

*A Path
Made in the Walking*

Forest School in Norway
and in England

**Torill Hindmarch
and
Diane Boyd**



An OMEP (UK) Report

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Foreword

In 2011, Torill Hindmarch contributed an OMEP (UK) Research Update entitled “*Challenges with introducing Forest School/Nursery to the Garden of England: a comparative study of Forest Nursery in England and Norway*”. Forest schooling has grown considerably since Torill’s publication and it remains a subject of considerable concern and interest within the early childhood educational community. In 2021, OMEP (UK) therefore commissioned Torill to provide us with a *Ten Years on...’update on the update’*. The project quickly grew into something more substantial than a regular *OMEP UK Research Update*, and in collaboration with Diane Boyd, Torill has provided a much more substantial report that we felt deserved dissemination as a OMEP (UK) published Report.

In her 2011 comparative study of forest schooling in Norway and England, Torill felt that something had been lost; “in the translation from one country to the next”. She suggested that it may have been the greater emphasis placed upon the natural environment in the Norwegian Curriculum framework that explained much of the difference, and she argues here that this is something many of us are pressing hard for in England at the present time. Torill argues that there has been a growing public awareness in the importance of the environment that is due in part to the pandemic crisis, and that this may provide a renewed impetus in both countries. In the back page of this report, we provide details of the *Nature Premium Campaign*, which provides an important focus for these efforts.

Torill explains most significantly perhaps, how it has been the forest that has been her teacher, and she shows us that it can be the same for us all, for every child and adult. In Chapter Two Diane Boyd provides further detail of the English Curriculum context and contrasts this with other nations of the United Kingdom. She also argues that a crucial aim should be to develop every child’s empathy for the natural world, and that this empathy can only be achieved through ‘immersion’. In contrasting common English practice with the theory of forest schooling, Diane echoes much of Torill’s challenges and her arguments are further supported by the practitioner perspective provided by Louise Rossiter in Chapter Three and the research evidence presented in Chapter Four by Nicola Kemp and Dr Joanne Josephidou.

The changes that have been made to forest school in Norway over the past decade are highlighted in these pages, with their progressive trend towards ‘establishing ‘Nature Nurseries’. In England, a major practical pedagogical difference is identified as the extent to which the children’s activity in the forest is supported to follow their individual interests regardless of any preconceived plans or preconceptions held by the adults involved. Torill quotes Jorge Navarro Fica (2018) who describes a child ‘Danosa’ and her play in an evidently real but nevertheless ‘fairytale forest’. At times Torill’s own words also capture the awesome wonder of the forest environment which in this case; “..consisted of variety in topography and vegetation with both open and hilly plains and slopes, mountain walls, slopes, and a river nearby”.

Danosa had special educational needs, she was withdrawn, struggled to interact with the other children and showed little inclination to communicate. But she loved to catch insects and was very skilled in doing so. Her speed and agility impressed the other children who showed great interest in the insects that she caught. The staff quickly responded to the opportunity and resourced and supported the group as ‘Insect Detectives’; “*based on a playful approach where the children and adults were equal as explorers, discovery seekers and knowledge seekers*”.

Navarro Fica (2018) explains that Danosa gradually gained a higher status in the group of children, as she was the one who mastered finding and catching the various insects, and: “*that her status in the children's group led to self-assertion and secured support for the establishment of more friendships and positive social experiences with the rest of the children's group*”. Navarro Fica also describes how the adults followed up on other individual children in the group: ‘Katherine’ was excited to discover that birds eat snails, which led to a group of children taking a closer interest in food chains. Another child’s fascination for studying a ‘wrinkling troll’ (woodlouse) under a magnifying glass was supported and led to an extended discussion amongst the children. The adults were clearly looking out constantly for cues from the children on the directions to take in their support of their exploratory play. Navarro Fica refers to it as ‘tuning into’ the child’s perspective. In the UK *Effective Practice in Preschool Education* (EPPE) research this was referred to as ‘sustained shared thinking’ (Sylva et al, 2010)

“I believe that this improvisational way of working gave us experiences of present and committed adults who dared to offer themselves in the sphere of

play. Our inner child created a connection and presence, the safe base that allowed us to disappear into the world of play” (Navarro Fica, 2018).

Gibson’s (1979) ecological conception of ‘affordance’ is useful in this context. Gibson suggested that the affordances, or ‘action possibilities’, that we perceive in our interactions with the environment are neither an objective property of that environment (or any part the environment), nor a psychological property of the individual perceiver (or their culture): “Affordance” must be understood as simultaneously **both of these**. Affordances are constantly being created, recreated and expanded in the interactions of the individual **and** their environment (along with all its components/artefacts etc).

Play is the natural way that children, and other intelligent animals, have evolved to learn. That is why Play is a fundamental human right enshrined in the 1989 *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child*. And, as Maudsley (2008b) has argued; “*Play affordances may be thought of as invitations to play that arise when a child intentionally encounters any physical space.*” In training, Maudsley (2008ab, 2009) invites workshop participants to consider the play affordances of ‘sticks’ and demonstrates the fact that, whether you consider the stick real, or metaphorical:

- *Every stick is unique - children, when left to their own devices, often find their own individual ways of playing and interacting with outdoor environments.*
- *The more sticks there are the better - the number of play affordances increases with complexity of the environment, and the looseness and flexibility of its constituents. Woodlands or beaches, for instance, are very high affordance environments.*
- *Sticks act as play tools - play affordances arise where children are able to sense and act at the same time. For instance, children instinctively hold sticks and then use them to discover and extend their playful environmental interactions: poking, tapping, twirling, scraping, marking etc.*
- *Sticks have a hundred uses - sticks, and other natural props, do not have a predetermined function. Therefore they can be used by children in many different ways, for many different purposes, at many different times.*
- *Sticks don’t last forever - through playing outdoors children interact with and change the environment, creating their own play spaces. Through*

being able to manipulate outdoor environments children detect new play affordances.

Of course the principles apply even more widely: What Maudsley refers to as the tool's, or 'toys', of children's play, might best be considered to be *any object that a child plays with*, or to put it another way, as. any object that provides them with the affordance of 'playing'. Note; this is not to say that any particular object 'offers' that affordance for play, for Gibson (1979), that could only ever be established empirically. As Maudsley (2009) puts it, play affordances *'arise at the meeting point between the possibilities of the environment and the potential of the child'*.

Given the versatility of a stick, it is perhaps unsurprising that Vygotsky chose the example of a child playfully substituting a stick for a horse, to explain how a child begins manipulating symbols in their mind. In considering this we might also consider the child's recontextualization of the *horse* and the *horse riders* physical operations, their e.g. 'cantering' gait, their 'holding of reins' etc, as they play out the drama. And in play, we should also consider the benefits of the child being in 'Flow' (Siraj-Blatchford and Brock, 2021). But of course we are not only speaking of sticks here, as Maudsley reminds us, we are talking about wild spaces, and all of the environmental artefacts found within them: *"Woodlands or beaches, for instance, are high affordance environments"*.

Details of the OMEP UK Early Childhood Education for Sustainable Citizenship Award are provided in Appendix A. The Award scheme provides support for early childhood settings in developing this profoundly child-centred approach to teaching with resources related to the Environmental, Social and Cultural, and Economic objectives identified in the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. The Award training encourages practitioners to identify the schemes and schema that each child apply in their play, to reveal what it is that they already know and can do, because these provide the foundations and 'anchor points' for further learning and discovery.

Appendix B is provided by Joanna Hinson, who is the dedicated Forest School Lead at Chartham Primary School, Kent. Joanne provides us with an account of Forest Schooling that is consistent with the findings of this report, and also a practical glimpse into some of the deeper realities of day to day Forest School practice in England.



