

APPENDIX 10: Expanding the horizons of outdoor play - beyond the designated outdoor area



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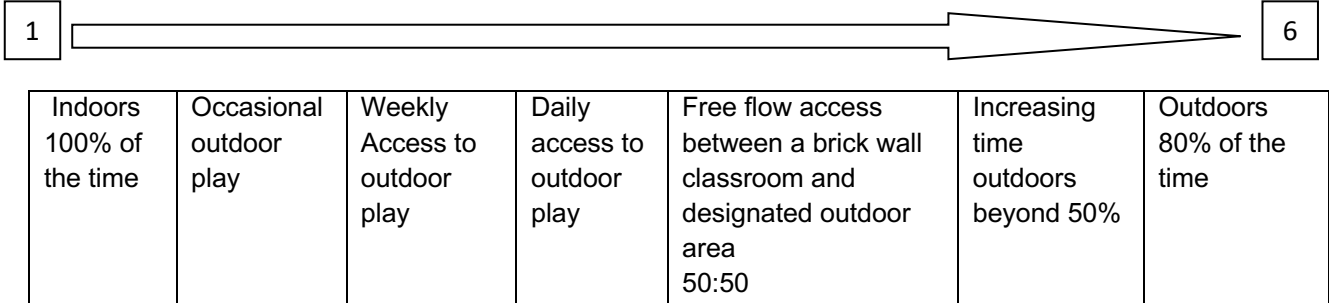


This appendix is not meant to be prescriptive. Early years practitioners and outdoor learning professionals will find more apt interpretations and ideas. This should be viewed as a starting document for further discussion and development.

It can be helpful to view outdoor play provision as a continuum of which there are a number of strands. Whilst there are many books and articles about play within the outdoor area, taking very young children further afield brings other concepts into consideration.

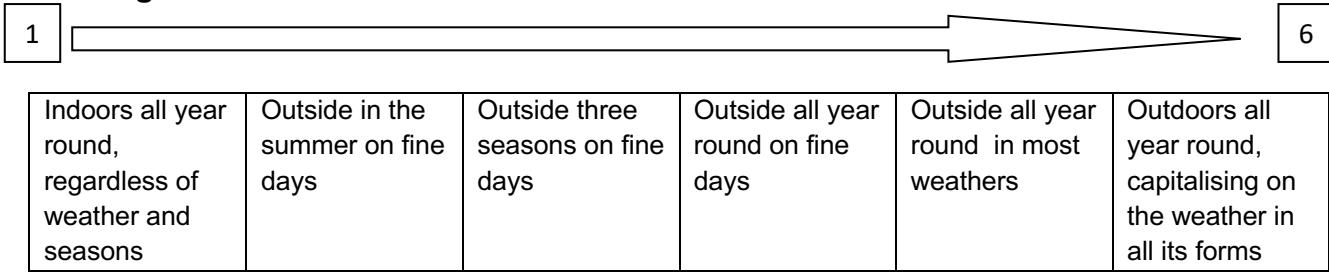
The philosophy underpinning nature or forest kindergartens fits into this continuum. Pre-school establishments can work towards their ideal in all the strands incorporating aspects of the philosophy over time, and in a way which meets their individual circumstances.

Time spent outdoors



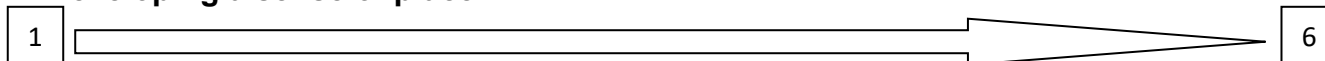
It has long been recognised that free flow play between the indoor and outdoor environment is good practice. Children choose where they play. In a nature or forest kindergarten, there usually remains this choice. The 'indoor' area might be a wooden play house, shelter or tepee and campfires provide a source of warmth. The Secret Garden has a wood burning stove in one of its shelters. The drop-off and pick up usually happens outdoors in the designated outdoor area, rather than inside.

Making the most of all weathers and seasons



Many pre-school establishments are outside in all weathers, all year round. Here, it is important that children and staff have good quality outdoor clothing. This increases the play opportunities afforded by the weather.

Developing a sense of place

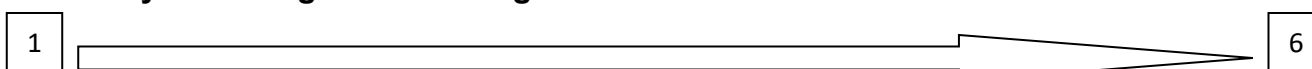


Almost all outdoor activities take place only in the designated outdoor area	The school grounds beyond the outdoor area is used frequently and regularly	Children have frequent, regular opportunities to play in greenspace in or beyond the school grounds	The local neighbourhood is used frequently and regularly for ventures and exploration	Children visit a variety of different natural habitats within their local area, frequently and regularly	The exploration of different natural habitats becomes a key focus of facilitating play, frequently and regularly
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A 'sense of place' is more than just exploring natural habitats. It includes learning about and connecting with the local community, culture, history, work and use of local resources. In the examples above, natural rather than built environments have been mentioned to fit in with the forest kindergarten theme and also as a reminder about the importance of frequent, regular access to greenspace. (Read the research: Centre for Confidence and Wellbeing website in the "Flourishing Lives" section: <http://www.centreforconfidence.co.uk/flourishing-lives.php?&p=cGlkPTE3Mw>).

However the richness of the urban environment can be utilised too. Go for a very experiential approach and ensure that stories, songs, artwork and other creative ways of exploring the local environment are used to connect children to their place. Finally, staff will need to get out and about to really learn themselves about their local area.

