

TAKE ME OUT

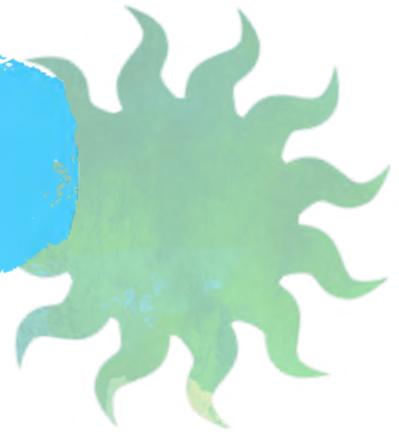


Handbook

How to support children to access
the outdoors and nature

TAKE  ME OUT

Introduction



This handbook is a resource designed to support all those who want to make sure that children get outdoors more often and have access to nature. It is designed to support the children, parents, early years professionals, senior management teams and supporting professionals.

We believe that working in early years should be seen as an enjoyable and rewarding task with a substantial amount of time outdoors. So read on and then take them out!

Throughout the book we will be encouraging you to think about the development of:

- settings ethos
- attitudes towards the use of the outdoors and how these will help you deliver a high quality curriculum to ensure the best possible outcomes for children.



Special note from the Take Me Out Project Manager



You have chosen to start your journey by reading this handbook which we believe will immensely inspire you and also become your helper in setting up your activities for outdoor education and play.

For the past two decades family life has dramatically changed – children spend up to three times more time watching television and sitting in front of computers than playing outside (Childwise, 2017). An increasing number of studies have shown results that indicate an increase in children's obesity as a consequence of their sedentary lifestyle. At the same time,

the outdoors has a lot of benefits for children including, amongst other things, an increase in physical activity and mental health improvements. The solution seems to be simple – take the children outside.

Who should do this? Experts agree that parents and early years professionals have the greatest influence on child development. Is it therefore the responsibility of early years professionals and parents to facilitate the children's outdoor experiences? The Take Me Out partners are clear about this and it is why we have decided to share with you our experience in outdoor education and play and explain the reasons why it is important to educate children to go outside.

Learning and play outdoors offers unique opportunities to expand the potential of children in early years. Outdoor education and play, in our opinion,



should be a natural part of the developmental process as both indoors and outdoors offer different but mutually complementary environments for education. However, the quality of outdoor experiences is so rich that it is authentic, meaningful and necessary for real life. It is an essential part of the shaping of their future, the future of those we care for the most – our little ones.

Positive results of the impact of outdoor education on children have been proven by surveys in Scandinavia and the United Kingdom (Parsons, 2007), where outdoor activities are commonly being practiced. During this project we found that in the countries where outdoor

education and play is a daily routine there are still issues and barriers that are sometimes put in the way. Through resilience and determination these countries have not been deterred and they have shared some of their experiences and solutions in this handbook. If you have any doubts or see obstacles in introducing outdoor education into your practice, or perhaps you don't know how and where to start, then this handbook is a must for you.

Adriana Kováčová, INAK Slovakia
Project manager



“Proper formation of the view of the world of nature and their relationships with nature supports children to have a well-developed view of the world.”

Vlado Gerko, Prešov University







TAKE ME OUT project

This book is an outcome of the **Erasmus+** funded Take Me Out project which came together in 2016-2018 to:

Support the sharing of good practice in early years outdoor education and, at the same time, develop the outputs that early years practitioners can use in their daily education and care as they implement the outdoor approach in their settings.

The project involved practitioners from Slovakia, Estonia, Denmark and the UK. Their focus was on public pre-school provision and they aimed to:

- Develop an outdoor framework on a European level to support children's early development.
- Develop a training programme for the pre-school practitioners who are or want to use the outdoor environment.
- Provide practitioners with this handbook.

In the long term the aim is to:

- Reach as many early years professionals as possible and support their skill development
- Offer motivational tools and support services for early years outdoor education practitioners

- Reach as many children as possible and enable them to experience the outdoors

This handbook is designed to support all those involved in improving the use, design and management of early years outdoor spaces, including the children and their parents, practitioners, senior management teams and professionals, such as gardeners and landscape designers.

Throughout the handbook we will be encouraging you to think about the development of your setting's ethos and attitude towards the use of the outdoors and how it will help you deliver a high quality curriculum to ensure the best possible outcomes for children.

Much is now known about the role physical and outdoor play has on the intellectual, emotional and social development of young children. In this handbook we have used this research to provide you with evidence and a strong case to help justify the time and money needed to make significant changes in your approach and/or space, while using the outdoors.



PARTNERS

Learning through Landscapes is the UK charity dedicated to enhancing outdoor learning and play for children. Our vision is that every child benefits from stimulating outdoor learning and play in their education. We aim to enable children to connect with nature, be more active, be more engaged with their learning, develop their social skills and have fun!

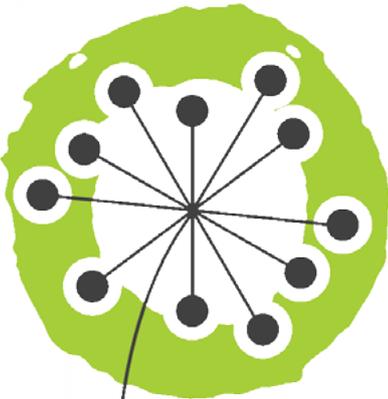
We are the leading UK charity specialising in outdoor learning and play in education. Our unrivalled knowledge and expertise is based on more than twenty five years experience of practical action and research.

For this project Learning through Landscapes has coordinated this handbook and organised training with the Danish partner.

We do this through three avenues:

- advocating the benefits of outdoor learning and play at school and pre school.
- inspiring and enabling the design and development of outdoor environments to support children's development.
- inspiring and enabling early years professionals and early years practitioners to develop the confidence, ideas and skills they need to make better use of outdoor spaces.

To find out more visit www.ltl.org.uk



**Learning
through
Landscapes**



The Faculty of Education, University of Presov, Slovakia, is a public higher education institution. Currently, it is the only one in Slovakia that exclusively specialises in the training of teachers in pre-primary, primary and special education. Their priorities include the importance of teacher training and modernisation of methodology and didactic approaches particularly in terms of the current state of education in Slovakia.

The Faculty of Education, University of Presov prepares pedagogical staff (undergraduates) for their work in pre-school institutions, school clubs, after-school centres; specialists in the field of compensatory pre-primary and primary education of socially and culturally disadvantaged children; educators in special education institutions, health care and social care institutions, young offender institutions and pedagogical staff working with people with special education needs. Graduate jobs include primary teacher positions (first four grades in primary school); primary education methodologists; managing and organisational staff in pre-school institutions; methodologists and research staff in pre-school institutions; special needs kindergartens; special needs primary school teachers; primary school teachers at diagnostic and re-education centres; curative education sanatoriums

or other institutions providing care for psychosocially disadvantaged children and youth.

The Department of pre-school education, PRESOV UNIVERSITY, SK, with their expertise of research and training for managing and organisational staff, methodologists and research staff in pre-school institutions, as well as academic expertise in the ECEC sector, fosters the integration on new outdoor education approach in the official teaching methodologies, helping to enhance the contact with decision makers in Slovakia and support official recognition of an outdoor education approach in Slovak legislation beyond the project.

For this project their role has been to evaluate the teaching standards of outdoor professionals and support background references for the handbook.

www.unipo.sk/en





INAK, Slovakia is an NGO, that tries to do things DIFFERENTLY/“INaK“, if possible, „Innovatively and Creatively“. „INaK“ was established in 2014, as the team of people experienced in the field of using innovative approaches, activating methods and ICTs in education, with the experience of development of didactic materials, experience with project management, running of educational training, as well as the other activities from the field of innovative education. Through our activities, we aim to support the development of human resources.

We focus on the use of innovative approaches, using creative methods in the educational process and whilst working with a variety of target groups - children, youth and adults. Our projects enhance lifelong learning and help to develop learners' key competences. We try to implement our ideas

and bring them into practice through local, national and international projects, usually in strong partnership with a variety of institutions.

INAK, SK initiated this partnership based on the results of a needs analysis carried out in February 2016 with 326 kindergarten teachers in Slovakia. 286 (88%) expressed their interest in the project focused on outdoor education, as well as and based on positive previous experience with similar educational projects.

For this project INAK have coordinated the partnership and project management and created the online training modules.

www.trochuinak.sk





RUKKILILLE LASTEAED, Estonia, is a private kindergarten, established in the fall of 2009. Our kindergarten has 198 children who are between 2-7 years old. There are 9 groups. Our priority is to meet the basic education curriculum requirements in Estonia, and realize it playfully, and by using alternative pedagogical methods. We have prioritized learning through and the value of Estonian traditions of nature education, raising awareness of our traditional culture, through movement and activities with an additional emphasis on health -promotional work.

We achieve this by providing an environment

of respect and trust with high expectations to support the full development of the individual and allow recognition of talents beyond the academic; an environment where pupils can demonstrate a love of learning, a love of life - a place for them to thrive and shine.

Our staff are well-prepared and enthusiastic about their work. They use the elements of many different methods, eg: The Method Project, Step-by step, The Dalton Plan, The Good Start Method, Sherborne, etc. We also have expertise in art, work with social skills, ICT, folklore and outdoor learning.

For this project their role has been to support the content of the handbook and the dissemination of the project in the Baltic states.

www.rukkilill.eu





Stockholmsgave Centrum Denmark,

is an outdoor kindergarten located near Copenhagen, with focus on outdoor and nature education, while sharing their knowledge with institutions from Denmark and abroad. The kindergarten has a great experience in forest and outdoor education, both in theory and practice, as well as with integration of this approach into official national curricula.

Each day children from the kindergarten drive from the collection place at the city centre to the countryside. Once in the countryside there is a house with group rooms, a kitchen, toilets, an office and a big garden/playground. The kindergarten has 70 children aged from 3-6 years and 10 teachers. The children are divided into 3 mixed age groups with 23 children and 3 teachers/pedagogues in each group. The kindergarten is open from 7am to 17.30 pm from Monday to Friday - all year round. The kindergarten is public and works according to Danish law and regulation.

The kindergarten has a focus/profile on outdoor and nature education and does most of its activities outdoors. They provide a high quality teaching environment with teachers who have a degree in children's development, knowledge and experience in forest and outdoor education. The kindergarten often shares experience and

practice with institutions from Denmark and other countries. The kindergarten has a strong belief that the outdoor environment is the best for children's learning processes and development.

For this project the kindergarten have contributed to the handbook and training.

<http://stockholmsgavecentrum.kbh.barn.kk.dk/FrontEnd.aspx?id=643403>





Strom života Slovakia, is a non-governmental, non - profit organisation that has been active in the field of environmental education and cultural heritage preservation in Slovakia for nearly 35 years. The main target group of the organisation are children in kindergartens, elementary school children and youth in general. The organisation provides services for these groups by creating a variety of programs focused on environmental education at all levels, including preservation events, publishing activities, environmental competitions and many others.

Currently they have worked with 150 kindergartens or schools nationwide,

targeting over 7000 schoolchildren. Environmental outdoor education as such is a compulsory cross-subject topic in the schools in Slovakia, but currently there is no sophisticated teaching and methodical material available on the school market.

With their focus on integration of environmental studies into education, experience of developing materials for teachers, organising teachers' training and publishing a magazine of environmental issues and nature for pre-school aged children, their current internal network of 185 kindergartens and primary schools, contributes to quality management of the project and dissemination activities in Slovakia.