Finding natural objects around Forest School and taking a closer look (*Joanna Hinson*).



Children discussing fire safety around the campfire: *Hands up to offer an idea on how to stay safe* (*Joanna Hinson*).



Chapter One: Forest School in Norway and in England: Ten Years On

Torill Hindmarch

Introduction

Ten years has seen changes in Forest School practice in both England and Norway, and to gain some insights to developments I interviewed a selection of practitioners in both countries. My English colleagues have also contributed to this Report with their own research and experiences from England.

Together with Dr. Diane Boyd, Dr. Nicola Kemp, Dr. Joanne Josephidou and Louise Rossiter, this report presents some of the experience, perception and research evidence from Norway and England which hopefully will inspire some ideas and set challenges for the next ten years of forest, woodland and coastal settings.

After fourteen years of working as a kindergarten teacher and manager of two Nature nurseries in Norway, I came over to England in 2009 to do a master's degree in early Years Education. Forest school was in the limelight as an exciting new aspect of education for the youngest pupils in school and nursery settings in England. I was engulfed with questions about the Forest school practice in Scandinavia, where I had several years of experience in taking children over the fence and into the woods. The more I researched into the forest school phenomena the more I understood that lifting a practice from one culture to the next was a pedagogical challenge. It became apparent that the content of Forest school practice in Norway was not quite the same as practice in the Forest school movement in England.

A common factor was the thrill of being out in a wooded area, with tall trees and thick undergrowth that provided a place of shelter from the cold winds in winter and from the hot sun in the summer. The majesty of the forest is awe inspiring and provides a rich tapestry of experiences and learning possibilities. I first encountered the Norwegian equivalent of Forest school in 1998 when I had contact with a Special education teacher, Merete Holmsen, who informed me of a research project locally which culminated in the book "Jeg Vil Mestre" ("I Will Master") (Nordahl and Misund, 1996) outlining the Forest Group Method. I recognised the possibilities it offered for my setting in a forest environment by a coastal village. At first it was something I first used

for a group of children that needed that little extra to develop emotional control and social skills, autonomy, self-dependency, and self-confidence. The benefits to the children were of such a character that I expanded the remit of the project to encompass the whole nursery setting.

The goals with forest group method were many and varied, from developing language skills and emotional intelligence, to enabling children to realise their strengths and to voice their knowledge with other children in the group. The mastering of physical goals such as coordination, balance, climbing skills and mastering uneven terrain was also part of the pedagogical approach. It was aimed at helping children who had challenges or were struggling with social integration. It also provided a multitude of possibilities to develop children's learning through following their own interests. It gave them strategies to consult each other and to speculate on the things they discovered out in the woods or the possibilities that materialised en route. It opened opportunities for the adults to observe and evaluate the children while they were in free flow play, where often new aspects of a child's ability would emerge. The development of self-worth in conjunction with an intuitive and exploratory inquisitiveness is seen as important factors motivation learning (Nordahl and Misund , 2009 p22). This then the staff could build on to extend and scaffold the children's learning.

The pedagogical base line for the Norwegian framework was and is still a pedagogy of play, of child-initiated interactions and a holistic approach to learning. My pedagogical education, based on Froebelian principles and educationalist such as Bruner, Vygotsky and Bronfenbrenner, is influenced by Scandinavian educationalist such as Berit Bae, Ingrid Pramling Samuelson, Ingunn Fjørtoft and Elin Sandseter to name a few.

Developing play-based learning using the resources in the forest was a very economical way to run a setting. There was always so much going on the forest floor, trees that have been toppled by winter winds, streams changing from gurgling brooks to roaring cascades after the spring rains made for a varied and an exciting monthly schedule. Often the only resources the eldest children might take out with them was a pencil and a small book in which to draw and record experiences. These books were also used in the planning of our trip out before we left the nursery.

Persuading my staff that we should be outside all day was difficult during the start phase until they experienced a fine spring morning in the forest where we

assembled for lunch by a little stream and a fallen tree. As an inspirational playground it was perfect for the children. My staff became relaxed and realized there was no quarrelling over toys, everyone seemed to be in a good mood which affected the adults in a positive way. The children became inventive in their play while others called the adults over as they discovered the hidden wildlife on the forest floor. It was a start. From there on, the forest has been my teacher, throwing up opportunities and ideas that have enriched our learning and been absorbed into the culture of the setting. From making a water wheel and testing it out in the stream to tracking the signs of a fight for life and eventually finding the half-eaten deer that the lynx had left behind, the projects have been a colourful and intense way to learn about nature, the ecosystem, and our social democracy where everything affects everyone.

Coming to England I was surprised to find how popular the trend was towards the Scandinavian pedagogy of the forest. But during discussions and interviews with staff at various settings I became aware that there was a big difference in not just what was done but how it was being delivered. The basic idea of child initiate play that was practiced in Norway and which I had read so much about during my MA research was not being put into practice outdoors in the English forest. There was, it felt, something lost in the translation from one country to the next; duplicating ideas from one culture to another without knowledge of behavioural mores, attitudes and social expectations that prevail. Some striking differences were:

- Rigid planning in England contrasting with “let us see what turns up”.
- Children not involved in the pre-walk planning contrasting with the involvement of children and integration of their ideas.
- Set activities at each location contrasting with observing how children used the playscape.
- Everyone doing an activity in the same way contrasting with letting the children find their own solutions.
- Interrupting children’s investigative play contrasting with extending the activities the children found interesting.
- English children said very little.
- Norwegian children talked all the time.
- The English adults asked control questions.
- The Norwegian adults asked “I wonder what” questions.
- Talking at the child contrasting to talking with the child.

- Addressing adults with titles and surname contrasting with being on first name status.
- In Norway the forest groups also included under threes in contrast to England with three and above taking part.
- A planned route and destination in England contrasted with the Norwegian idea that the path is more important than getting there.
- Evaluating experiences with the children, letting their voices make an impact was less apparent in English settings.

I made this the focus of my research, comparing practice and trying to understand the pitfalls and the possibilities that I encountered on my journey. But I did meet some interesting practices and exceptional practitioners who over the time that I did my research absorbed and implemented ideas evolving from our discussions, some of which I took back with me to Norway. Now 10 years later it is interesting to see how things have developed both in the national framework and the growth of outdoor education, (forest and coastal) in both countries. The pressures on the environment have led to environmental issues becoming a topic in the framework on par with formal educational goals in Norway. The restrictions due to Covid 19 also have influenced the move to the great outdoors and appreciation for nature has become stronger in both countries. There is new research and practices that must be shared to ensure that the up-and-coming generation develop a love for and understand of our dependency on a healthy planet. The attitudes and behaviours that are learned at this early age are the basis of lifelong learning and stay with us our whole life. The place to observe and learn is out in nature not the classroom.

Developments in Norway Today

Merging the Forest school philosophy into everyday teaching

In preparing this paper I interviewed staff from three nurseries in Norway. One just outside Bodø which is within the Arctic Circle and two south of Oslo. It is interesting to note that none of these settings promote themselves as practicing Forest group pedagogy although two promote themselves as a 'Nature Nursery'. The setting in Bodø is in a built-up area but close to woods and the sea. The two other settings are in a rural location on the outskirts of the town. Common to all three nurseries is the regular visits over the fence to rural destinations, but not necessarily to the forest. Two use the coastal area

within a 30-minute walk. The third has a minibus to take children to coastal environments in the locality.

In Norway, outdoor activities in the grounds of the nursery have been central to the culture of Early Years Education, but in recent years, the prevalence of “over the fence” activity has greatly increased.