Journeys - Getting to know the great outdoors!



Beyond the outdoor area, journeys are made by car, taxi or private bus or powered boats. The purpose is reaching the destination	Journeys are made by public transport, including ferries. The journey is part of the experience but primarily a way of reaching the destination.	Journeys are made by bicycles, boats with sails or paddles, or using animals, e.g. ponies. The journey is an important part of the experience and children are developing confidence in undertaking journeys.	Journeys are made on foot as this is the most environmentally sustainable method of travel. It is a deep and integral part of the experience. Children are familiar with routines. Key experiences and activities are part of the journey process
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Like a 'sense of place' this theme is difficult to describe in one paragraph. The concept of journeys is about personal development and growth, through the process of exploration and discovery. The book, *Adventures in Nature* by Children in Scotland (2008) ISBN 978-1-901589-78-8 describes the inspirational nursery project which took place in Verona. Using the local natural environment and the children's ideas and interests, they embarked upon a series of adventures, looking for castles in the woods, exploring caves and even rafting down a river. The talking, listening and reflecting on the experience are an integral part of journeys and developing a sense of place.

Role of adult

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<p>Adult initiated and adult led activities almost all the time. Projects decided by adults. High child to adult ratio, e.g. 10 to 1 Only part of the curriculum covered by outdoor experiences</p>	<p>Adult initiated and adult led activities most of the time. Some child input into project. Activities decided by adults</p>	<p>Children choose some projects based on their interests. Adults begin to plan some activities based upon children's interests</p>	<p>Children are involved in planning of the activities and events which take place, most of the time. Adults decide some activities and projects</p>	<p>Child initiated, child led. Projects led by children's interests Adults facilitate Low child to adult ratio Almost all the curriculum covered by outdoor experiences</p>
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Some may wonder why the role of the adult is mentioned within the context of outdoor play provision. However, the relationships that develop outdoors between children and adults take on the third dimension of the environment! Everything about good early years practice applies to working outside with children.

The reference to the curriculum in this part is because the adults tend to monitor which parts of the curriculum have been or are to be covered.

Involvement of outdoor professionals to develop staff skills and confidence

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<p>Outdoor activities beyond the outdoor area are almost always led by external professionals</p>	<p>External professionals are used continuously for repeated activities outdoors and organise the activities</p>	<p>External professionals work alongside pre-school staff with sharing the planning and organising</p>	<p>External professionals are used to support pre-school staff developing the skills and competence to deliver the activity independently</p>	<p>External professionals are occasionally used as a source of advice and support but activities led by pre-school staff</p>	<p>Led almost entirely by pre-school staff and supported by trained volunteers and parents. Pre-school staff undertake a range of CPD activities to develop outdoor skills.</p>
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This section has been included to encourage pre-school staff to develop the confidence and skills to go outside beyond their designated area without relying on a 'visiting specialist' ranger, outdoor education expert all the time, e.g. to lead the forest kindergarten sessions every week. There is **always** a place for outside professionals to enhance experiences for children and adults but this should be exception rather than the expectation, in order for an outdoor activity to happen.

For example, a nursery teacher might go on a CPD course on storytelling outdoors and be able to do this himself. However a professional storyteller going to a woodland with a nursery class would benefit the children and the teacher would be able to hone his skills by working with a professional.

Environmental stewardship

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Little or no environmental stewardship activities	Token gestures, e.g. occasional tree planted	Pre-school becomes involved in a longer term project, e.g. Eco Schools or John Muir Trust Award which takes some account of stewardship	Eco School or JMT award or other stewardship scheme is gained annually	Environmental stewardship activities underpin all outdoor play, beyond an award scheme – part of ethos of the pre-school
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“Sustainable Development Education should be integrated into learning and teaching and be used as a way of delivering the curriculum and key skills. It should not be treated as an additional activity that is undertaken ‘if there is time’...Regular opportunities to learn outside the classroom – in the school grounds, the local community or further afield – should be built into any SDE policy.” LTS Sustainable Development Education Liaison Group, (2008) Schools Sustainable Development Education Policies: A Guide to their Preparation

Environmental stewardship is about demonstrating love, care and positive action for and in the natural and built environments. Again, it’s about developing a relationship with the world and ensuring that sustainable practice is at the core of everything. “Is what we are doing harming or helping other people, plants and animals?”

Sustainable acquisition and use of resources

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Little or no thought is given where and how resources are made. Recycling or reuse of materials does not happen	Natural materials such as stones, sticks, shells are present in a nature corner or during a specific topic. An occasional resource is fair-trade/ organic/ locally made. Occasional recycling or reuse of material	Pre-school has natural materials for use indoors and out in all areas of play provision Policy of purchasing wherever possible resources that are fair-trade/ organic/ locally made. Recycling or reuse of materials becomes more frequent	Natural materials carefully sourced from the local environment are the main resources supported by some fair-trade/ organic/ locally made resources. All materials are reused and eventually recycled.
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This section is also to ensure that sustainable practice is at the heart of outdoor learning. Education establishments are often very resource dependent. There is a perceived need to acquire lots of resources to support a theme or project. Yet as the saying goes, “imagination is not about what you’ve got, but what you’ve not got.” This is a challenge for most of us, but it’s good practice to question our purchasing powers!

The outdoor learning web

The progress made can be plotted on a web, to indicate where a centre is at in terms of developing its outdoor play provision. The larger the web, the further along the continuum a centre is. Progress can be monitored year on year.

Below is an illustration of this. For the purposes of evaluation in line with *The Child at the Centre*, a six-point scale has been used.