For this project Strom života have contributed to the handbook and coordinated the design and digital resources.

en.stromzivota.sk

STROM ŽIVOTA®





CONTENTS

| | |
|---|-----|
| Introduction | |
| The Take Me Out project | 1 |
| 1) Be inspired | 9 |
| 2) Why “Take Me Out” | 11 |
| 3) First steps before starting | 14 |
| 4) Perception of the child | 19 |
| 5) The role of the early years professional | 35 |
| 6) Outdoors and the environment..... | 45 |
| 7) Overcoming barriers and red tape | 65 |
| 8) Parental Involvement Outdoors..... | 76 |
| 9) Evidence and evaluation | 80 |
| 10) Early years managers and leaders of the outdoor approach..... | 83 |
| 11) A positive approach to Risk and Challenge | 94 |
| 11a) Our legal and moral duties to provide risk | 96 |
| 11b) Positivity is contagious | 99 |
| 11c) Enabling Policies and Practice | 103 |
| 11d) Enabling Environments for risk taking | 105 |
| 11e) Communications | 107 |
| 12) Acknowledgements | 110 |



1) Be inspired



Close your eyes and think of your childhood...what was your favourite activity as a child? Did it happen indoors or outdoors?

Many of us will think of the outdoors, of the changing weather and sensory experiences where we enjoyed the freedom and fun we had with others. This book aims to enable children to lay down these memories to maximise their potential in a secure and happy outdoor environment.

When these experiences are well planned, safely managed and personalised to meet the needs of every child they can, according to the English education inspection team (OFSTED, 2008):

- Improve academic achievement
- Provide a bridge to higher order learning
- Develop skills and independence in a widening range of environments
- Make learning more engaging and relevant to young people
- Develop active citizens and stewards of the environment
- Nurture creativity
- Provide opportunities for informal

- learning through play
- Reduce behaviour problems and improve attendance
 - Stimulate, inspire and improve motivation
 - Develop the ability to deal with uncertainty
 - Provide challenge and the opportunity to take acceptable levels of risk
 - Improve young people's attitudes to learning

Today in many European countries where children are often in childcare whilst parents and carers work, we can reconsider the need for children to be outdoors. Through sharing practice we are realising its value and re addressing the needs of children.

In Denmark the concept of out of town nature kindergartens has grown and today Denmark has more than 500 nature kindergartens (Official Statistics Office, 2017). Nature kindergartens promote their services as having large if not all their time spent outdoors in natural environments.

In the UK we have seen an increase in children using the outdoors through the



development of the Government's early years framework which emphasises the need for children to have access to the outdoors. The settings have been inspired by a range of outdoor approaches including nature kindergartens (forest schools) which originated from Scandinavian Kindergartens.

In Slovakia the Act No. 527/2007 §7 (Vyhláška, 2007) provided a regime for each day in pre-school facilities, and in the pre-school child care facility, to be organised by the early years manager/early years professional who would ensure that: children stay outdoors at least two hours in the morning and two hours in the afternoon, depending on the length of the children's stay in pre-school or in the pre-school childcare facility, throughout the year and in every weather. The stay

outdoors can be shortened or omitted in extremely unfavourable weather conditions such as whirlwind, rapid rain, temperatures below -10°C , or excessive air pollution.

In our Estonian nurseries it's really important to be outside every day. Children spend time outside at least 4 hours per day, in the morning and in the afternoon before going home. Children are going outside in every weather. In Estonia it's really important to do everything outside. Different activities like music, gymnastics, all learning activities, eating outside and most events are taken out of the classroom.

So we just need to take them out!





2) Why “Take Me Out”



WHAT DO THE CHILDREN GET?

- An increase in self confidence
- Better communication and social skills
- Boosted motivation
- Improved problem solving skills
- Increased physical activity
- Better creativity and imagination
- A lot of discovery
- A caring attitude towards nature and the environment
- If you want happy and healthy children Take them Out!



OUR VISION

We want to see more young children across Europe, supported by professionals and parents, getting outside every day. Striving to provide higher quality outdoor play and learning experiences for children aged from 0-6 years old.

Research in the UK into children’s wellbeing (Public Health England, 2013) suggested “Time spent playing computer games was significantly and negatively associated with

young people’s wellbeing.” We feel this is also taking away from the time being spent outdoors where children are more physically active.





WHY “TAKE ME OUT”

We believe that...

For the child:

- Taking children outdoors is an essential part of their daily lives.
- Play is a fundamental right of every child and essential to the physical and emotional wellbeing of children.
- Children need to have contact with nature for their future.
- Children need to explore by themselves and with other children. They will have greater independence, creativity and resilience.
- Being outdoors enables children to be noisy and quiet, move and create more mess.

For the early years professional or early years manager:

- The above is enhanced by professional guidance
- Children benefit from being with early years professionals who understand the need for them to be outdoors. Professionals are skilled in encouraging a range of play types that are fun so that children want to be outdoors and are able to enjoy the health benefits from spending longer periods of time being active outdoors.
- Sessions outdoors should reflect the length of time children need to

- develop their play, regularly returning to their space after a period of time. Good early years professionals create routines that are flexible enough to allow them to observe and change plans appropriate to the needs of the children.
- This dynamic and flexible planning enables the children to develop critical thinking, creativity and resilience. It is good to see children choosing to return to an activity and developing their understanding of how things work or using a resource in a different creative way.
- Professionals benefit from being outdoors. It can be less stressful, more enjoyable and healthier.
- By using the outdoors, professionals competencies are increased.

We must make sure we do not have too much adult led time in our plans.





The environment:

- The outdoors both supports and extends the indoor experiences where we can take natural materials into the classroom and work with them outdoors. In addition to this, indoor behaviour is improved by children being more physically active outdoors in open areas.
- Children must have contact with nature and a range of everyday real life experiences including getting dirty, learning about outdoor jobs and having space to explore the way their bodies can move.
- The special nature of the outdoor environment extends the indoor experiences due to the ever changing possibilities that are created by the natural world.
- Naturalistic outdoor environments stimulate movement, creativity and skill development.

Outdoor play supports appropriate risk taking and offers appropriate challenge for all children, making sure it is inclusive. Good practitioners will enable children to progress.

The parents and communities:

- Parents and communities play an important role in attitudes towards the outdoors. Early years professionals can work in partnership with parents to foster positive behaviour such as allowing children to get muddy or to play in the rain and snow.

For more information on the Take Me Out partnership please go to our Take Me Out project section at the back of this book.



3) First steps before starting

Before you explore this handbook further, here are a few tips

You will find under each section:

A **Did You Know** reference section to background theorists and research which will support practice, including the health benefits of getting outdoors.

You can explore the **Take Me Out Case Study** section that pulls together some key findings from the Danish, Estonian, Slovak and UK partners.

You may be able to learn from the **Techniques and Ideas** section that pulls together some of the lessons the partners have used to improve their practice (for example how the Danish use bread and cheese as well as fruit to keep energy levels up through their outdoor sessions).

Using references you will find further images and links to the resources on the website and case studies of both children and practitioners who are using nature and their outdoor spaces.



DID YOU KNOW

Parental and setting involvement in getting children outdoors was proven to raise attainment at settings in the USA
"Parents can and should facilitate their kids spending regular time outdoors, but settings will need to step up too. By doing so, settings will produce better educated students with stronger life skills." (Coyle, 2010)

Lessons taken from our Scottish partners **CASE STUDY #15**

Ryley (3) had a fear of "what was around him". When out and about he held dad's hand very tightly. Dad was apprehensive about Ryley's reaction to coming along to our woodland days. The change in Ryley after a few weeks was heart warming. His whole personality appeared to change when he went through the entrance to our greenspace, with confidence brimming he led a small group of children to the best bug hunting areas. Dad had seen the change in Ryley when in the woodland and they try to use the area as often as they can as a family.

Pete became a big part of the setting's regular outdoor sessions, encouraging and helping other parents to join a group of families taking their children out to a local greenspace to enjoy quality time together. The impact on both Ryley's confidence and therefore learning, was huge. Would Pete have taken Ryley without the support of the setting - No was his response...

Using Pete to chat with other parents about what his family got out of joining the group will be more beneficial than using staff.

So in taking Ryley and Dad (Pete) on our woodland days they both see the

63



ENABLING ENVIRONMENT

Parents need to feel welcome and we have found that cooking outdoors and celebrations outdoors are a great way to engage with parents. Why not have a simple open evening where children can celebrate and show their parents around the outdoor space or a trip once a term that enables children to introduce their friends to their parents on a walk, picnic or visit to a local farm.

TECHNIQUES AND IDEAS

If need be providing waterproof clothing to parents can take away a barrier. The experience has to be fun for parents too. Don't forget grandparents. Let the parents book the kindergarten and if appropriate use it as a community resource.

70





Different starting points

Example journeys you can take

The Take Me Out partnership acknowledges that we are all starting at different stages of our journey. This handbook is designed to support different levels of expertise and experience. You might choose to read it from cover to cover but for others here are some suggestions as you continue your journey to Take Out your children:

If you are new to taking children outdoors



Why not start by flicking through the images which are here to inspire your practice? We would then recommend that you read the **Why “Take Me Out”** and the **Role of the Practitioner** section to explore what your role is in the outdoors. You may have recently trained or perhaps be studying as you read this book, in which case please use this handbook to see some of the practical applications of theories in the Did you know boxes. We hope this handbook will be something you can dip into as your practice develops. When you need activity ideas please go to our **activity pages** on the website.



For the professional wanting to reflect and develop their outdoor practice further

We really recommend recapping on the **Why “Take Me Out”** section to reflect on why you use the outdoors. Of course as you use the outdoors more you will find that you will need to look in more detail at the **Role of the early years professional** and **Perception of the child** in the outdoors and how we **Evidence and Evaluate** the work we are doing outdoors. You may be reflecting on the **Risk and Challenge** aspects of using the outdoors, or working with your colleagues to **Overcome other barriers and red tape** you are facing. We hope our **Techniques and Ideas** will help you develop your practice further.



If you are looking for further inspiration in the way you use the outdoors, why not reflect on the Did you know boxes on each page and how this applies to your practice? Or take a look at our online **training modules** and **activities**.





For experienced leaders of outdoor sessions

If you are an experienced practitioner why not recap on the **Why “Take Me Out”** of why we use the outdoors and what we want to be able to achieve. This can support your **Role as an early years manager**. In this section you will find other direct links to policy development and the support of your staff. You may also find our **Outdoors and the environment** section very useful as it explores the way you might manage larger changes to your outdoor spaces.

As leaders are also accountable to external bodies you might find the **Evaluation and Evidence** and **Engaging Parents and Carers** sections useful. You may also want to look at our **Techniques and Ideas** to help you develop your practice further.

Of course as a leader you will have group responsibilities and having this overview of the whole handbook will help you to signpost others so that you all develop over time.



CASE
STUDY
#1

What are we all called?

In Denmark the early years professionals are called Pedagogues and are trained to work in a range of care environments. In Slovakia and Estonia they are known as early years professionals and in the UK those working with 0-4 year olds are known as early years practitioners. Those working with five and six year olds are known as Foundation Stage teachers. Partners in this project all agreed that all of these people are early years professionals and so are called this throughout the handbook.