Changes in the Framework for EYE in Norway.

The Norwegian Framework for EYE promote values and pedagogy centered on individual needs of the child, focusing on developing language competency and social integration through free flow play and child led activities. These are baseline skills that must be present to facilitate self-confidence and well-being which lead to participation in learning activities, resulting in lifelong learning (NdfE, 2017).

In recent years there has been greater focus on environmental issues and the need to include the local environment in implementation of day-to-day learning. There are seven subject areas including Nature, Environment and Technology and another Local Environment and Society. The aim is to develop the children’s ability to be part of the natural environment, to be aware of the connections to themselves and others.

This includes sustainable development, involving the children in practices that demonstrate taking care of and protecting nature in their local environment and leave no trace in nature (“traceless travel”) (NdfE, 2017). Combining this with a holistic approach, using the child’s personal interests as a starting point, the movement from classroom to nature has developed organically to embrace the tenets of forest group philosophy and has been absorbed into the daily life and rhythm of nursery.

Implementation of Forest Group Activities

Getting Staff onboard: staff meeting in the forest

A practice of having the staff on an occasional outdoor staff meeting was a common factor with the three settings I interviewed. Apart from reconnaissance, (documenting possibilities and making provision for risk

reduction), it gives the staff a chance to connect with the area and experience well-being.

I experienced a development within my own staff over a two-year period where some staff were at first reluctant to take the youngest children out. This became an opportunity to develop good planning and organisational structures. The least motivated person in the group was invited to voice the challenges that she envisaged with the different age groups. Through ‘around the table’ discussion each month, strategies were introduced layer by layer that created a secure framework for ensuring that the staff ultimately felt confident outside the fence. This was combined with excursions into the terrain to find best suited sites, examining seasonal availability of natural resources and finding seasonal solutions for nourishment. I even had each member of staff up on a horse to experience the change in perspective, the sensory stimulation and to understand what the children experienced when we put them up on the Shetland pony. This also strengthened the affinity the staff developed with the horses we had at the Farm nursery. As journey for all staff members, it could be compared to “team building” activities for the consequential bonding of staff members in their empathetic and cooperation skills.

Involving the children in the process

My experiences from forest group showed that a period of planning, (putting marks on paper) and then reflection after the forest activity was invaluable to long term memory and learning. It also encouraged those with little propensity for drawing to make a few symbols on paper to which they could later relate and recall experiences. This gives the children a real voice in the reflective process of their learning and should not be overlooked.

However, although there was no evidence of planning with the children before the outset of the trip (integral to forest group pedagogy in the nineties), it was reported that an informal gathering was held in the playground to prepare the children for the excursion. Plans might be adjusted in accordance to input from the children.

All nurseries have a yearly plan based on the seasons and cultural events which guide them in where and when certain topics are brought into focus. A specific topic may be the planned goal of an excursion to the forest, staff introducing relevant aspects if discovered along on the way. A Norwegian saying “the path is made in the walking” is a fitting description of Norwegian practitioners’ way of working. For the original destination may never be

reached because something of topical interest might provide a diversion. The staff are well versed in using opportunities as they present themselves as the resource to attain the overarching goals. There is seldom the need to bring resources out as there is an abundance just waiting to be discovered under the foliage. Observing what captures the children's imagination gives the teacher a vehicle to promote learning and development as set out in the Framework.

An example of Norwegian practice:

Jorge R. Navarro Fica, a teacher from a setting in Oslo has written about shows how the magic of the forest enables hidden talents to be revealed.

Navarro Fica (2018) describes a trilingual girl who played primarily in situations which needed little verbal communication. A withdrawn and anxious child who was isolated in the group by underdeveloped skills in formulating and expressing herself clearly.

The staff based their approach specifically on forest group pedagogy to enable and stimulate the child's development.

On trips into the forest, the girl exhibited a special interest for insects and was especially drawn to play involving speed. This active play in the forest attracted the other children, increasing her social involvement. With a focus on insect life a project developed based on playful exploration and study of insects. In this process the child revealed her swiftness in finding and capturing insects so that they could be studied out in the open. This gave her a higher status in the group, increased positive social interactions and resulted in the establishing of friendships. The project developed into much more, also within the classroom, involving cross subject elements conjoined in dramatic play. The author asserts it was the ability to playfully engage with the child and "tune in" with the children's perspective that made the project a success (Navarro Fica, 2015).

This methodology does not need any other qualification than a degree in Early Years Education. An important aspect is the recognition of the skill of a teacher in using what is at hand. Not just resources in the forest or on the shore but also the individual competencies of the staff. Personal experience is an important factor that can be shared with the staff, enhancing the overall knowledge of the setting. There are no special courses in Norway that are obligatory for those wishing to move out of the classroom. I maintain that it is

not what one teaches that but how one facilitates learning in others that matters.

Another example: Sticks and boys

I observed a particular group of five-year-old boys were compulsively finding a stick each time we went out into the woods. They would constantly bang trees with their sticks, playing out different scenarios together or individually. I found several different ways of incorporating sticks games, in particular constructing shapes and indulging in mathematical reasoning. We took this activity to higher and higher levels of complexity.

I asked them if they could make a shape with four sides that were of equal length. Then we discussed how we could make twelve smaller squares. They eventually reasoned that if they could start by making four squares they might proceed from there. This changed into making 3 oblongs and dividing these up resulting in twelve squares. I was impressed at the way they showed understanding and involvement in the task, collaborating, moving sticks until they found a solution.

This grid was used as a frame for Kim's Game as the girls in the group turned up with their collection of different types of moss, lichen, fallen leaves and stones. The interactions during the weeks we worked with this ensured the sharing of mathematical and plant life knowledge, moving through other subjects on the way.

This activity encouraged staff at the setting to use more mathematical concepts in other areas of daily life.

Staff experience and knowledge

Some staff already have an area of interest and expertise which can enrich the setting and be shared with staff. This was apparent in the setting in the north where the manager was also a teacher of swimming and lifesaving. His enthusiasm affected other members of staff and resulted in water familiarization and learn to swim projects on the beach.



A setting in south Norway had a two-week period where they are on the beach all day in June every year. I encouraged them to take part in a water safety project which I conducted together with another setting in 2016 to 2018. We integrated elements of wind, water, under water life, floating, water familiarization, regaining and retaining body heat and much more. The staff integrated their knowledge of play with water activities, increased the overall awareness of learning possibilities at the same time reducing risk by

introducing the children to safe strategies. The development of specialized courses that I have seen in the UK undermines the expertise and understanding that many staff have already accumulated through both research and experience of being in the outdoors in their free time. This is reflected in Louise Rossiter's case study in Chapter Three.



Chapter Two: Recent Curriculum Developments in England

Dr Diane Boyd

Boyd et al (2018) provide a review of current practice in understanding early childhood education for sustainability in England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, along with accounts of the particular contributions that are being made by many Montessori and Steiner school projects.

