour the water and watch it fall. Use different colours to see what happens.
- paint picture on paper and expose to rain, or use a watering can, to blur the picture
- make wellington prints
- do a rain dance
- compose rain music with different instruments. Tape it and playback later
- make water features and fountains
- make clay models outside in the rain
- use cameras to produce rainy day pictures. Laminate them and make a picture/word board.



Some resources and ideas to get you started

- Use pipettes/syringes on easels to allow paint to drip down in the rain
- rain maker (get children to make their own)
- observe what happens to different surfaces (e.g. bark, grass, slabs, spongy tarmac, mud etc) outside when they are rained on
- make mud pies.
- dig in the mud
- water play outside in the rain with pipes and guttering

Books

- 'Alfie's Feet' Shirley Hughes
- 'Out and About Through the Years' Walker books
- 'Watching the Weather' Heineman 1st library.

Songs and Rhymes

- "Pray Open Your Umbrella"
- "Wellingtons Are fun"
- "Splish Splash" 'This Little Puffin'
- "Incy Wincy Spider"
- "Doctor Foster"
- "I can sing a rainbow"
- "I Hear Thunder"
- "It's Raining It's Pouring".

A Snowy day box

Resources/activities

- snow man kit - hat, scarf etc.
- waterproof trousers – for children
- wadding- large piece - 2m x 3m- for making igloos, ground sheets for igloos, blankets

- buckets, spades, brushes
- ice cream tubs for making ice blocks
- wellies with different treads for pattern making
- trays to use as sledges for toys
- real sledges for children
- christmas trees tree decoration - snow flakes, glittery materials, 'lametta'
- cotton wool
- music tape/story tape of 'The Snowman'
- food dye



- salt to sprinkle on ice
- powdery substances- salt, flour, small pieces of paper and dredgers
- small world figures eg. penguins, polar bears, people etc to use out side in the tuff stop with real snow
- large white pompoms (pretend snow balls) and a target to throw them at
- sugar and sugar cubes to use as snow with small world figures
- balloons to make ice balloons.

Some resources and ideas to get you started

Books

- 'Percy the Park Keeper' series, 'Snowy days'
- 'Kipper's Snowy Day' Mick Inkpen
- 'The Snowman' Raymond Biggs
- 'Jolly Snow' Jane Hissey
- 'First Snow' Kim Lewis
- 'The Snow Queen' H.C.Anderson
- 'Penguins in the Fridge'.

Songs and Rhymes

- "Five Little Snow Men" "This Little Puffin"
- "Here We Go Round the Mulberry Bush"

A Sunny day box

Resources/activities

- sunhat
- sunglasses
- empty sun cream bottle
- picnic basket
- barbeque
- blanket/material-different sizes, dressing up clothes
- umbrellas/fans
- pop up tent
- coloured cellophane
- pegs and string
- ribbons, CDs, mirrors



- watering can/ water spray bottle.
- soft toys / puppets
- tea set and plastic food.
- buckets/ builders tray
- paddling pool
- kite, carrier bag, camera
- making picnic food/drink
- books, postcards, holiday brochures
- chalk.

Possible role-play areas

- travel agents
- airport
- caravan and camping
- garden centre
- boat
- café.

Stories

- magic grandad
- going to the beach
- where's my teddy by Jez Alborough
- 'Bonting' and 'Alfie goes camping' from 'The Big Alfie Out of Doors Storybook' by Shirley Hughes
- 'Sam's sandwich' by David Pelham

Songs and Rhymes

- "If you're happy and you know it clap your hands"
- "Here we go round the mulberry bush"
- "The sun has got his hat on."

Music

- Vivaldi's 'Four Seasons'

Some resources and ideas to get you started

A Windy day box.