4) Perception of the child

INTRODUCTION

Denmark has a long tradition of nature kindergartens. There is strong support for kindergartens in general in Denmark with over 97% of all Danish children attending kindergarten.

The Danish out of town kindergartens started up for socio-economically challenged families who live in the cities, particularly Copenhagen. One of the reasons for starting up this kind of kindergarten was to create more kindergarten spaces and reduce the existing long waiting lists.

It soon became clear that this type of kindergarten worked. The benefit to children's health was observed at these settings with children being more resistant to common medical conditions and with a generally improved sense of well-being.

At the same time children developed better physical skills, better social skills and also developed a greater imagination. Their awareness of nature increased and their responsibility towards it improved.

The concept of out of town nature kindergartens grew and today Denmark has more than 50

nature kindergartens. In Denmark there is a strong tradition of educating early years professionals to degree level. This is done to create the best environment for children's development.





This tradition has strongly influenced the UK forest based settings and nurseries, and the UK government now advises that all children should have access to the outdoors in their daily childcare provision.

The Estonian history of outdoors education goes far beyond what we see today. Although the term “Outdoor learning” has only been in use since 2003, it has essentially always been

embedded in what we do, but now more is being done to bring learning and accountability into our outdoor practice.

The definition of field learning in Estonia is “Outdoor education is learning in a real environment, applying all the senses, doing it yourself, sharing the learning with others, and continuing to teach it.”

Since 2003 “Outdoors learning” education in Estonia has been more systematic. Schools and kindergartens celebrate the 14th of April as the outdoors education season start.

We believe that the children in an Estonian nursery school with good outdoor learning will be more focused, more resilient and more adaptable to their surroundings. The foundation begins in kindergarten, and therefore it is most important to shape children’s early love of nature and teach them to value the natural environment.





CASE
STUDY
#2

A Slovak Perspective from Experienced Early Years professional, PaedDr. Monika Miňová, PhD.

In the country of Slovakia, the first institutions for pre-school age children were established in 1829. Since 2008, nursery schools have once again been part of the school system and are no longer pre-school establishments. At present we have 91.19% of the pre-school aged children attending kindergartens (159 081 children), involving 14 777 teachers in 2 959 pre-schools. By 2020, 95% of children between the age of four and six should be attending kindergartens in order to prepare for school education (minedu, 2017).

Kindergartens realise education and care according to their own school education program, which must have its own goals and topic focus/profile. In 2012/2013, from 197 kindergartens inspected by the State School Inspectorate 75,13% had environmental education acknowledged in their reports. As the inspection was not carried out in all kindergartens in the country it is assumed that the number of kindergartens with their own aims and focus on environmental education is much higher. (Uváčková 2013, s.

23-33).

Other documents from the Ministry of Education draw attention to the obligation to enable children to spend time outdoors. Kindergartens are involved in various projects, e.g “Green school” and organise activities, eg. Earth Day, where they are trying to develop all aspects of cognitive, socio-emotional, and psychomotoric abilities through direct experience in the natural environment.

Some kindergartens also have environmental education co-ordinators, environmental clubs and teachers are educated in this area at various seminars, workshops, conferences or through literature studies. Kindergartens in Slovakia





realise outdoor activities in school yards, in a nearby natural environment or during health/recondition week stays in nature schools. Also, in 2017 there were about 22 Forest schools in Slovakia, but they do not belong to the school system and operate at the level of civic associations and other clusters.

The stipulation for outdoor sessions and its conditions can be found in § 7 let. b) Decree of the Ministry of Health of the Slovak Republic

no. 527/2007 Coll. details of the requirements for facilities for children and adolescents: (b) children shall stay outside daily for at least two hours in the morning and 2 hours in the afternoon, depending on the length of stay of children in pre-school or in pre-school childcare facilities in each season; stay outdoors may be shortened or omitted in extremely unfavorable meteorological conditions, such as whirlwind, heavy rain, temperatures below -10° C, or excessive atmospheric pollution.

DID YOU KNOW

Within the framework of outdoor education **in Slovakia** - active learning outdoors in the natural environment, Herinková (2017) presents the following most common benefits for children:

1. Children are healthier.
2. They have better grades later in school.
3. Children improve communication skills.
4. Outdoor education builds community.
5. Children build positive memories of nature and gain new skills.
6. Outdoor education builds its own culture.

The Danish early years education is based on the perspective of children and inspired by several of the older philosophers, including Rousseau and Froebel. Much of the thinking around this actually took place after the Second World War. (Srogon, 1986)

Rousseau 1712-1778 - believed that children learned much better by themselves through their own experiences. He also thought it important for children to learn and develop at their own pace. Rousseau said that childhood is a value in itself.



Froebel 1782-1852 - also influenced Danish pedagogy. Inspired by Rousseau, he also developed his own thoughts including a particular emphasis on play, how children reflect on their play experiences and how this only happens when they are actively acting on things.

Froebel's thoughts highlight the belief that children develop best by letting their inner nature unfold in external nature.

Although Froebel's thoughts refer to children's learning and development, he makes a point of explaining that the kindergarten is not

part of the school but an important part of children's education. Together, education and upbringing are key to children's development so it is the whole child that is to develop and not only the thinking child or the bodily child.

After the Second World War, educational views were influenced by different philosophies. This time it was the antithesis of human oppression and cruelty that had taken place during the war. The vision was to create an upbringing which strengthened the children's ideas of freedom, democracy and independent thinking.

TECHNIQUES AND IDEAS

It's all about the child!

Today we inform our work with the old theorists but our focus is on the whole child. We believe that childhood development is supported when children go to nature kindergartens.

Versatile personal development

Children develop best when they thrive, and when they are met by adults who engage

with them. When children experience adults who are interested in them, they get a feeling of self assurance and feel appreciated. This gives them the courage to explore the world around them. It also makes them test the boundaries and learn to understand their own role within the community, both the close community with the other children, the larger community of the society in which they live and the natural world they are surrounded by.



When children in nature kindergartens are being supported in their all-round personal development it enables them to identify their own limits. For example, when a child does not get help to climb up a tree he should be able to know his own strength to enable him to climb it safely and be able to determine how far he will be able to climb before it gets too high.

At the same time we need to teach children to deal with their own feelings that arise in the community and in the space outdoors. Feelings can be compared to friendships, competition, courage and much more, so having those experiences in a safe environment will enable them to understand them and make good decisions within the context of the wider community.

In a setting, children have the opportunity to develop and test their potential. They experience how to “get away”, test conflict resolution strategies and use their senses to learn new skills. When the framework is freer than traditional kindergarten, children have the opportunity to pursue their own ideas and create their own projects so that both they and the adults recognise their creativity which, in turn, strengthens their self-esteem and their desire to innovate.

Bodily skills

When children are outdoors in a nature kindergarten they get stronger through using their bodies and using apparatus designed to make them move. They can strengthen their motor skills by climbing trees and picking up sticks, leaves, seeds and insects. When they climb up the steep hills and go on long walks their endurance increases. As their physical skills develop so they develop into strong, healthy individuals.

It is not only on a physiological level that children develop, but also on a sensory level through the different effects of seasonal changes on their skin, the smell of the soil of the forest and the first new flowers in the spring. They taste the wild herbs they find in nature and get stung by stinging nettles giving them a learning experience. They hear the birds sing and learn to distinguish between the most common birds which also gives them cognitive experiences to be able to tell different sounds apart from each other. They also see how nature changes over the year. Everything helps to give these children tools they can use in their further development as they get older.



Through these experiences they will be able to understand their bodies more and connect the different sensations of the body and brain.

Cognitive skills

All the physiological and sensual impressions are linked to cognitive skills. When the cognitive skills are coupled with the physiological and sensory skills the entire 'rail network' development is supported. This does not happen when a child is in normal daycare because their physiology and senses are not stimulated in the same way as in nature. In nature, the child has more focus on movement and the environment and becomes better at controlling his body, which in turn provides an advantage when the child starts school, as well as in later life.

Social skills

Social skills are supported when children are out in the wild. These skills can develop only in a community with other people but if there is no space, development will be marked by conflict as the children cannot get away from each other.

In a nature kindergarten it is possible to withdraw and

take time to think about how the various conflicts can be managed which includes the time for sleep. In both UK and Danish settings if children need sleep this can be facilitated. Some children need the sleep and others don't so effective zoning and organisation of activities to enable quiet and reflective time is essential. This is different in Slovakia and Estonia where children have "obligatory" sleeping time, not really reflecting individual needs.

In nature, children can join together for different activities and experiences. This creates the opportunity to build relationships and friendships, which in turn gives the children a sense of community. The five key things that children need to be happy outdoors are: to feel safe, to not be hungry, to be warm and dry, to not worry about how to go to the toilet and to not feel uncomfortable in a dirty nappy.



CASE
STUDY
#3

Sleep - What do you do?

In UK settings after the children have had lunch, they are encouraged to use the quiet reading corner or other quiet spaces indoors and out. The children and babies who regularly nap are given time and space to sleep, with a range of sleeping options being made available. These sleeping options are agreed with the parents to reflect the needs of the individual child at their stage of development. Examples might include a mother who wants the child rocked in a pushchair outdoors or another who wants a cot in a darkened area. In Sweden, Denmark and the UK they all use mattresses that are flexible and can be moved indoors or out.

If a child needs a nap earlier in the morning with good design of the outdoors space a quiet area can be found to facilitate this, although occasionally children like a busy environment to have their snooze. During this project our Estonian nursery has now established an outdoor sleep area under

an outdoor shelter with sleeping bags for every child.

In Denmark and some UK settings children are also encouraged to finish sessions by 3pm to enable time for family and quiet activities including a late nap if needed. These earlier finish times can often also support children who find toilet training difficult. In Slovakia and Estonia, obligatory sleeping time takes place after lunch only indoors and the children need to wear pyjamas and sleep in regular children's beds.





New children

CASE
STUDY
4

New children coming into the setting will need support as they settle in. We learnt that in the UK and Denmark they have a range of methods to help them adjust to being indoors and outdoors.

Have a routine for the setting and build the outdoors into this routine. For example, in the UK Jenny found that starting outdoors when the children were used to being indoors didn't work and the children became unsettled. To overcome this, parents now say goodbye indoors and then the outdoor session begins. In Denmark

children go out after their snack. Strategically early years managers might need to adapt a daily routine to reflect the needs of the outdoors in the long term.

Some children need **clear boundaries** and working with older children can help. Other times they may need adult support and planned activities. In UK outdoor settings it is popular to hammer in flags, in other settings they sing boundary songs and beat the bounds with sticks.

Keyworkers are used in the UK and Denmark and are important when new children start indoors and

outdoors. A keyworker is a member of staff that is allocated to the individual child when they start at the nursery. The child and adult don't have to go to each other but they will





know they are available for a little more attention if needed. This person is also key to maintaining communication with the parents.

Transition toys - these are often soft toys, rags or comforters that are allowed by the early years professionals whilst children settle in. Most children will realise they don't need them after a while.

Be prepared to **differentiate small group work** to enable different children to take part in activities. In the UK Toby was observed clinging to the key worker but when the key worker set up dinosaurs on a blanket with some stones and leaves Toby settled into play and other children joined him. He began to grow in confidence and the next week followed the other children a little further away from the blanket, extending his boundaries. Toby now runs everywhere and enjoys the outdoor sessions.

Casual observations by several settings managers in the UK observed that children could take as long as six months to independently access the garden. In settings where they expect children to be outdoors it is important to respect a child's individual comfort zone and support their development gradually. Some children are the opposite.