In September 2021, a third version of the EYF5 (DfE, 2017) will be published as a statutory requirement in English schools for children 0-5 year. There are four overarching principles of which one is “enabling environments,” and seven areas of learning which are all supposedly interconnected. There are three prime areas of which physical development is one, and it is only there that the first reference is made to the outdoors. It highlights the need for gross motor development through the indoors and outdoors, citing them as places to build ‘core strength, stability, balance, spatial awareness, co-ordination and agility’ (DfE, 2017, p9). The outdoor environment provides a wealth of authentic and natural opportunities for this but in literacy (a specific area of learning) the language changes and contradicts this possibility, to children learning about their world through listening to adults. Learning about their world must involve ‘being’ in the world, tumbling, climbing, running, lying down listening to sounds and smells, not just seeing abstract images in books. Sadly, this too is reflected in the specific area Understanding the World which also suggests children can listen ‘to a broad selection of stories, non-fiction, rhymes and poems will foster their understanding of our culturally, socially, technologically and ecologically diverse world’ (2017, 10). It asks practitioners to ‘guide’ children in making sense of their physical world, with visiting parks as the only real outdoor location suggested. The word ‘visit’ does not imply a relationship with, but a fleeting stay in a ‘short space of time’. In the regulations the outside is only mentioned in ‘premises’ and asks ‘providers must provide access to an outdoor play area or, if that is not possible, ensure that outdoor activities are planned and taken on a daily basis’ (DfE, 2017, p35). This outdoor area could literally be a tarmacked space with plastic equipment and no opportunities for developing a love of their natural world.

This is in total contrast to other home country requirements. In Scotland for example, there is a document for the Curriculum for Excellence through outdoor learning (Learning and Teaching Scotland, 2010) as well as sustainability embedded into their teaching standards. In Wales they have taken a different step in their outdoor publication with a section on Forest school included. It recognises that forest school is a 'practical, hands on, learning experiences which encourage children to explore and challenge themselves. This leads to the development of confidence and self-esteem as well as a growing appreciation of their natural environment' (Welsh Assembly, 2009). England sadly seems to yet again lag behind their national and International partners in early childhood, missing out on promoting the need for children to engage sensorially and experientially in the natural world.

It has been documented that children enjoy the release Forest school gives from the routine of lessons. (Coates and Pimlot-Wilson, 2018) where free play and physical activity provide a good alternative for young school children to engage with nature. But research shows that there is an imbalance between the original ethos of forest school and some practices that have been established (Leather, 2018).

My interview with one practitioner reported that over- structuring of forest school activity left no room for free play or self-initiated activities. She felt that Forest School workers promoted an agenda of activities that left no room for the natural curiosity and the urge for physical movement that young children have. Other settings failed to make use of the opportunities present in nature and took many resources out, removing forest school from the precepts of free play and child-initiated activity. These indications of commodification of Forest School (Leather, 2018) and structuring of activities removes it from the sociocultural origins that the pedagogy of forest school emerged from.

There has been an increase in settings marketing themselves as Forest School in England. The Forest School Association has established itself with guidelines and support for those wishing to get involved which is very positive. They promote a child centered approach and the value of free play and have been active in establishing structures and principles to guide those wanting to move the classroom outdoors.

The Principles of Forest School on England

Within the UK there are an agreed set of six principles developed in 2011 (Forest School Association) which all providers must adhere to. All sessions must be run by a level Three Forest school practitioner with 180 hours of assessment behind them, which contrasts with Scandinavian practitioners who are social pedagogist's and able to facilitate all aspects of 'forest school'. A key requirement is also recognising that it is a long-term process and not a one-off visit and should enable all learners to watch and be part of the evolving four seasons as a result (FSA, 2011, para 4). A second principle recognises that for children to engage in forest school they needed to be in a "woodland or natural wooded environment." However, it also (oddly) recognises that an area with only a few trees can support "good forest school practice" (FSA, 2011, para 8). Another aspect of principle two is crucial: It asks learners to "foster a relationship with nature" (FSA, 2011, para 11). This surely is difficult to achieve in an area with a few trees and a poor awareness of the indigenous fauna and biodiversity. It is also extremely difficult if the practitioner's knowledge is not sufficient to develop children's understanding. The principles do not acknowledge this or provide the support that learners and practitioners require if they are to understand what is really required. In unpicking 'developing a relationship' we can consider if this means developing an ecological sense of self. Thomashow (1996, 3) suggests this refers to "all the different ways people construe themselves in a relationship to the earth" through their values, attitudes, personality, and actions. Sebba, (1991) opined that children have a natural gift of 'primal seeing' which enables them to experience the essence of the world in a magical way, resonating with Pearce (1992). Steiner pedagogy also advocates that children need experiential, self-motivated physical activity, but most importantly that they should 'feel' and understand the natural rhythms of the natural world.

Feeling is a strong emotion which develops because of bi-relational interactions with someone or something, and therefore, children will love and have empathy for all living and non-living matter in the forest. This can only happen if as it states the children are immersed in the forest on a daily or weekly session (FSA, 2011, para 4), with knowledgeable other (Vygotsky, 1978).

Practice versus theory

Unfortunately, forest school sessions are from my experience more tightly controlled with practitioners 'planning' and bringing aspects of an indoor

classroom outside rather than letting the children roam free. For example, I have seen paints of bright primary colours, feathers and other materials transported into the space. How does this build a relationship with nature? If the children ‘want’ to paint they should be encouraged to use the natural earth and water, or fallen leaves ground down, which is more in keeping with indigenous ways of being creative too. Additionally, from my experience there are very few practitioners who really know their locality, the history, the culture, the knowledge of how the locality evolved. I have seen a practitioner when asked by a young child what a certain berry was, decline to answer or even gave an incorrect answer (a cherry)! Instead, it would have been better that they find out together. Another example, I have observed of ‘forest school’ is offering children plastic bottles filled with water and a tray of cut herbs (not even growing them in a school bed) to make ‘herb water’. How does this foster a relationship?

We would advocate for forest school (the name to be amended to remove ‘school’) to be more nature play based, where children wander and take in their world. A place where they can be still, observe, and become one with their place. To know the names of the trees, the plants and to recognise bird song. By changing the name and removing ‘school’ could allow a more organic and natural approach to emerge. We would recommend that we need to draw upon indigenous ways of being. Wilson (2012, p85) highlights this as a way of “fostering conservation attitudes” emphasising the positive interconnection between all living things. Morgan and Waite (2018, p52) suggest that the early years is the period when children should be introduced to nature and frame this nurturing place as “nestling.” Morgan and Waite (2018,) suggest that ‘nestling’ conveys the idea of a safe place, a place of interaction and a place to cherish, resonating with an ecological sense of self.

A place of Interaction

Evidence of this practice was described by an Early Years researcher citing a project in Kent where toddlers and parents had sessions in a forest setting together. This gave parents an insight and understanding into learning experiences through creative free play. This was supplemented by additional sessions for older preschool children without their parents. The toddlers had the opportunity to “just be” in nature, evolving their own sense of the forest and developing their own exploratory play at their own pace.

Chapter Three: A Practitioner Perspective

Louise Rossiter

For the last seven years, I have been studying Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC), whilst either on placement or working within an early years setting. I began with a level three qualification and I am currently culminating this professional development with an autoethnographic masters dissertation exploring pedagogy and professionalism within the sector. For the vast majority of my life, I have been involved in the Scouting Movement and I recently started a new role in an outdoor early years setting. I now have a 35-mile commute to my new workplace as although outdoor education in early years settings has begun to gain more traction since the notion of 'Forest School' was imported from Scandinavia in 1993 (Forest School Association, no date), there still remains an inequality of access to outdoor learning environments. This paper will explore some of the tensions I have experienced as an ECEC practitioner committed to learning outdoors.

