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## A Guide to Introducing Outdoor Learning and Forest School into your Establishment.

**DON'T WASTE, SAVE ! THE EARTH IS YOURS**

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Facilitate experiential learning to develop higher order thinking skills

Increase pupil behaviour and motivation to learn

**Firstly, congratulations on taking the first step on this exciting approach to learning which will make a REAL difference.**

No need for extra timetable space! Teach the same objectives, just in more creative way outdoors.

Develop your pupils' self-esteem and self-confidence

Develop pupil understanding which feeds into all academic subjects

Utilise any outdoor space from concrete playgrounds to ancient woodlands

# What's so important about taking learning outside in today's society?

## Let's consider the typical day-to-day experiences of many children in today's society...

- What opportunities are there to play, experiment and test ideas?
- What opportunities are there to be creative, use their imagination, and follow their interests?
- What proportion of the day do they have access to the outdoors?
- When do they have opportunities to make a connection with nature or their local environment?
- When do they have access to wide open space to be physical?
- How often can they relate learning to real-life situations?



## What impact does this have in the classroom and beyond?

- Poor organisation
- Poor co-ordination
- Appear clumsy
- Poor attention/easily distracted
- Lack stability (legs around chairs, wide sitting)
- Grip pencils extremely hard
- Poor social skills -inappropriate comments/behaviour
- Inability to think for themselves
- Lack of problem solving skills
- Lack of knowledge about the environment
- Inability to transfer learnt skills to real life
- Poor health

## What are the benefits of taking learning outside?

Improved behaviour

Connect with nature

All abilities are  
'stretched'

Facilitates higher order  
thinking skills

Increased motivation to  
learn

Learn about  
sustainability

Facilitates experiential  
learning

Develops  
independence

Improved self-esteem

Care for your local  
environment

Enables cross-  
curricular links

Improved social skills

Improved confidence

Relate learning to real-  
life concepts

Facilitates use of all 5  
senses

Improved health and  
wellbeing

Extends learning and  
skills

Builds resilience

Develops curiosity

Benefits feed into  
classroom learning

## How can we make it work for school?

### 5 steps for success...

#### 1.) Embrace what you've got!

Open your eyes and utilise your environment. Turn that empty corner into a log-circle. Leave the grass at the far end of the field to grow wild and create a natural meadow. Dig a patch of grass up to create a planting area to grow your own vegetables from seed. Slow down, take a minute and look closer at what you've got in front of you! The possibilities are endless, despite any locational restrictions you may have.

#### 2.) Outdoor Learning sessions should take place on a regular basis.

With weekly outdoor sessions, children start to connect to their local environment and take a real sense of pride and care towards nature. They start to notice the difference between the seasons and both you and the children will love them all for their own uniqueness. A connection with nature begins with solid roots in their primary years.

#### 3.) Don't restrict outdoor learning to early years and younger ages.

Older children still need to be outside. They still need to be experimenting, creating and exploring. Why develop a child's creativity and connection with the outdoors in the early years, only to quash it by the time they reach upper primary? Many theories and objectives throughout KS2 can be better taught and learnt through utilising the outdoor environment. Remember, Outdoor Learning isn't an extra subject, it's a new way of teaching the same subjects and topics we already teach. A sprinkle of creative teaching initiates creative learning by pupils.

#### 4.) Commit to a whole school approach.

By adapting a whole-school approach to outdoor learning, colleagues can support each other and learning and skills can be built upon as the children progress through your school.

#### 5.) Don't delay!

Just by stepping outdoors you are opening up a whole new opportunity of learning. You will experience an enrichment of resources and a deeper pupil-understanding. Outdoor learning should take place in all weathers and all times of the year. Your pupils only get one chance: they are relying on you to provide them with the best education NOW!

# What are the differences between Outdoor Learning and Forest School?

## Outdoor Learning

- Any learning activity which takes place outdoors.
- Utilises any outdoor environment, from concrete playground to ancient woodland.
- Usually has a learning objective often linked to the National Curriculum.
- Sessions usually link to a subject, topic or skill.
- Consolidates and extends learning in the classroom.
- Not always an extra subject, therefore extra time in the timetable not always necessary. Children can learn the same topics and objectives, just in an outdoor space.
- Facilitates a high degree of thinking skills and experiential learning.
- Monitors ecological impacts sessions are having on the outdoor environment.
- May need a risk-benefit analysis appropriate to the area and activity. Pupils are encouraged to self-manage their own risks in a controlled way.
- Holistic benefits, including improved behaviour, concentration and self-esteem.
- Schools may create their own scheme, but qualifications to help with this are available. E.g. Level 2 Outdoor Learning Practitioner Award.

## Forest School

An ethos and pedagogical method, popular in Scandinavia, of increasing self-confidence and self-esteem through largely child-initiated experiences in a woodland environment.

Long-term process of regular sessions, rather than a one-off or infrequent visits; the cycle of planning, observation, adaptation and review links each session.

Takes place in a woodland or natural environment to support the development of a relationship between the learner and the natural world.

Uses a range of learner-centred processes to create a community for being, development and learning.

Aims to promote the holistic development of all those involved, fostering resilient, confident, independent and creative learners.

Offers learners the opportunity to take supported risks appropriate to the environment and to themselves.

May have a loose theme or nature based activities, but these are provided on a choice basis and led by the children's interests.

Run by qualified Forest School practitioners who continuously maintain and develop their professional practice. Those leading sessions must be Forest School Level 3 qualified. Those with Level 2 are qualified to assist sessions. Anybody training others to lead Forest School sessions must hold a Level 4 qualification.

Schools should only state that they run Forest School sessions if they are led by a Level 3 qualified leader.

# A Comparison of Outdoor Learning and Forest School in Practise



## Outdoor lesson example . Theme: Pirates

### Outdoor Learning

- A teacher/ leader sets up a controlled activity in a shallow pond or stream, investigating which materials float or sink, in order to work out the best material to use for a pirate ship.
- Children would be made aware of the session objective, 'Which materials sink and which float?' at the start of the session, and be encouraged to test their ideas and question their findings whilst thinking about safety aspects.
- By theming the session around a pirate ship and allowing experiential learning in a stream outside, children are naturally more motivated to learn and can transfer additional skills they have utilised during this outdoors activity to other areas or learning.

### Forest School

- Forest School would have no 'set' objective. You could have a loose pirate theme, but activities would stem from the children's initiatives and interests.
- The children may decide to make pirate ships in their shallow stream and then make observations about which materials sink or float, however learning in this way would be child-initiated, with open questions from the adults.
- The children, however, may not initiate or choose this activity and so may take the learning in a completely different direction, e.g. hunting for pirate treasure, building a pirate camp from natural materials, or something completely different such as a bug hunt.
- Adults would respond to the child's actions and interests by encouraging them to come up with their own solutions to any potential hazards, or to facilitate opportunities for experiential learning through providing prompts or open questions.



# What could an Outdoor Learning session look like?



'Amazon Rainforest' shelter building



Investigating what happens when food is heated



Studying Spring buds




Practising number bonds



Sawing a 'totem-pole'



Writing WW1 codes

A group of five children are standing in a forest with vibrant autumn foliage. In the foreground, a girl with long brown hair and a white jacket is smiling. Behind her, a boy in a blue and white striped shirt is looking up. To the left, a girl in a blue jacket is also smiling. The background is filled with trees with yellow and orange leaves.

**Go for it: You won't regret it!**

**“Must we always teach our children with books? Let them look at the stars and the mountains above. Let them look at the waters and the trees and flowers on Earth. Then they will begin to think, and to think is the beginning of a real education.”**

David Polis