As they grow in confidence the children will normally need less support.

Involve children in changes being made to their spaces, they often have some great ideas and may know where the best bugs are or where the sunnier areas are to grow plants.





I don't want to wear wellies!

CASE
STUDY
#5

In the UK, Peter (3) had been coming to settings for six weeks but he still didn't want to put his wellies on or his waterproofs, to go outdoors. When his key worker talked to mum, she explained that he had never liked being wrapped up even as a baby. This three year old had a new found freedom of walking and accessing his play space on his own and then had been asked to sit and do something he didn't feel he could do on his own and that he didn't like the feel of, so he wasn't having any of it.

After a little reflection the keyworker realised it might be better just to let Peter go outdoors for a few minutes in his indoor clothes until he realised what he might be missing out on (the shoes and trousers can get muddy and can always be washed). After a couple of sessions Peter accepted that it was much more fun if he could jump in the puddles and he was then motivated to learn to put outdoor shoes on himself. The setting also adapted songs to share the fun of getting dressed to go outdoors.

So for the Peter in your setting why not...

Organise your wellies and coats close to the door on hooks that children can access.





Think about the areas of learning (not the activities), that the indoor space supports and try to cover these in your outdoor space so that children find something that builds on their interests and schema from indoors. If, for example, you have the small world or quiet area indoors try creating one outdoors too. Lay out outdoor activities the children can access independently in a secure area and have refreshments ready for outdoors too.

Mud is a key part of a child's outdoor experience so make sure you are prepared to let the children get dirty for their own sensory development and the development of their

immune systems. Sometimes we need to convince parents that their washing machines won't suffer.

Be patient, the journey is just as important as the end result. With all our new children we expect to spend longer helping them get ready and we have a few tips to help with this: Model new activities (including getting ready); try not to allow a whole group to be getting ready at the same time; have other activities they can do whilst you help a small group get themselves ready; and remember it is ok to ask them to wait for your support.





EXTENDED

Hygiene and Food

CASE
STUDY
6

Part of a settings routine includes supporting children with their **personal hygiene**. The key priority here is good handwashing before eating routines and after toileting.

DID YOU KNOW

In Denmark they start each day with bread and cheese and then children wash hands - this seems to keep them going before a large warm lunch.

In the UK routines vary but generally children have access to fruit and toast or crackers and cheese at some point in the morning and will then either be provided with a lunch or eat their packed lunch around midday.

In Slovakia, children in kindergartens are provided 3 meals a day - usually slice of bread with spread and fruits or vegetables as late breakfast, warm - cooked lunch consisting of

a soup and a main course and slice of bread with fruits or vegetables or similar in the afternoon, depending on their length of stay in the kindergarten."

In Estonian kindergartens children eat 3 times a day. Breakfast is usually porridge and milk soups. In addition, a sandwich with a small vitamin dip. For lunch chefs cook a main course or soup with dessert. For evening meal children can have lighter snacks, such as salads, pies or vegetable mix."

In the UK all settings have to have at least one person trained in food hygiene.



Popular outdoor snacks with children might include

Quick and easy

Raisins and dried fruit
Pretzels
Cheese
A range of fresh fruits
Popcorn - ready popped
Biscuits and crackers
Breads
Flasks of hot chocolate or soup
Water and juice or milk
Herbal teas

On the fire (warming)

Baked bananas or apples
Pancakes
Popcorn
Hot Chocolate
Fruit with warm dipping sauces
Taco shells warmed
Tortilla pizza's
Soup
Bread on sticks
Flat breads
Casseroles
Pasta
Toast

In all the countries the children all sit down to eat at the same time for lunch. They choose where they sit and sit in small social groups to encourage conversation the early years professionals are encouraged to sit with children and when possible eat with the children to model good eating habits and conversation skills.





Toileting outdoors - a few things to consider:

Potential issue

Babies in nappies

Potty trainers or toilet trained children (at the setting)

Potty trainers on the go away from settings

Toilet trained children away from settings

Possible solution

Take a changing mat and changing bag outdoors (into the garden or walk-to space) don't break play and rush indoors or home

Support them to use the indoor toilets as usual

Support them to use a potty or to wee into the bushes (in an emergency)

Support them to wee into bushes, away from play areas (designate an area) or if on a site where this isn't appropriate set up an area as a temporary toilet. Always take faeces away with you.

Provide soap and water for staff and children's handwashing.





REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS

Read the feedback from a recent visit to the Danish setting:

It was amazing to see how calm, healthy and happy the children were outdoors in kindergarten. Children had great chances to explore, discover and be active outdoors.

I would put my child in an outdoors kindergarten and I would happily be a teacher in this kind of kindergarten. They say that beauty lies in simplicity and it was so obvious there. There is no need to force children to absorb too much information but let them act freely and be yourself in the role of guider. All that a child does and experiences outdoors is very educational and developing. I very much liked that children are in touch with reality in the very early stages of life and work raising.

Do you feel you could say this about your setting? How is your setting different?

On an average day how much time is:

- adult led
- outdoors
- doing daily routines?

How could you increase child led time to develop their play and interests outdoors?

How could you better use the outdoors to support children's:

- Sleep
- Hygiene/toileting
- Nutrition?

How do you support new children outdoors?



5) The role of the early years professional

INTRODUCTION

When was the last time you went outdoors and enjoyed nature? How was this experience? What moments do you remember the most? Was it rewarding for you? Why not allow your children or the children you work with to experience nature too.

It is rewarding to be with the children and to watch their development but how aware are you of what you are doing when you are with them? What are you talking about with your colleagues? Are you playing with the children? How are you supporting their experience of learning and development outdoors?

Early years professionals have a special and important role in the training and development of children. By their example they can show the joy, opportunities, challenges, great experiences and many things that can be done in the natural world. As a professional you have to work with yourself, your understanding, your teaching style and see nature as an environment with endless opportunities for play and educational activities. Maybe you don't have any experience of using the natural environment - but don't worry - it's all about

having the commitment, interest and energy to try new and different ways of teaching and activities. You don't have to be an expert to take children outdoors, just keep an open mind, enjoy it and you too will learn - and the children will love it.

We believe that the first step for you as a professional is to understand the holistic approach - see the child as a "whole child", with its own will, thinking, understanding, own way of expressions and as a unique person with different competences. The child's development has to be seen in the bigger perspective and everything has an influence, every competence is important; physical, intellectual, emotional, creative and spiritual.

The professional's role is to be motivating, engaged, positive and to show that nature is a great and safe place to stay and play. The children should have space and time for making their own experiences and as a professional your role is to nurture their curiosity, understanding and play. On the other hand we also believe that creating educational activities which are led by the professional is important. A further important role is taking responsibility



for creating an environment that is stimulating and motivating for the child, and where the child can develop all its competences including social, physical, emotional, creative, language. The natural environment has it all, so just go out.

One of the most important things is that you are curious - you are a role model - and if you show curiosity, the children will be curious too. You don't have to be an expert in outdoor life, but have the will and curiosity to explore, investigate and wonder about nature and all the things you see, sense and feel, even if you don't know what it is. If you, for example don't have any knowledge about bugs, insects and small animals, you can start by going outdoors, flip a stone, look under some leaves or dig in the ground. You will find small animals - look at

them, pick them up and take photos of them. Together with the children you can read nature books, check the internet and find out more about the insects and bugs you find. Where do they live, what do they eat, how many legs do they have, how many wings etc. In that way both you and the children learn and gain an understanding of nature. As a role model you might have to face fears yourself if you are not used to spending time outdoors and don't feel comfortable with nature and animals. For example, if you are afraid of spiders which means you scream and run away when you see one, it's likely the children will do the same. So start with things you feel comfortable about. Always start with a success.





DID YOU KNOW

From Italy, Reggio Emilia's approach (Pound, 2005) viewed the early years professional as a co-learner and collaborator with the child whose role is to facilitate independent access to well designed outdoor spaces (including naturalised areas) which encourages free thinking. Maria Montessori also believed that the role of the early years professional should focus on the needs of the individual rather than the needs of the lesson plan.

Russian Lev Semyonovich Vygotsky (Pound, 2005) talks about children having a zone of proximal development, where, with the support of an early years professional, they can then do a skill independently which was once unachievable. A child may still need some support from their early years professional before they can independently access resources confidently and refine their skill through repetition and reinforcement. The independent access and choice increases motivation.

Adams (2006) suggests that for social constructivist pedagogy, the following principles should apply:

- Focus on learning not performance.
- View learners as active co-constructors of meaning and knowledge.
- Establish an early years professional pupil relationship built upon the idea of guidance and not instruction.
- Engage learners in tasks seen as ends in themselves and having implicit worth.
- Promote assessment as an active process of uncovering and acknowledging shared understanding.

This type of approach focuses on learning by doing, with early years professionals posing questions to the children whilst they are engaged in carrying out activities, in order to promote child reasoning. A constructivist approach moves away from the more traditional view of teaching in which early years professionals instruct children and then test them. A constructivist approach would involve experimentation and problem solving, and the children would actively make meaning when they engage with mistakes and problems. 'While knowledge entails fact and behaviour, it more fundamentally entails understanding and children actively construct their understandings through interaction with the physical and social world' (Kahn, 1999).



CASE
STUDY
#7

Our role at work

At one of our **UK settings** that has just introduced a forest environment, early years professional Tina (23) didn't have waterproof leggings. When her manager Joan began wearing them she copied and soon the children benefited from Tina being able to kneel on the ground when they were in the woods. Tina was also warm and comfortable so more relaxed. Tina was showing she was reflecting on her practice outdoors and Joan acknowledged this. Be an example for your colleagues, go outdoors, feel comfortable and enjoy! Your colleagues will most likely join you, too!

In outdoor kindergartens in Denmark, they have staff who are "fliers". These staff have cardboard planes on their arms and are available for children and other staff when they need support with toileting, bumped knees, getting resources or if they just need an extra pair of hands. The staff all have roles in the daily plan and will rotate core tasks.

In kindergartens in Estonia, there are three people per group of children. All 3 persons are available for the children all day. In one group there's one teacher, who is responsible for different activities and two assistants who are helping the teacher and are available for the children all the time. We have specialist teachers for music and gymnastics. Teachers are doing most of the activities in small groups, meanwhile assistants are playing or spending time with the other children. We try to guide children to be more independent and to discover and explore the world around them.





EXTENDED

Nature and creativity

CASE
STUDY
8

A reflection from a Danish Nature Kindergarten Manager Søren Emil
Markeprand- Stockholmsgave Centrum, Lyngby, Denmark

Over the last few years we have experienced an increasing interest in outdoor education and forest kindergarten in our setting near Copenhagen. We have visitors from Spain, Italy, Germany, England, USA, Canada, Australia, Korea, China etc. They are inspired by the Scandinavian approach to learning and development, where there is more freedom, play and fun and focus on creating life long learners. Denmark has been highly rated in recent years for having the happiest people in the world, and this has created an even greater interest in preschool and also outdoor education - and what the Danes are doing.

What makes them unique in the small country? The Danes are known for their innovation and creativity, among which the most famous brand LEGO stands for play and creativity.