Are You Qualified to Work Outdoors?:

As a graduate practitioner working in an outdoor environment who has not yet completed Forest School training, I may be highly qualified by the standards of the sector as a whole, but I am unqualified to 'deliver Forest School' to children. Despite having a lifetime of scouting experience and having dedicated time to researching about and developing my knowledge and understanding about outdoor education and pedagogies within my degree, I am still not qualified in the 'right way'. Although my education and pedagogy more closely reflecting the Scandinavian expectation, as having a Forest School qualification has been decided as the measure for quality and capability in England (Leather, 2018), *I still fall short.*

The institutionalisation of practitioner education to enable the delivery of a Forest School program is reflective of the imported nature of the ethos (Leather, 2018). Although the importance of, and beneficial nature of, spending times outdoors that is essential to Scandinavian practice is apparent in British interpretations of Forest School, some of the fundamental principles of 'friluftsliv' have been lost in translation. Across Scandinavia, outdoor living is central to their culture and lifestyle, so their connection to their

practices and pedagogies surrounding outdoor education have developed organically and authentically to align with the society that their children are growing up in (Brookes and Dahle, 2007). The same cannot be said about the UK, so practitioners must be taught the principles and pedagogy that would otherwise be innate in Scandinavian practice.

The training of Forest School Practitioners differs significantly from that of Scandinavian pedagogues, and this can be seen in the inherent differences between international practices: Documentation and research suggests that outdoor education should be child-led and exploratory in Norway, focussed on play in the natural environment (O'Brien, 2009; Waite, Bølling and Bentsen, 2016). This supports children in fostering a connection to, and understanding of the natural world, which afford reciprocal benefits for both people and the Earth. It is understood that exposure to the outdoors in childhood supports children's emotional regulation and wellbeing, in addition to their holistic development (Kemple et al, 2016). Although elements of free play and exploration can be found in outdoors practice in the UK, Forest School has become associated with specific activities such as having fires and developing whittling skills. These activities are exciting, and children may not have the opportunity to experience these in their lives outside of Forest School, but they are removed from the central ethos and pedagogy of Scandinavian outdoor education.

Inequality of Access to Outdoor Education:

Where would you want to play?

The access to and provision of outdoor environments for children in the UK has been improving over recent decades, but our approach to child-initiated and led free play outdoors and the opportunities for highly qualified practitioners need reviewing if we endeavour to provide high quality early childhood education to all children.

Outdoor education has not yet become fully integrated into the early years curriculum, so the variation in provision is immense. This disparity is only exacerbated by the Early Years Foundation Stage Statutory Guidance which states that

“Providers must provide access to an outdoor play area or, if that is not possible, ensure that outdoor activities are planned and taken on a daily basis

(unless circumstances make this inappropriate, for example unsafe weather conditions).” (Department for Education, 2017, p.29)

The guidance is not explicit in its expectation for outdoor play and as a result, equal opportunities for all children to access quality outdoor environments in early childhood is not achieved. As many early years settings are not purpose-built, unless the founding pedagogy is centred around an outdoors pedagogy, the outdoor play space could be a small, tarmacked area. This would meet the requirements of the statutory guidance, but the experiences of the children would greatly differ from those attending an outdoor setting where children are outdoors in all weathers, (except high winds).

Responsibility for equalising the opportunities for children to access quality early education and care therefore falls to passionate practitioners. In my personal experience, although I was passionate when I was qualified at level three, it was not until I was a graduate practitioner that I have gained the confidence to ground my practice in theory and research, even if this differed to, or surpassed, statutory requirements.

Early Years Retention Crisis: Would you want to stay?:

The value of highly qualified practitioners in the sector can be found in their understanding of research and theory, as well as their wider comprehension and evaluation of the structures of society. Studying at a higher level supports the development of one’s pedagogy and their ability to challenge current practice to induce change and improvement, yet this is not reflected in their pay and status (McDonald, Thorpe, and Irvine, 2018; CEEDA, 2019). Even before the consideration of outdoor pedagogy and the troubling approach to training Forest School Practitioners, there is a retention crisis in early childhood settings. The poor retention of all practitioners is entirely understandable when the basic pay rate for a supermarket worker is far higher than that of an early years practitioner (Morton, 2020; Read, 2021).

The importance of early childhood development is well documented, and recognised by the government, yet it is not reflected in their investment into the early years sector. When highly qualified practitioners leave the sector, not only is their knowledge and expertise is lost, but so is their passion to develop progressive practice that improves the lives of young children.

Although there are clear tensions within the early years sector, particularly surrounding the access to outdoor education, there are examples of progressive and innovative practice around the country. I'm hopeful that as the beneficial nature of these practices becomes more widely acknowledged, practice will begin to evolve more universally.

Risk or Safety

The possibility to engage in adventurous play, to seek the sensation of *schadenfreude*, is the very spice of life.

Being able to deliver Adventure play in a safe environment was a priority for the three settings interviewed. The pedagogy of safety is something that is often overlooked. The practice of it has well documented benefits to young children (Murray & O'Brien, 2005, Maynard, 2007) but often termed "risky play", which may result in negative connotations.

They confirmed that the children learnt how to evaluate their own strength, to



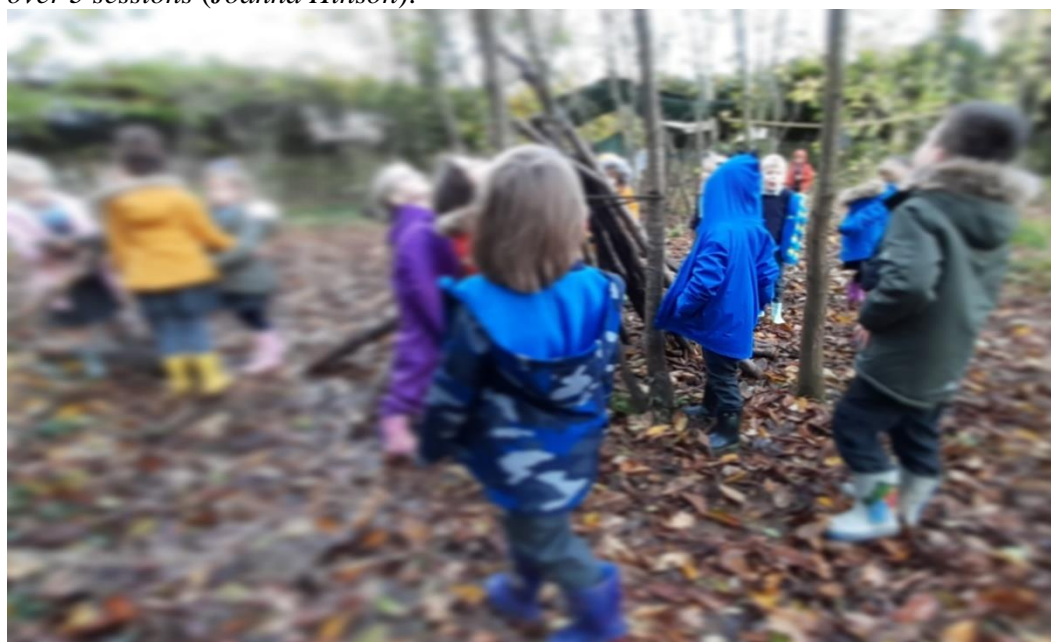
realize their own limitations and gain good experiences in safe parameters. Teachers at all three settings experienced that children were better able to evaluate risk, to make strategies for reducing risk in their own free play. For example, when climbing over wet rocks in summer or icy surfaces in winter they would slow down and choose their route carefully, going on all fours if necessary. They also became good at knowing when it was safe to run down a hill or which tree to climb. They became resilient in situations which required negotiating difficult terrain and experienced a growth in confidence.

A teacher reported how evident this was when a new child joined the nursery. This child had only been accustomed to tarmac and even surfaces, there was a marked difference between her mobility and the rest of the group. Just walking over a ploughed field challenged her balance and self-confidence, again when walking up a steep hill, she became quite emotional. Gradual familiarization with uneven surfaces and an adult close to hand was necessary to build confidence and motor skills. Letting the children find their own solutions is important, one teacher described the variety of ways to balance on a fallen tree trunk revealed a lot about their personal confidence and their strategy to keep safe. Creative ability was also demonstrated when one child chose to just sit on it and be a “pilot in a plane”. This child got many others in on that game, the teacher accepted his solution of “balancing” on a tree trunk.