- paper fish game
- straws and paint
- scarves
- lengths of fabric
- pots, pans and foil trays
- streamers/ribbons
- balloons and variety of fillings
- mobiles
- wind chimes
- kite making equipment
- bubbles
- measuring equipment
- weather vane
- paper planes
- windsocks
- frisbees
- airflow balls
- variety of hats
- chalk
- blow football
- tent for camping role-play
- boat/ship with sails/hot air balloon for role play
- windbreak/equipment for making shelters
- mirrors
- digital camera for recording leaves blowing
- tape recorder to record wind
- video/ camcorder to record wind
- Parachute
- umbrellas
- flags
- water and sail boats
- washing line
- windmills
- sound makers/tubes etc.
- natural resources- dandelion heads, sycamore seeds

- mini Fans
- Feathers

Songs and Rhymes

- “Five little leaves so bright and gay” (This Little Puffin)
- “Rock a bye baby”
- “Autumn leaves are falling down”
- “Build a house with five bricks” (This Little Puffin)
- “Bobby Shaftoe Clap Your Hands” songbook (A&C Black).



Books

- ‘The Windy Day’
- ‘Mrs Mopple’s Washing Line’
- ‘The Lonely Scarecrow’
- ‘Mr Wolf’s week’
- ‘Pants’
- ‘A Fox Got My Socks’

Organisation, Storage and Access

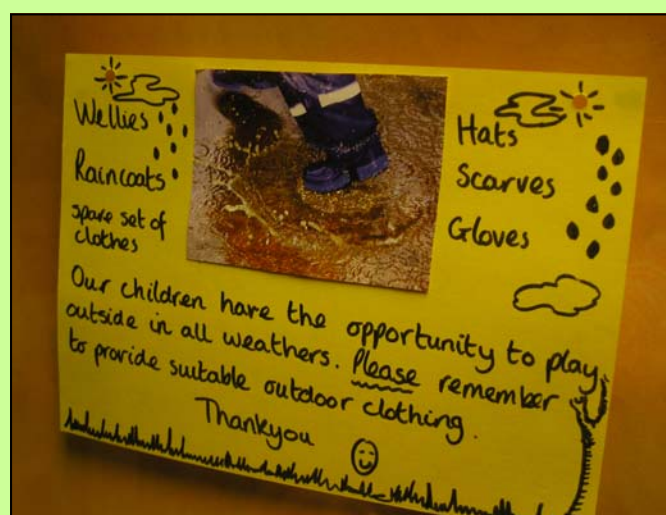
- Have some resources easily accessible to children in containers so that they can manage to access and return them safely. This will develop children's independence and decision making as well as freeing adults to interact and observe play.



- Ensure everyone knows where equipment is kept and returns it to the same place after use.
- Consider what can be left outside permanently. Cover in bad weather to prevent equipment from becoming unpleasant or unsafe to use.
- Consider possibilities for storage of footwear and outdoor clothing. Build up a supply of spares for those children who do not come equipped.
- Nominate a member of staff to be responsible for the maintenance of containers and storage systems as part of the ongoing risk assessment of the school/setting.
- Teach children to tidy up. It is an essential part of the learning process.

Further Reading

- Ouvry M (2000) *Exercising muscles and minds: outdoor play and the early years curriculum*. London: National Early Years Network
- Bilton H (2004) *Playing Outside: Activities, Ideas and Inspiration for the Early Years*. David Fulton
- Bilton H (1998) *Outdoor play in the Early Years*. David Fulton
- Lindon J (1999) *Too safe for their own good? Helping children learn about risk and life skills*. The National Early Years Network
- Edgington M (2nd edition 2003) *The great Outdoors. Developing children's learning through outdoor provision*. The British Association for Early Childhood Education
- Bayley R & Broadbent L (2001) *50 Exciting Things To do Outside*. Lawrence Educational Publications
- Featherstone S (2001) *The Little Book Of Outdoor Play* (2003) *The Little Book Of Outdoor Play in All Weathers* Featherstone Education Ltd.
- *Birth to three Matters*.
- *DfES Curriculum Guidance for the Foundation stage*.
- *Learning Through Landscapes - Early Years Outdoors*. To subscribe contact the Early Years Outdoors Advice Line on 01962 845811 or www.ltl.org.uk



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- Stonebow Primary School, Loughborough
- Noah's Ark Pre-school
- Burton on the Wolds Primary School
- Asfordby Pre-school