When we have visitors in the kindergarten, we often end up talking about children's creativity and creativity pedagogy, it gives rise to a good debate about what creativity and nature can contribute to child development. In my understanding, the natural element in itself is creative and there are endless possibilities for being creative. Nature is unpredictable and in constant change - living in it requires attention





and a relationship to what is happening. When the child is in nature, for example, on a walk in the woods, the child must find a way through the forest floor, relate to where we are and where are we going? There is not a city planner or architect who has decided where we are going to move, but here is the child who can decide what it takes. It requires more creativity and at the same time stimulates the brain. In nature, things change constantly, it demands the child to act differently and when the child acts differently than usual, it gives it new experiences and stimulus for creative thought. That is what I consider to be creative creativity - finding new ways to act and thereby understand the world.

In Denmark, we see children's play as being very valuable for their learning and development and creation of important life skills. In play in the outdoor environment, the

child strengthens his language, his cognitive understanding, his emotional understanding, social interplay, and much more. When the child plays outdoors, he finds new things all the time. The world and wider community are part of this and they change the play by discussing roles, rules and the shape of the play. During this interaction the child changes perspective, this whole process requires the child to be creative in her understanding of others and the world, constantly creating whilst interacting with other children - creating during this interaction with others is for me evidence of a person who is creatively thinking. The natural environment is fantastic and maximizes creative thought, as it offers endless possibilities, there is room for physical exercise and the children can shape and play with natural materials.

In our Danish Nature Kindergarten we do not have many toys, so the children use a stick



for all sorts of things - it can be a sword, shovel, car, aircraft, tools - yes, it's just about being creative thinker - a stick can be almost anything. Nature is a treasure trove in itself and there are endless possibilities for being creative. There are natural materials all over the place where the child's creativity can be stimulated. There are leaves, sticks, stones, all the elements - many different colors, shapes etc. - many resources that you use in creative workshops and spend money on, can be found in nature. Nature can increase our curiosity, ideas, and different thinking.

Creativity is what we are going to need in the future to be adaptable - the ability to find new ways to live, understand the world, use materials in new ways and think - the ability to innovate - to perceive the world in new ways. Our job is to create an environment that is more stimulating for the whole child and we think that the natural outdoor environment is the best place for children to develop and learn.

Creativity - the opportunity to express oneself - to sense, to feel and create

ENABLING ENVIRONMENT

What do we mean by environment? For the sake of this handbook we are talking about the natural and material resources that we offer to support the children's development socially, physically, academically and emotionally. Examples of outdoor play and learning spaces vary hugely and this section aims to look at supporting your practice whether you have no outdoor space of your own or if you have a woodland and farm. All children can and should be taken outdoors.

Before we start remember that if you and your colleagues are happy and confident it will help you to create a positive environment for the children, so don't forget you need to be comfortable to sit and get down to the children's height. You need to make sure that whilst working outdoors you still have access to drinks and toilet breaks and are appropriately dressed for the weather. This might include shade during the summer months or warmth in the snow during the winter.



REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS

List the areas/environments in your surroundings that come to mind when thinking of ideal/possible outdoor activities.

Reflecting on your outdoors practice, here are some questions to ask yourself:

1. What available environment do I have for using the outdoor approach?
2. Is it the school yard, park, forest?
3. How often do I use it?
4. Is the access to this environment easy or difficult?
5. If it is difficult then what can be done to make it easier?
6. Where am I placed?
7. What impact is it having on the children?
Can I see everything? - If not is a colleague taking this role?





8. Do I feel confident with what we are doing? - If not what is worrying me and who can talk this through with?
9. What rules do we have outdoors?
10. Why do we have these rules?
11. Can we get rid of any rules?
12. How can I make sure I am using more positive affirmations?
13. Am I being consistent in my communications with children?
14. Are all the children accessing the outdoors?
15. Can I increase the numbers accessing outdoor play?
16. How much adult led activity is going on and how can I increase independent activity and play?
17. Can I extend their language development outdoors?
18. Are the resources open ended?
19. How am I documenting what I am seeing outdoors?
20. Are the children having time to develop and revisit their play and learning?





21. Are adult led activities at the right pace?
22. Am I setting realistic expectations?
23. Which physical environment best suits the outcome I want to achieve?
24. How can I work with parents and colleagues to better support children outdoors?
25. How do you use the outdoors in your planning?
26. Do your colleagues use the outdoors in their planning?
27. How do your children behave indoors after being outdoors?
28. What do you wear to work, is it good for the outdoors?
29. What areas of your curriculum would be fun to teach outdoors?
30. Have a read of the “Outdoors and the Environment” section?





6) Outdoors and the environment

INTRODUCTION

Whether you are a setting with little or no outdoor space or one with a woodland, there are lots of ways to make sure that children have access to nature and the outdoors. In this section we look at some key ways to extend your outdoor sessions no matter what the size of your outdoor space. We cannot tell you what will work for you and hope that this section will help guide you to where you and your setting want to be. Remember we as early years professionals plan, do and then review.





Where are we now?

When you are planning make sure you have taken time to explore your outdoor areas. 'Where are you now?' Your aim is to find out what is working well already, as well as what can be improved for the children's development and learning.

Start by observing the shapes and sizes of the different physical spaces; identifying existing or potential uses; note major features of the landscape, such as large areas of planting, main routes through and access points; where does the sun shine and where do the shadows fall? Which direction does the wind blow? Are there existing features you use all the time and others that never get used? What condition is everything in? Do you need to replace or repair items outdoors?

Listen and watch all the adults including parents in your setting to find out what they think and how they use the outdoors now.

Also, observe your children - where do they go and what do they do in the different spaces? Are there areas of the grounds they don't like to use?

As we become more experienced at this the flow of plan-do-review becomes more flexible and you will find yourself able to observe and plan during a session. Don't forget to jot these dynamic planning moments down in your reflections and don't be scared to let the children create their outdoor sessions.





SWOT Analysis

Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats

CASE
STUDY
#9

Here is one tool you could use to evaluate where you are now.

Strengths

e.g.

- Jo is keen to use the outdoors.
- Tommy's behaviour is better after being outdoors
- Yan's grandad is a gardener and has offered to work with the children
- There is a great forest area nearby
- At least one colleague is a nature lover
- Jo's parents are nature lovers/ sportspersons who could support efforts when starting with the outdoor approach...

Weaknesses

e.g.

- We only go out when the weather is warm
- Some staff don't like being outdoors
- Children don't come dressed for being outdoors
- the children don't like putting wet weather clothes on
- I don't know how to solve...
-

Opportunities

e.g.

- We have a park in walking distance of the settings
- We have a small concrete space outdoors the door

Threat

e.g.

- other users of the site won't want things left outdoors
- the parents are worried about the children being outdoors



CASE
STUDY
10

Where do we want to be?

In Denmark they develop profiles for their kindergartens which means that when they ask what they want their children to do at the kindergarten they can give confident replies that are linked to

- overall educational aims and objectives
- curriculum requirements
- access to the use of materials and other resources
- the type and range of outdoor space that is accessible
- the settings approach to teaching and learning outdoors
- the role of the adult

Here is how this might look:

A nature profile kindergarten

We cover the curriculum areas outdoors

We employ people with a passion for the outdoors

Children are outdoors for most of the day and everyday

We have parent work parties in the garden

We use the outdoors to inspire our creativity

A music profile kindergarten

We reflect on the curriculum areas using songs

All our staff play at least one musical instrument

Our children have access to music throughout their time with us

We do parent shows and singing sessions

We take music to all the environments we work in



The planning of your work outdoors should follow on from this. You will need to consider how this space should feel, what type of atmosphere you want to create and what your

outdoor area will look and feel like? What features and resources will it contain? How can the space reflect the ethos of your setting in the way your outdoors spaces are used?

TECHNIQUES AND IDEAS

If you are adjusting your own space (eg. schoolyard or nearby park) for outdoor activities, why not have some clipboards and pens ready for your little helpers to role play this with you during an outdoor play session. Take a doll or teddy bear outdoors and ask the children to show you where he/she would like to play, where they might go to sit in the sun,

to relax and take a rest, grow a flower/ herb/carrots, favourite walking route around the area or where is the best place to race a toy car, roll down a hill or climb? Encourage the children to help with the observations - getting their umbrella's out to show you where the wet places are or hot places are.





CASE
STUDY
11

Wider influences on a child's development

In Denmark and the UK they begin the session by asking children what they would like to be able to do - remembering that their experiences will be limited by what they have done before. It may well be that you want to introduce them to things they have never done before but don't forget to continue to develop the things they already enjoy. Questions may be more general, such as:

- What is your favourite thing to do

outdoors at your setting?

- What is your favourite thing to do outdoors at home or with your family or friends?

This technique can be repeated at the end of the session and complemented by children sharing what they have done during the session. It is a great way to extend reasoning and language skills around a curriculum area.

TECHNIQUES AND IDEAS

How can we get there?

As early years professionals we reflect after our sessions on how the session went and we use this to plan our next sessions. You might like to consider some of the following in your reflections on the outdoors:

What went well?

How might you zone your space so that noisy, active things don't overpower quieter areas? Make sure children can move easily from one space to another and give them a space at



the exit point of your building for them to take a moment to look around before deciding what they want to do and where they are going.

Find ways of incorporating nature into your space - bring items in from outdoors if you don't have space to grow very much, eg. a branch of a flowering cherry in the spring or conkers in the autumn. Don't forget to go outdoors into nature whenever you can, with your eyes, heart and mind open, using all your other senses too!

Storage is really important. If you can store things outdoors it will ensure they get used more often.

Where do you need space to sit either individually or in small groups?

Think about the need for shade and shelter and whether this be temporary like an umbrella or tarpaulin, or more permanent like a shade sail or pergola.

Do you have an outdoors tap and if not, where is the best place for this to be sited along with other features in your grounds? Do you need to fill water cans before your outdoor session?

If you are able to have free-flow between your building and outdoors you may want to think about heat loss, supervision and hooking doors back so that little fingers don't get pinched.

Make use of vertical spaces - walls, fences, hedges, structures - especially if your space is very small. This might be pictures or words on the wall, storage of play items or runner beans climbing up a fence.

Do you have things children can change? A sandpit, a mud kitchen or loose play equipment for den building for example.

How are younger children supported? Do they have something to pull themselves up on and begin to walk: do they have access to appropriate teething toys and a space where they will feel safe near to their key adults. Perhaps consider a blanket with treasure baskets, overhanging trees decorated for them to look at, sensory materials such as sand, water, gloop and cooked pasta to play with.



OUTDOOR EDUCATION ACTIVITY IDEAS



Making the changes to your planning

If you want to get outdoors more often the changes in your current practice can be very simple or if money allows you may be looking at larger landscape changes. Below are a few starting points to get you outdoors with your children.

Space description

Get outdoors

No outdoor space

Open windows to bring nature in. Organise walks to local parks or to buildings such as libraries, other settings or museums and churches and organise trips to areas with access to nature

Organise parent led activities that encourage children to go for walks and play outdoors with their families

Look at the resource boxes below to take to the park with you (why not use a backpack to carry a few things in children like to help with this job too)



Small outdoor space which has to be packed away



The above

plan activities using the simple resource boxes you can see below

Try to zone your play so that one type of play doesn't dominate another e.g. noisy area next to story telling camp or sleeping area

If possible create a space that has potted plants and growing areas, or small animals homes (goldfish, hamsters, turtles, rabbits, dog, ...)