Thanks to the Wildlife Trust we had enough trees for every pupil to have this opportunity. Every child chose to take 10 minutes to do so at different stages over 3 sessions (Joanna Hinson).



Whole class teamwork looking for sticks big enough to create a den that everyone can fit in. Some children chose not to join in, others came and went over the 20 minutes it took (Joanna Hinson).

Chapter Four: A life ‘in and with nature’? Exploring Outdoor Provision for Babies and Toddlers in ECEC settings in England

Dr Nicola Kemp and Dr Joanne Josephidou

Our research

Funded by The Froebel Trust, our research project has aimed to provide new knowledge and understanding about the ways in which formal childcare settings provide opportunities for babies and toddlers to experience outdoor environments. It responds to an identified gap in existing knowledge and understanding about the nature and extent of outdoor provision for under twos. Whilst there is now a well-documented body of international research evidence that documents the benefits of outdoor learning (Malone & Waite, 2016) this has tended to focus on children aged three and above. The needs and



experiences of the youngest children are rarely considered, and this is recognised as a significant gap given the growing number of under twos who receive out of home care (Bilton, Bento & Dias, 2017). Around one third of children aged 0-2 are enrolled in ECEC globally (OECD, 2019). Our research project focuses on the English context where provision is higher than this average at 42%.

The project includes three phases: a narrative review of international research literature, an audit of provision in baby rooms in Kent and case studies of settings that have self-identified as having good opportunities in outdoor

provision. The findings from phases one and two have been published in separate reports available on The Froebel Trust website <https://www.froebel.org.uk/resources/froebel-trust-publications/>. In this update we provide an overview of our findings and their implications:

Where are the babies? Narratives of exclusion

Our analysis suggests that there are two dominant contemporary narratives about babies and toddlers outdoors when attending formal childcare settings: For babies, the focus is on safeguarding and risk management; the dominant narrative relates to ‘being safe’. For toddlers, the focus is on preventing obesity and the narrative is one of ‘being physically active.’ These, we suggest, are narratives of exclusion with outdoor spaces characterised by their separation and safety; pedagogy reduced to supervision and control and being physically active prioritised over other ‘ways of being.’

Unequal access to the outdoors



We found both within the international research literature, and from our English audit, that very young children are offered very different outdoor experiences depending on the context of the specific ECEC setting they attend. The audit revealed that some settings have very little space and few resources whilst others offer access to extensive and varied outdoor environments either directly linked to their sites or within their local community. Such variation in outdoor provision was also noted by Moser and Martinsen (2010) in their Norwegian study. The nature and extent of the differences in outdoor provision are concerning as it suggests that rather than reducing inequality of access to the outdoors, ECEC settings may be

inadvertently laying the foundations for it.

Limited opportunities for nature connection

Regardless of opportunity to spend time outdoors, we noted a lack of natural elements within outdoor provision meaning that most young children have limited experience to connect with, and therefore learn about, nature whilst attending a setting. Qualitative responses to our survey also revealed a concern with safety issues including managing parental expectations in relation to engaging with the natural environment and risk. This means that natural elements tend to be discouraged in favour of manufactured alternatives such as artificial grass and commercially produced resources. We suggest that there is considerable potential to develop nature engaging and nature enhancing pedagogies from birth.

Demonstrating what is possible

The three case studies we undertook were useful in informing what is possible despite the challenges settings face in developing outdoor provision for babies and toddlers. For example,

Setting A is based on an 8-acre site. It caters for 140 children a day from 3 months upwards and there is an emphasis on using the large outdoor area. The youngest children have their own designated space with a canopy so that all children have free-flow provision to the outdoors regardless of the weather. The staff often take the children off-site and there is a forest school area accessed via a gate from the main nursery gardens. Here, two yurts are used for indoor play and sleeping. There is a fire circle and lots of natural features including stinging nettles which are deliberately left so the children learn about risk.



The practitioners believe that this continual outdoor engagement supports children in becoming confident risk takers who love a challenge. The setting considers there are wide range of benefits from the environment they provide including:

- sensory engagement with different smells and textures;

- a connection to nature and a love of living things;
- important opportunities for the children to challenge themselves physically;
- a sense of calm and wellbeing which supports children if they become excited or upset;
- many opportunities to explore in different ways

We are now starting the second stage of the project which will be focused on dissemination and impact.

As part of this, we have presented our research in collaboration with Early Childhood Outdoors at a Froebel Trust webinar that you can access via this link

<https://www.froebel.org.uk/training-and-resources/webinars-and-short-films>

They can also be viewed via our YouTube channel:

https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLiQL7HlObhSj3U79hax0fIAe_bw7q_awr

We were also invited to be part of a working group to develop one element (the learning environment) of a non-statutory guidance to support those who work with young children ([Birth to Five Matters, 2020](#)).

This ongoing work has involved engaging with practitioners, academics and consultants and has given us the opportunity to promote our research.

Chapter Five: Concluding Vision for the Future

Torill Hindmarch and Diane Boyd

Another new emerging way to consider forest school is through a post humanist lens, which reflects the eco interconnectedness of all living and non-living things. This approach embodies a truly holistic way of being, with the children interacting with and as part of nature, as easily as the sun shining, water rippling and breeze moving the trees. The children and practitioners can reflect upon traces of life, traces of the past, traces of matter and begin to see how they too are part of a greater whole. By being part of this greater ‘whole’, will again resonate with the development of an ecological self, an ecological self within the place, within nature itself.

According to the Dasgupta review (2021) it is necessary “*to rely on self-enforcement*” if care and conservation of the environment is to be successful. Dasgupta asserts that this will not be achieved if we do not connect with nature from an early age. For this reason, it is vital that the pedagogy of forest school is expanded to include the whole natural environment from nursery age upwards. The need to connect and just be in nature is a step towards protecting our global heritage.

To conclude, we would advocate the removal of most of the structured planning and the controls seemingly imposed. By doing this you embrace developing a holistic relationship with all aspects that are in that ‘place’(forest) and therefore, as Avison and Rawson (2016, p52) suggest, that by embracing rhythms of nature children learn the “processes and patterns of change,” in an organic and authentic way.

Appendix A

The OMEP (UK) Early Childhood Education for Sustainable Citizenship Award

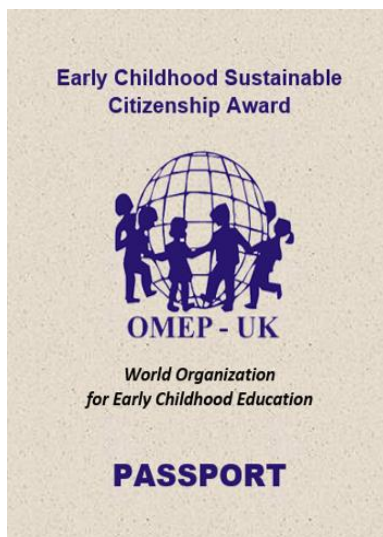
The **Organisation Mondiale pour l'Éducation Préscolaire**, or OMEP for short, was first formed in a collaboration of Lady Marjory Allen of Hartwood in the UK and Alva Myrdal in Sweden in 1948, and it is today both a UK charity, and an influential global voluntary association involving 68 nations, and with consultative status at the United Nations and UNESCO.

The foundations of OMEP-UK's *Early Childhood Education for Sustainable Citizenship Award* scheme are firmly set in Article 12 of the 1989 UN Convention on the Rights of the Child: *"When adults are making decisions that affect children, children have the right to say what they think and have their opinions taken into account"*. This is a principle of particular importance in the context of climate change, threats to bio-diversity, and world peace. Sustainable development is commonly defined in terms of; *'developments that meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs'* (Bruntland, 1987), and as a group, young children clearly have the greatest stake (*and at stake*) in the future. Recognition of their citizenship is therefore crucially important.

The OMEP-UK Award also recognises that for all of us sustainable development is something we aspire to achieve, and that sustainable citizenship should be recognised as a life-long emergent capability (Siraj-Blatchford and Brock, 2016). As adults we are therefore sharing this journey with the children that we care for. One of the implications of this is that we should involve children in our day-to-day sustainable decision making - in our homes, as we make our choices in the supermarket or in selection of replacement transportation, white goods, such as purchasing a washing machine or choosing an energy provider. We should also be sharing our decision making with children in the operations of the preschool; in our procurement of sustainable materials, services and resources and the sharing and celebration of these sustainable choices should also be extended to the local community and include the sustainable actions and achievements of local volunteers and professional service providers.

In developing the OMEP-UK Award our intention has been to provide affordable support for settings in their development of these practices, and in their wider provisions for an Education for Sustainable Citizenship (ESC) in early childhood. The Award's development was informed by earlier research and development conducted in ten countries by OMEP (Siraj-Blatchford et al, 2016), and in preschools supported by Kent local education authority (2016 - 17). The preschool self-audit tool that is applied within the Award scheme to inform development planning, is an adaptation of the ESD rating scale that continues to be developed by OMEP in its use in preschools around the world. The training materials and resources included in the Award support all aspects of the *UN Sustainable Development Goals* and provide firm foundations for the achievement of UNESCO's (2017) *SDG Learning Objectives*.

The Award scheme provides each child with a Sustainable Citizen Passport which summarises the provisions of the 1989 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. Parents are also provided with a series of *i-care booklets* that contain simple activities for home learning that are linked to the broad themes of economic, environmental and socio-cultural sustainability, and also to emergent literacy and numeracy activities that are each provided with a practical sustainability 'spin'. The activities range from the identification and naming of three wild birds, and the identification of wildlife habitats, to the recycling of waste materials, and the recognition of cultural and linguistic diversity.



As the children complete each of the 'i-care' statements with their parent or carer, each is signed off, and when the whole booklet is completed the child is awarded an eco-friendly sticker to put into their passport (like a visa). All of these activities are supported in the preschool as well, so that the parents and preschool practitioners are working together in partnership to support the child in completing the educational activities.

While temporarily suspended during the current pandemic restrictions, the passport also provides discounted entry for the child (with accompanying adult) to local animal conservation parks and visitor venues engaging in sustainability promotion and activities.

The approach also celebrates sustainable achievements and innovations within the home, the preschool and the local community, and it encourages the children to feel themselves involved in the creation of a more sustainable future.

The OMEP UK ESC Award training is provided by SchemaPlay™ supporting a pedagogical approach that is strongly informed by Csikszentmihalyi's (1990) research on the importance of 'flow' and the 'optimal learning experience' of free-flow play. It is also grounded by what is considered Ausobel's (1978) 'prime directive' for education; that all new learning must be firmly anchored in some element of prior learning; and by Piaget's distinction between a child's operative 'Scheme' and a figurative 'Schema'. SchemaPlay training supports practitioners in recognising the 'flow' that occurs when a child is fully, and joyfully immersed in their play: When the child is intensely engaged in the moment, drawing upon their operational schemes (what they can already do), and their figurative schemas (what they already know).

Traditional developmental theories have assumed that cognition and behavioural control are internal executive functions. But from the perspective of embodied and ecological cognitive science, the external physical, social and cultural environment provides an additional influence on control. This supports the notion of 'relational pedagogy', and the idea of a curriculum that is co-constructed.

Following, and also extending, the typology of Schemes that were first identified by Chris Athey and Tina Bruce, SchemaPlay identifies the particular schemes that provide necessary, *even if alone insufficient*, prerequisites for the achievement of the *Early Years Foundation Stage* early learning goals, and in gaining the foundational knowledge, attitudes and understandings of sustainability that good citizenship demands. Practitioners are provided with resources that support them in 'seeding' and, when appropriate, in provocatively intervening in the children's self chosen play to support their ongoing learning.

The SchemaPlay ecological perspective recognises that it is the child's body that provides them with the interface with the world that they must at first learn to adapt to in sustaining and expressing themselves. This is a perspective that is consistent with what we know about natural selection and biological adaptation. From an early age, the child begins to assert agency in its interactions with the physical, social and cultural environment that it finds itself within. Elenore Gibson (1969), in her classic 'virtual cliff' experiments showed us how the child's awareness of the positive and negative 'affordances' that are offered by different features of their physical environment develops as a result of their increased mobility and interaction with the world. Children's early learning and development is therefore determined by the particular features of the physical, social, cultural and economic environment that they experience.

Piaget (1969) described a developmental continuity between action and thought. He posited operational 'schemes' as the primary units of the child's mental organisation and argued that these goal-directed behavioural 'schemes' were continually applied in new situations to explore the child's environment. It is therefore important for us to remember that for the young child it is the action scheme that defines their interaction with the world. What, for an adult may be considered a ball, for example, is for the infant a non-symbolic object capable of being contained, rotated or following a trajectory (Muller and Overton, 1998, Mandler, 2004). Large scale longitudinal, population-based research studies have found a significant relationship between the acquisition of major motor milestones (e.g, standing without support) and child's future performance and progress (Murray, *et al*, 2007). The ecological psychology of James and Eleanor Gibson, and the new insights provided by an embodiment perspective in cognitive science, and increasingly supported by the evidence of neuroscience, recognises the essential reciprocity between every living organism and their environment (Siraj-Blatchford and Brock, 2021). Perception is implicit in action, we perceive by acting upon the world, and our actions are equally dependent upon the affordances that are offered by it:

"An affordance is neither an objective property nor a subjective property; or it is both if you like. An affordance cuts across the dichotomy of subjective-objective and helps us to understand its inadequacy. It is equally a fact of the environment and a fact of behaviour. It is both physical and psychological, yet neither. An affordance points both ways, to the environment and the

observer." (Gibson, 1979, p. 129)

Children thrive in positive social, economic and cultural environmental conditions, but too many suffer the long term negative consequences of growing up in disadvantaged families and communities. We are aware of the crucial importance of bonding and attachment, parental aspirations and the negative effects of child nutrition, injury, neglect and abuse. The Effective Provision of Preschool Education (EPPE), and many other research studies have shown that the quality of the early home learning environment, quite independently of any socio-economic family influences, remain positively correlated to attainment and adjustment right through primary and secondary education, and into late adolescence (Sylva et al, 2010). EPPE also showed that high quality preschool provisions served to narrow the gap between those more or less advantaged. All of these ecological features were identified in the Common Assessment Framework which provided a central component of the *Every Child Matters* policy of England and Wales (2000-2010), and remains implemented in the current; "*Early Help Assessments*". The relevance of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals to the development of more joined up thinking and inter-agency collaboration can be seen clearly when they are presented in juxtaposition (below) with this Common Assessment Framework. In fact the UN Global Goals for Sustainability provide a comprehensive transdisciplinary framework with the potential of providing a common vision and stronger foundations for partnership working and collaboration in the interest of every child.