Small or no outdoor space with lots of farmland and woodland



Above

get permission to access the land with the children

look at the case study below of a setting that uses the forest school approach

Medium to large outdoor space that only has steep slopes and is overgrown or covered with asphalt



Above

Look at the interview with the landscape architect below. Occasionally settings have no choice but to pull in a designer to enable a space to be accessible

Involve parents in the discussion on how to use the space

A medium to large outdoor space that has good access and has or could have lots of natural planting and mud

Above

Get them out! The children will use the natural materials to make their own activities



EXTENDED

Low cost resources

CASE
STUDY
12

In the UK some settings are “Put Away” settings where they have to put everything into storage. This might be because they are sharing space or they need to limit vandalism. Other settings

have large outdoor sites with woodland and open spaces. We have learnt that often what our children need is very simple and may not cost much money.

We have found that ideally these changes take advantage of the natural environment and resources that are open ended to extend children’s creative thinking skills. Sticks, leaves, long and short grass, mud and stones, pieces of wood and cones are all great resources for outdoor play. If you only have asphalt then why not bring in these natural materials.





Resource Ideas

In the UK Learning through Landscapes has produced a useful list of some resources children might like to play with.

Natural materials

Log slices, branch pieces
Wood off-cuts
Bamboo sticks
Big or small wooden pieces
Baskets
Shells
Pebbles, slate pieces etc
Cones
Polished pebbles
Cards to inspire, including lifecycle pictures
Small world animal toys

Den building

Blankets, curtains, bedspreads
Sheets, large pieces of muslin, net curtain material
Pegs and a basket
Pop up tent
Carpet tiles or off cuts
Cardboard inner tubes
Picnic blankets
Camouflage material
Baskets and bags
Suitcase, backpacks etc
Bamboo canes
Masking tape
Long and short ropes
String scissors, strong elastic bands
Torch, lamp, tea towels
Umbrellas

Pulleys

Once built think about

Music and books
Tea sets and other role play resources including writing materials

Art materials

Large pieces of thick plastic sheets
Plastic shower curtain and hooks
Transparent corrugated roofing
Ready mixed paint
Bed sheets
Decorators brushes
Household items such as a shower, mop, loofah, to apply paint
Chalks
Wallpaper
Big felt pens
Blow pens
Water spray bottles
Child sized carrying boxes

Music and movement dressing up and role play

Large and small pieces and strips of fabric
Sheets large pieces of muslin
Scarves
Ribbons
Small soft hair bands to tie fabric together
Feathers



Bubble mix and bubble wands

Music :

Carnival of the animals (St Saens), William Tell overture (Rossini),

Ride of the valkyries (Wagner), Bolero (Ravel) Carmina

Burana (Karl Orff), Carmen (Bizet)

Wrist bells

Hand held drum and beaters

Pots and pans or plastic buckets for drum beating

Old CD's for reflective light

Baskets to present the above in



Water

Hose and tap

Guttering and pipes

Guttering attachments

Umbrellas

Funnels and jugs

Buckets and basins

Spray bottles

Watering cans

Sieve and colander

Short pieces of hose

Squirty bottles

Bottles with and without holes in them

Decorators brushes



Mud

Old kitchen equipment

Child friendly furniture for role play

Gardening equipment

Small gloves

Flower pots

A builders tray (to contain some mess)

Bag of compost

Buckets

Clay





Get them out!

CASE
STUDY
13

Ruth Staples-Rolfe from Droxford Montessori, a private Montessori preschool based in England.

I began working at the pre-school 2 years ago and I chose to join the team because of the potential for working outdoors. I am not Montessori trained but my colleagues are all at least graduate level staff and I have found this has helped me to integrate my forest school approach into the Montessori principles.

The setting is rural and has a small outdoor garden. The garden has to be packed away because it is a shared space with other community groups. As a result of this my manager wanted me to help explore the potential of walk to spaces like the sports fields, woods and farmers fields. We also had to consider how we could make sure that the ethos of the setting continued into the outdoor spaces, this included:

- having Montessori qualified early years professionals
- allowing uninterrupted play for at least 2 hours
- children choosing to work together or on their own
- all children playing together from 2.5 to 4 years
- making observations of the children
- promoting freedom of choice and independence
- offering age appropriate activities and resources
- high quality resources displayed in an orderly, beautiful and simple way
- remaining positive with children
- having a ratio no higher than 1:8
- all staff first aid trained
- regular staff meetings and consultation over planning
 - all staff have job descriptions and adhere to an equal opportunities policy



Having worked in other settings I found this really supported my outdoor sessions. Obviously nature isn't always beautifully laid out and as controlled as the classroom but this adds to the fun, for example one of our favourite sessions is when the tractor appears to work the fields, or when the apples fall from the trees so that we can harvest them for jam.

Enabling differentiation does offer its challenges outdoors and we have found that having a blanket area as a base with nature baskets (full of natural objects) and resources suitable for 2 year olds (e.g. paper and crayons, clay, chalk, small world animals, puppets and a story or two) can complement a wider run around area for older children to explore and extend their level of risk. Having them all together really did enable us to see how far some younger children can develop in a more open and flexible environment like the wood. They want to be with the older children.

We love getting out of the setting but we have found that routines are still important so we allow time to establish the routine of getting ready. Having a snack and finishing the session with circle time, it is very popular and enables shared planning with children and staff.

My journey to this point has taught me I don't need to spend lots of money on materials or physical changes I just need to make the most of the natural world around us.





EXTENDED

An experts view

Mary Jackson Landscape Architect

CASE
STUDY
14

Very occasionally early years settings need bigger design projects so we interviewed a landscape architect. Mary Jackson is an experienced Landscape Architect who has supported many settings to change and use their outdoor spaces.

What does a designer or landscape architect need to know when we put a brief together?

The more information you can provide the better! A designer may ask for technical information such as where underground services run, who owns the land or are there any restrictions to change. He/she will also need to know what you are trying to achieve, what are your aims and objectives and your wishes for your children? - all of the things you looked at in the first two stages of the process.

There is a sample brief and guidance notes for writing a brief in this folder.

What lessons have you learnt from managing change projects?

Having a designer who understands what you want to achieve will make all the difference. So

don't just choose the cheapest person - really talk with them before you start and get them to show you what they have done before. Talk through your ideas, ask them to explain their first thoughts to you. Make sure you have an opportunity to comment on their designs and they have put in time to make changes to their proposals - don't be afraid to really ask tricky questions!

How can we fundraise for such a big project?

First look at different ways of reducing your costs. Can you get something at cost price or even donated for free perhaps by a local company? Make a list of the different items you need and see if anyone can help supply them. See if there are things you can do yourselves eg planting or painting. However, always make sure whoever is in charge knows what they are doing!

Investigate if there is a local company who will do some practical work for you - some firms like to contribute to their local community and may be looking for a project. Your local volunteer bureau may have more information about this.



and be successful then you can try something a little bigger next time.

Is there anything else I might want to consider before I start on a large scale change project?

Make sure you have an overall plan so that everything works together and remember to break it down, you don't have to do it all in one go. If you are starting from scratch you might be able to get a lot done right at the start but don't worry if you can't, your grounds will always be growing and developing and that means the children can get involved in helping to make the changes too.

Again, make sure it is something they have the skills and knowledge to do.

Look out for grants and awards that you can apply for or try crowd funding - start small





DID YOU KNOW

The Israeli longitudinal study (Tali Tali and Orly Morag, 2013) supports the UK's research which demonstrates the link between the way grounds are designed and managed and the attitudes and behaviour of the pupils, Special Places Special People (Titman, 1994)

Natural environments represent dynamic and rough playscapes. The topography, like slopes and rocks, affords natural obstacles that children have to cope with. The vegetation provides shelter and trees for climbing.

The meadows are for running and tumbling (Fjortoft, 2001).

Research has shown the educational benefits to be gained from learning in such an environment (O'Brien, 2006; O'Brien and Murray, 2007) and has also highlighted the added value of increased physical activity and well-being derived from the outdoor experience (O'Brien and Murray, 2007).





ENABLING ENVIRONMENT





TECHNIQUES AND IDEAS

Remember to have a couple of larger goals, but also set lots of small realistic targets when you are making changes to your outdoor sessions e.g. removing large physical play equipment is a big job but planting up some wellington boots with herbs can be done tomorrow. Having a wind resource box could be done by the end of the week and putting a

saucepan outdoors to collect the rain in can be done now.

Most of your activities will be done in the space adjacent to your building but don't forget to look beyond this to take children to walk to spaces such as the high street, a farm, the sea, lake/pond or a nearby forest/park.

REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS

1. When was the last time you stood and looked at the outdoors without children?
2. When was the last time you experienced the outdoors and felt it with all your senses?
3. Which of the resources did your setting have from this chapter?
4. How would you describe your settings profile?
5. What do you want to be able to do in your setting? (not 'What do you want to have?')





e.g. Have contact with nature every day, be physically active and have physical challenges to try out, develop their language and mathematical skills, develop their understanding of the world around them, have opportunities for problem solving, develop their creativity, develop their social skills, increase their motivation for learning and increase their motivation for being outdoors!

What would you like children to experience outdoors?

e.g. discover the changes in nature, feel the rain, wind, sun, cold, mud, touch the leaves, flowers, bugs, learn about trees, distinguish the colours and their shades, observe the ants, bees,

learn about the life cycles, see the clouds, fog, rainbow stars...learn about them..and discover the happiness in being outdoors in all the seasons and weathers!

And now, please, make your own list...!

How do you involve children in the planning and reflection of your outdoor sessions?

How are you going to get the children outdoors more?

Why not complete a short SWOT analysis for your setting looking at the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats you have for your outdoor provision.

Strengths

Weaknesses

Opportunities

Threats





7) Overcoming barriers and red tape

INTRODUCTION

In every country there are barriers to getting outdoors and the adult's role is crucial in overcoming them. Our "Why Take Me Out" reflects some of the lessons we have learnt but this section looks at why we may have reached this understanding.

COMMON BARRIERS

Staff don't like being outdoors

The partners of Take Me Out will continue to advocate for the outdoors to be part of every national curriculum/included in guidance documents for this age group. In the meantime recruitment and planning is crucial to overcoming this barrier and in Denmark and the UK early years professionals know it is an expectation they will be outdoors and are therefore expected to dress appropriately.

Staff don't feel safe outdoors

Staff can be supported by visits to other settings to see how they manage risk positively and through modelling and support by

managers and more senior staff. Both early years professionals and children must be trained how to deal with first aid outdoors in this field. Take a look at our Risk section.

Children reluctant to leave indoor environment

Sometimes it is the role of the early years professional to show children the benefits of being outdoors. Often using transitional toys or incentives of food or favourite routines or activities can be enough but for younger children you may need to support them through sensory issues, for example not wanting to put boots on or change their clothing.



Sometimes it may need a gradual transition into new environments and for time to be allowed for children going through this stage in their development. Often other children are huge motivators and if you encourage children to unknowingly get ready together it can really help more reluctant children.

Staff not sure how to evaluate activities outdoors

Staff are unsure how to support the use of information technology or the wider needs of the curriculum.

The aspiration is that all countries should embed the outdoors into early years professional training but we know that this

is not always the case. Modelling of how staff can be accountable for their outdoor work is essential. This might come from other settings or it might be that new staff are recruited with outdoor expertise. It may be that the new staff need to shadow existing champions in the outdoors.

The planning can help identify the best environment to support children's development so for example the garden may be the obvious place to support knowledge and understanding of the world or looking after yourself. School readiness can be supported by toilet training during outdoor sessions and getting ready to go outdoors.





Experience of a Slovak practitioner

CASE
STUDY
#15

My name is Ivica. I do my dream job, which I truly enjoy. I'm a kindergarten teacher in Slovak republic. In my work, I use all possible and accessible modern technologies and methods, including an interactive whiteboard. I was convinced that I cannot provide my children with anything more.

I would like to share with you the experience of my understanding of the TAKE ME OUT project. I had the opportunity to be part of the training that was held in Stirling, Scotland, in the fall of 2017.

The principle of the project is that children spend most of their time outside and teachers use this opportunity as much as possible in any educational activity.

You may say - it is impossible. My initial thoughts were the same. I thought about the day structure we have to follow at our school. Early morning games, morning exercise, then morning snack, work, lunch and finally, outdoor play? that we do not often really even care about.

I named the first nursery that we visited in Scotland an "asphalt" one. The whole area was covered with asphalt. I admit that I could not imagine at first how the kids could be working there. In each area of the small campus, children had created a concrete "location"/point of interest. The child could choose what they like doing. On one site they played with wood. They learned math there. They weighed, measured, assembled, combined ... all possible mathematical operations. I immediately imagined our nursery children as they sit in the classroom above their workbook. I got embarrassed, how I bother them. In our school we have much bigger area that has more greenery than the one we visited, and still this "asphalt" nursery offered children more, really many more opportunities to learn and play, than our campus does.



Can you imagine that children in a nursery climb trees? In some of the nurseries in Scotland it is quite normal. The answer to our safety-related questions was “each child is able to evaluate and estimate their own skills and is therefore safe.” It is so true. Not only when climbing a tree. No teacher knows what the child is capable of. The simplest and most convenient way for us is to ban children having this experience.

When we visited another outdoor nursery, I already started to imagine how I can begin to change our premises/school yard. Children had an out-built den there. Built from laces and covered with sail. They had a tunnel from the willow wand. So many options out there!

During the stay, we really saw and experienced a lot. My best experience? In the woods we cooked lunch. I could not imagine what we would do all day in the woods. I have found that the activities and the fun that the forest offers are tremendous.

I know our public nursery system is all about structure and routines you have to follow. That teachers have to keep their plans and stick to what’s been used there for years. I was convinced that taking children outside was impossible.

What do colleagues who are accustomed to doing the same thing for 20 years say? What will parents think when we have to deal with them on any small issue? What would the nursery director say?





These were my day-to-day questions and considerations of why taking children outside was not possible.

When our weekly stay in Scotland was coming to an end, my questions were answered. It is more convenient for us to not challenge the system, colleagues, parents and director. And search for the ways and reasons of why we cannot do the things,

But when one wants, everything is possible.

After returning home, I had tremendous courage and motivation to make my children happier.

It is true that this cannot be done all at once, but it must start somewhere. We've built a den with our children at the courtyard and we are gradually changing the yard to different locations. We already cooked and ate the soup outside together with children. Parents and children were so enthusiastic about it. Eat together a soup, on which preparation the children were involved and seeing their empty plates after eating is definitely a more exquisite experience, than eating a soup in the dining room and taking away their full plates. And nursery manager? She had absolutely no problem with it. You can do anything, if the kids are happy, the parents are happy, and the happy manager is just a cherry on the cake.

Do not worry about trying new things. Do not be afraid to make the kids happy.

Take children outside!

Ivica Podhradská, Elementary School with Kindergarten at Revín, Bratislava, Slovak republic







EXTENDED

CASE
STUDY
16

Information Technology outdoors

With IT the equipment can be used as a tool in the outdoor environment. Examples we have gathered are shown below:

| Technology tool | Application in the outdoors |
|------------------------------|---|
| Tablet | Check the weather and UV levels Photos Recording observations Music/ recorded word Recording sounds/recorded sounds (eg.birds, animals) |
| Camera | Photos/videos |
| Phone | Knowing how to make an emergency call |
| Small robots | Programming simple instructional language |
| Digital microphones/speakers | Recording Sharing Replaying Following instructions/trails |

Some of the early steps to computer programming are best achieved through puzzles, building and understanding simple grouping, sequencing and cause and effect. The outdoors is a great space to facilitate this sort of play without technology.

Cautionary note: do not let technology take over play indoors or out, allow children to

have limited access to it but be aware of its benefits in small doses. In the UK we have also become careful to safeguard the children from inappropriate mobile phone use especially when adults irresponsibly use social media. Please, do not forget that while working with children, your mobile phones should not be the centre of your attention.



There aren't enough staff

We have learnt that having enough staff is important to support children, but it is not a must. In the UK and Denmark this is around 1:4 but can go up to 1:8. For the under 2's this is higher again. In Denmark and the UK, it often happens that you have 10 - 15 children playing outdoors and only 1 adult at a time watching them, with other adults on hand if/as needed.

Key things to consider are lines of sight. Try establishing a base for younger children so that a key member of staff can watch and be available when they need them. The key is being on tap and not on top of play. In some settings we have also found that too many staff can stop children developing their own creative play. Observe your children and see what works for your setting and children in a particular group. Ages and personalities can impact on the number of staff you would ideally have.

Ideally there will be enough staff to allow for a child approaching an adult to be supported to

develop their play further or taken to the toilet or have a bumped knee sorted out. If you don't have many staff make sure the person at their base has a basic first aid kit, changing materials, food, water and they don't have to leave the group to access these things.

There isn't enough time

If it feels like you are always rushing why not look at the routines that are making it feel like this. How long is a session? How much is adult led time? If you want to get children outdoors more make this a priority. Can you have a shorter circle time? Can the children have their snack outdoors instead of indoors?

Outdoor activities are organised so that children can have enough time to develop their creativity and this is managed through time management by staff. Early years professionals facilitate and create situations for play and ideas enabling the preconditions for outdoor activities.

If the space is set up in advance this will also save time and allow children to get into play quickly. You might consider sand pits, flower and vegetable beds, piles of rocks, water, a mud kitchen, a fireplace or a summer house etc. Tools for exploring and experimenting are vital. Why not look at our resource boxes in our outdoors and environment section?





There isn't money to develop the outdoor space

There are many examples throughout this handbook, it doesn't have to be expensive and ideally should not tie up lots of staff.

I can't get staff to change what they have been doing for years

An obstacle can be changing the mindset of the early years professional. Most of them are victims of old habits and have negative attitudes towards new challenges. Training and full support from management and other early years professionals should help to overcome the fear. Modelling is essential and making sure that you are aware of their strengths can really help them to find a comfortable starting point, for example, "Sue please could you take the craft into the garden today" or "could you tell a story whilst I am lighting the fire?"

To support motivation, why not have staff days outdoors together with your colleagues, without the children.

Parents aren't sure about their children going outdoors

Creating the setting and environment for outdoor learning is easier when achieving good co-operation

from parents. For outdoor work it must be done with parents who have to provide their children with all the necessary clothing and footwear and who understand the benefits of outdoor education (healthier and stronger children). Convince them that it is good for their children to spend time outdoors in all seasons and weather conditions, including winter.

Making sure that the outdoors features in promotional materials, introductory publications for parents and that staff greeting them are dressed appropriately for the outdoors all conveys messages that you are committed to the outdoors being part of what you do.

In the UK some settings have bought waterproof clothing to help support parents financially. It is important to know the types of families in your community and what their needs might be.





Good outdoor settings that allow plenty of opportunities to talk to key staff and share experiences really help to ensure that problems don't arise indoors or outdoors. These opportunities could be at the drop off and pick up point or during parent consultations or open days.

In Denmark and the UK they also have outdoor work parties to encourage parents to experience the outdoor spaces with their children, have shared ownership for changes and get to know staff in a less formal way.

ENABLING ENVIRONMENT





TECHNIQUES AND IDEAS

Keep it simple. For settings with very few staff you could start by bringing nature into the setting. Let your colleagues experience the outdoors to boost their motivation with a walk, a visit or perhaps a staff meeting in the garden. Slowly get the whole group out into a secure outdoor area which can be seen as another classroom. Your resources can be simple to start with.

In the UK, when they introduced outdoor play as a daily activity in all settings, some

settings used building site barriers as cheap and secure fencing around areas of the car park. Children could then get outdoors into a secure space. Today nearly all settings have purpose built, secure outdoor spaces.

In 'Our role of the manager' section we talk about policy development and leading by example to dispel some of the myths that can be created if the above is not managed carefully.





8) Parental Involvement Outdoors

INTRODUCTION

The importance of getting parents involved with their children's learning should never be underestimated.

When we ask parents what they enjoyed doing outdoors as children it can bring back many happy memories of play which are often mischievous and may be unknown by their own parents! The feelings of happiness and sharing of stories is a great way to encourage parents to join in with planned activities. It is also a great time to ask "Why would you not want this for your child". Memories can be made now.





DID YOU KNOW

Parental and setting involvement in getting children outdoors was proven to raise attainment at settings in the USA

“Parents can and should facilitate their kids

spending regular time outdoors, but settings will need to step up too. By doing so, settings will produce better educated students with stronger life skills.” (Coyle, 2010)

Lessons taken from our Scottish partners

CASE
STUDY
17

Ryley (3) had a fear of “what was around him”. When out and about he held dad’s hand very tightly. Dad was apprehensive about Ryley’s reaction to coming along to our woodland days. The change in Ryley after a few weeks was heart warming. His whole personality appeared to change when he went through the entrance to our greenspace, with confidence brimming he led a small group of children to the best bug hunting areas. Dad had seen the change in Ryley when in the woodland and they try to use the area as often as they can as a family.

So in taking Ryley and Dad (Pete) on our woodland days they both see the

importance of being outdoors and Pete saw the positive effect it had on Ryley.

Pete became a big part of the setting’s regular outdoor sessions, encouraging and helping other parents to join a group of families taking their children out to a local greenspace to enjoy quality time together. The impact on both Ryley’s confidence and therefore learning, was huge. Would Pete have taken Ryley without the support of the setting - No was his response...

Using Pete to chat with other parents about what his family got out of joining the group will be more beneficial than using staff.



ENABLING ENVIRONMENT

Parents need to feel welcome and we have found that cooking outdoors and celebrations outdoors are a great way to engage with parents. Why not have a simple open evening where children can celebrate and show their parents around the outdoor space or a trip once a term that enables children to introduce their friends to their parents on a walk, picnic or visit to a local farm.

TECHNIQUES AND IDEAS

If need be providing waterproof clothing to parents can take away a barrier. The experience has to be fun for parents too. Don't forget grandparents. Let the parents book the kindergarten and if appropriate use it as a community resource.





REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS

1. Read the following examples of parents comments to outdoor play and activities of children. What would you, in the position of early years professional, say or tell to these parents?
2. Jane is a 5 year old child who went with the other children from their pre-school for a walk into the nearest forest. During the walk the early years professional noticed a worsening of health and likely allergy possibly due to the forest visit. After returning back to the setting the early years professional called the parents to inform them about the situation. The mother of the child said that she had not witnessed any allergy until now, probably because they hadn't been in the forest with Jane, even though Jane is 5 years old and lives approximately 1 km from the nearest forest.
3. Mum of little Jack, a 4 year old cheerful boy who likes to play outdoors, asked early years professionals not to let him play outdoors in the sand in the afternoon, because she takes him directly to a coffee shop after school and the sand falls from him which makes her embarrassed in front of her friends and other visitors of the coffee shop.
4. Parents of Tony tell you they do not want him to go outdoors more often as he/she can get cold, dirty or hurt.