Further details of the OMEP Early Childhood Education for Sustainable Citizenship Award may be found on the OMEP website:

<http://www.omep.org.uk>

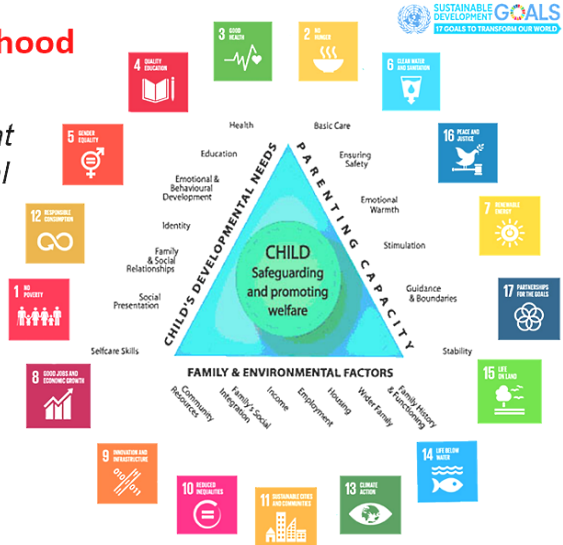
Or by contacting: escomep@gmail.com

Further details of SchemaPlay are to be found on

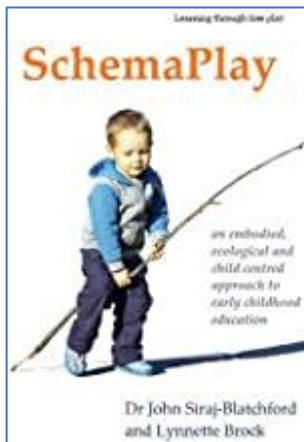
<http://www.schemaplay.com> and on facebook @SchemaPlay

Sustainable Early Childhood Care and Education

Sustainable development has the ultimate potential of offering an holistic, transdisciplinary and transformative perspective that can support the integration and future development of early childhood and family services.



<http://www.schemaplay.com>



Hot off the Press:

Siraj-Blatchford, J., and Brock, L. (2021)
SchemaPlay: an embodied, ecological and child centred approach to early childhood education,
 SchemaPlay Publications

<https://www.amazon.co.uk/dp/0995762643>

Appendix B:

Forest School in Practice

Adapted from: Hinson, J. (2021) Mama Beech: Chartham Primary School Blog, May 6th: <https://mamabeech.blogspot.com/2021/05/activities.html>

I know a lot of Forest School Leaders take extra time and effort to ensure there is a specific activity each session for the children to join in with. Occasionally I have something specific I'd like to do with the children, but mostly the provision is there for them to use to follow their own activity. I, therefore, am free to help them follow their own learning, respond to what they ask, and extend their interests.

The ever-present resources are for 'Bug Hunting', 'Bird exploration', and 'What's Growing'. Most sessions will also include books and basic woodwork tools, as well as a 'Nature Table', which sounds ridiculous outdoors but works well. All these are dotted around Basecamp. Adjacent to this we have a large digging area with gardening tools, plus mud kitchen equipment. None of this is left out in Forest School, despite being on school grounds, but because our site is ours alone, we do have a storage container where we can keep these items close to the point of use.





Let's start with the Minibeasts. We have an old bookcase as a bug hotel as well as plenty of grounds to search! I have small glass jars and magnifiers to collect the creatures in, some books about specific insects, a spotter guide, some laminated information sheets, and a book all about a Bug Hotel. This equipment differentiates itself, Year R will hunt down woodlice and use pictures to ID them. Year 6 will read the info! I have lots of identification sheets from the Wildlife Trust, RSPB, and Woodland Trust Nature Detectives.

I do swap these around seasonally, partly because if they match the season they are more accurate, but partly to ensure the information looks different and presents in a different way to stop the children from ignoring it! This contains much of the same kind of resources and again is seasonal. There are cut out and laminated leaf ID pictures on metal rings, there are ID Sheets, some books, and examples gathered from nearby. We have information on lichen and mosses, fungi and wildflowers, and leaves, twigs and trees. I spent a whole weekend in lockdown printing and laminating sheets to cover every area of learning in Forest School. The majority came from the Woodland Trust 'Tree Tools For School' site.

The Wildlife Trust has a site full of activity sheets called 'Wildlife Watch', the investigate section especially has great ID sheets.

The RSPB also has some great 'Spot It' sheets available on their website. Sometimes info pops up randomly from elsewhere and I squirrel it away! Articles on fungi, photos of birds nests, artwork, and postcards are all scanned into the computer and printed off when needed. I hate laminating because it introduces yet more plastic to the environment, but no sheet would last longer than a day without it. I work on the premise that 1 encapsulated ID sheet equates to 1000 sheets a year in paper and photocopying ink!



The Bird 'Information Station' is the one that varies and alters the most. Again there are info sheets on feathers, eggs, and bird nests, as well as birds. There are an assortment of bird guides and some binoculars. I also have 6 toy birds that make the correct bird call - which all the children age 4 through to 11 love! When children find feathers they either keep them or add them to our basket, this time of year we are also finding eggshells, which they love to try and ID.

Their contribution makes this collection evolve all the time. The children bring quite a lot of varied knowledge about birds to Forest School. Whether it's from



plucking pheasants, keeping chickens, or having bird feeders in their own gardens, and it's quick and easy to take the fact they know and help expand it. The roofers who have spent a large portion of this year working on top of the building donated some Bird Boxes, which was very generous, and made the children excited. This week we peeked into an older box and found...



Books are also a must! Stories for all age groups and information... but the most popular volumes are of wildlife photography! Seeing a bee magnified and being amazed at the detail, or seeing a stoat clearly for the first time, is always popular! Books are the most moveable provision. On a picnic blanket in the sun, or close to



shelter at basecamp. Sometimes it is too wet to have them out. The dampness pervades and pages end up mildewed, and muddy fingers glue pages together! The book box is something I'm not keen to put out during cold months as I like to keep them moving and warm. But a story around the campfire

is never a bad idea!



Tools! For the last year, our Forest School Sessions have been shortened and



included full classes. Year R through to Year 6 across 4 days. Sometimes 4 different classes in a day. It is difficult to plan and execute a proper 'making' session to include up to 30 children in what can be as little as 60 minutes!

Therefore I show them how to use the most basic tools (palm drills and peelers) and they can make independently. An adult is always nearby. Sometimes we have a small hacksaw available too. This has allowed small groups to design and create whatever they can imagine with minimal adult interference.

The great thing about all of this provision is it is moveable! However, the digging area isn't - and is THE most popular area we have!

It is a very physical entity and all ages throw themselves into using gardening tools with gusto. Sometimes (like last week), there is an interest in using trowels and hand forks. The Children are beginning to realise that sometimes they need a little more control! This week a buried piece of rope caught their attention. In a very 'Sword In The Stone' manner, everyone tried to pull it up! Eventually, excavations started - and have yet to be concluded!

And that is a basic trip around Forest School Activities. The children independently access the information and equipment they want. They follow whatever interests them in that session. Adults are available to support and encourage whatever investigation they choose, and their exploration can follow many paths, metaphorically and literally!

They frequently come up with better activities than I could ever plan and extend whatever I do provide into so much more.

Take your cue from them!

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The Nature Premium Initiative

OMEP UK is affiliated with the *Forest Schools Association* "Nature Premium" campaign. The campaign is calling for the implementation of a UK Nature Premium to fund regular nature experiences for every child.

Do join the campaign. The links below provide an outline letter to send to your MP, and a petition "**Reconnect children with nature**".

There is also a video to share on social media:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aI5Ej7OrDbo&feature=emb_logo

For full details on the Nature Premium initiative:

<https://www.naturepremium.org/>



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