9) Evidence and evaluation



INTRODUCTION

It does not seem to matter where you work these days there is always paperwork and someone asking you to prove that you are doing a good job. Being outdoors does not stop this happening and we hope you can grab a few tips from us below. We are not exploring academic methodologies in this section but simple tools that can be used in a busy setting on a daily basis.



DID YOU KNOW

Process that illustrated evidence as an outcome of the 'learning experience' i.e. a conscious shift in the child's way of thinking, doing, experiencing, feeling, interacting or responding (Malone, 2008).

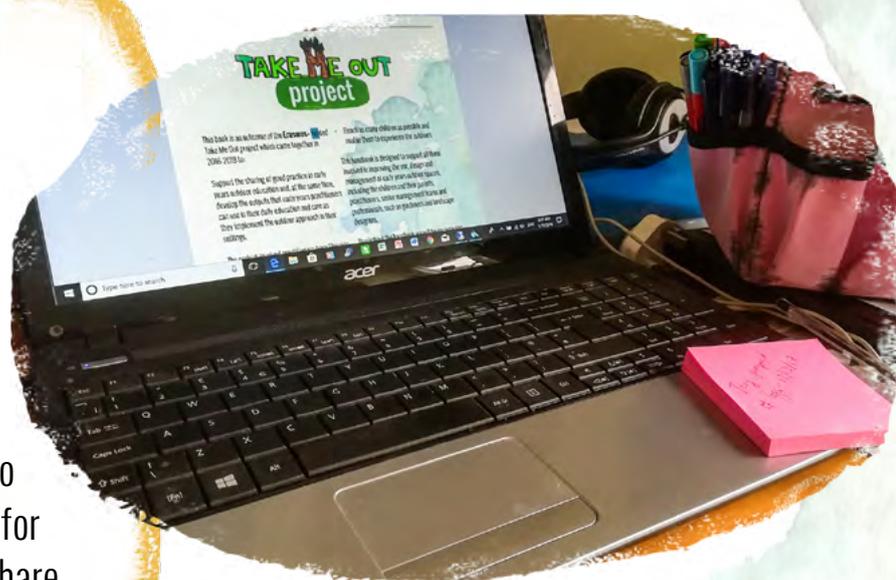
CASE STUDY # 18

In the UK and Denmark the early years practitioners have developed a range of data gathering techniques. They agree that the most important thing is to not try and record everything. The children still need you! Be sure about why you are collecting information and who it will be for. Here are a few of the reasons we collect information as evidence for:

- Curriculum accountability and inspections
- Evidencing that we are inclusive
- Parent reports
- Staff personal development plans and evaluation of impact of changes you have made to your setting
- Children building their ability to reflect and develop reasoning skills
- Evidence for external funders
- Marketing

ENABLING ENVIRONMENT

You don't need much to gather information. Why not try post-it notes in your pocket to write down observations, a setting camera being made available to all staff for short films and photos or using peer to peer surveys between staff on attitudes towards the outdoors. Build in short questions when talking to colleagues over coffee and make time for staff to catch up with each other and share observations.





TECHNIQUES AND IDEAS

Children should be consulted too. Some settings are using software on mobile phones such as Baby days - this can be useful but make sure your children are still safe guarded while you use your mobile phone or other devices for data recording.

REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS

1. How do you evaluate your indoor plans? Can these techniques be used outdoors? If not, how can you adjust these to be used outdoors?
2. Do you feel your evaluation techniques affect the play of the children?
3. Do you know why and when you need to make these evaluations?
4. Is evaluation in your planning?
5. Which of the techniques above do you already use? Could you use any of the others?



10) Early years managers and leaders of the outdoor approach



INTRODUCTION

Whether you are managing a huge setting or running a woodland based setting with a small group of children there are key things we need to make sure are in place for children to access the outdoors. This section should be used with the section entitled ‘A positive approach to risk and challenge’.



DID YOU KNOW

Leaders of outdoor education all have similar traits. They are confident, knowledgeable and enthusiastic in the outdoors. The UK Government Research into learning outdoors the classroom stated.

“When planned and implemented well, learning outside the classroom contributed

significantly to raising standards and improving pupils’ personal, social and emotional development.” (Ofsted, 2008). This was as a result of good planning and evaluation and reflection. They recommended that it be linked to the curriculum and existing policies of the setting.



CASE
STUDY
19

What does a good manager do?

So how can early years managers find or enable good leaders of outdoor sessions. We explored this as a group and discovered:

- Early years managers need to take into consideration the location, neighbourhood and children of the setting
- The early years manager needs to convey that the outdoors is an essential part of their setting and practice.
- The importance of the recruitment process and selection of staff with previous life experiences and a shown commitment to being outdoors
- Outdoor play should be embedded in existing policies but these need to acknowledge the outdoors, e.g. staff need to be dressed appropriately for working outdoors, recruitment of staff needs to reflect the expectation that staff will be outdoors, planning should use the most appropriate space both indoors and outdoors, how children are encouraged to assess risk
- Management modelling and the setting of expectations in the outdoors including their dress and relationships with children in the outdoor sessions
- Opportunities and time for staff to follow their own as well as common interests, develop high quality resources and share their enthusiasm for the outdoors. This may include supervision time and professional development targets specifically linked to the use of the outdoors
- Staff confidence in their managers to back them up and support them when outdoor improvements are needed both financially and emotionally
- A calmness, confidence and flexibility in the way early years managers work and how transitions into and out of the indoor spaces are made. This includes being responsive to the children's ups and downs on different days and flexible with routines and plans
- An ability to calm staff and children and enable sensible decisions to be made when a dynamic situation changes outdoors
- A good approach to plan, do, review cycles to enable all staff to reflect and improve what they are doing



ENABLING ENVIRONMENT

If early years managers create a feeling of safe working practices and have the confidence of their staff, they can take children into a range of environments to give them real life learning experiences. Pre visits and an awareness of weather conditions is always recommended.

TECHNIQUES AND IDEAS

Get out and improve your knowledge of your local walk to spaces as well as your garden. Do your Risk Benefit Analysis and have a clear health and safety policy to work to. Why not pull in grandparents and parents to help if necessary. Just be aware that you can also have too many adults.





REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS

1. Does your recruitment process and other existing policies reflect your attitude towards getting outdoors?
2. Does your Risk Benefit Analysis include the outdoor space and walk to spaces?
3. How much time do children spend in adult led activity and child led activity in outdoor sessions?
4. Do you involve parents and carers in maintenance and small scale construction in your outdoors space?
5. Do children get out everyday and for enough time to enable deep play experiences?
6. Are children and staff dressed for the outdoors? (enabling to get dirty, stay warm/cool, move freely and limit cuts and grazes or bites)
7. Are staff keen to work outdoors?
8. What support do you think staff need from you to improve their use of the outdoors?





The impressions

from one day visit of Stockholmsgave Centrum, Denmark
Janka, INAK, Slovakia

EXTENDED

CASE
STUDY
20

It is 8.30 am. 66 children aged 3 - 5, dressed in comfortable clothes, after being brought by their parents, usually on bikes, to a meeting point in Copenhagen, are lined up, accompanied by their teachers, patiently waiting for a bus. It will bring them to Stockholmsgave Centrum, one of the 50 outdoor kindergartens located in Denmark.

After being seated in a bus, children receive the instructions for the day. After about 25 minutes drive, leaving the city of Copenhagen behind, they get off in the premises of their second home - outdoor kindergarten. Each day, they spend about 6 hours here. Kindergarten has a children-friendly building, enabling easy transition between the indoors and outdoors and is surrounded by large natural open space where they can play, develop their skills, learn and relax. After the morning routine of eating bread and cheese the children put on their outdoor overalls, with more or less visible signs of their frequent use in all weather conditions, and start hanging around the outdoor area, while developing their own small activities that this natural environment provides them with (running, skipping, swinging, climbing, jumping, hiding in a shelter, constructing, digging, observing, planting, painting etc. - with natural

materials that can be found in the area, as well as using some of the tools and toys provided - swing, bounces, gardening tools, cleaning tools...).

At first, there are only a few children outside. Gradually more of them appear. The rest of them have their activities inside. Some of the teachers hang around the outside area too, also dressed in their outdoor clothes, not interrupting the children - led activities but calmly observing, making sure all of the children are comfortable and safe in what they are doing.

At about 10:00, all the children are outside with all the teachers. The outside teacher - led activities start in smaller groups. One of the teachers prepares lunch. Once a week it is cooked outside, on an open fire. Children who are interested, can help with preparation of the meal, while all of them have the possibility to get involved in this process. Today, rice with minced meat is being cooked under the supervision of one of the teachers. While lunch is being prepared a group of children participates in "Ninja" activity, developing particular physical and mental skills, such as balance, concentration and waiting for



your turn. Another group of children is sitting on a bench, learning to use the knives for accumulating their wooden sticks, under teacher's supervision. On the wooden benches, next to the open kitchen, a group of children is sitting next to their music teacher, playing the guitar, singing.

In the area, apart from wooden house and open fireplace, there are also large wooden containers for growing herbs and vegetables while children participate in planting, caring and harvesting process. Also, they get involved in cleaning works around the area, too. In this way, children are actively involved in the real-life situations and processes.

Inside of the building, on the walls, the pictures of natural species, eg. bees, and their life cycles can be found, too. Also, the insect larvae are used to observe the life cycles. In this way, learning here is just a very natural process.

While children are involved in their outside activities, a "teacher on day duty", wearing a sign on his/her arm, walks among the children, observing, making sure every child is comfortable in their wellbeing, in what they are doing, dressed properly for the weather conditions. All the teachers, including men and women, rotate their positions of activity leaders and kitchen staff during the week.

When the lunch is ready, at about 11.45 a'clock, the children sit at the tables and eat, together with their teachers. All of this happens outside.

After lunch time, outside activities continue. (eg. Feeding the chickens, watering the greenhouse, coloring paper, painting with mud)

All this happens in a very calm, natural way, without any stress.

At about 3pm., after spending most of their day outside, the school bus drives the children back to the city of Copenhagen, back to their parents.

For all of us, to become "learners" in Stockholmsgave centrum, for at least one day, it was a truly rewarding, valuable and inspiring experience. We are glad and thankful we could have done it, wanting to become children again, attending the outdoor kindergarten!





EXTENDED

An example half term plan

CASE STUDY # 21

A forest school half term plan in the UK might look like this:

This plan is taken from a setting in the UK where one morning a week is spent in a woodland within walking distance of the setting. The children get back to the setting for lunch and quiet time before having another play session in the afternoon.

The risk benefits have been done in advance and

exceptional risks are added in the daily plan. Staff share roles and these are shown on a whiteboard in the kitchen, so staff know what they will be doing. The plans are meant to be flexible and can be adapted as the half term progresses. These reflections are recorded. This plan enables effective resourcing and budgeting and enables good coverage of the curriculum areas. It complements plans from the rest of the week. It is written by early years managers in consultation with their staff and uses staff strengths.

| Curriculum links: | | Our world around us: animals in our woodland, looking at what animals need Looking after ourselves: getting ourselves dressed Looking at books: The Gruffalo | | |
|-------------------|---|--|--|--|
| Week | Circle activities | Adult supported activity | Resources | Evaluation methods (to inform future planning and parent consultations) |
| 1 | Read The Gruffalo story Discuss woodland animals | Gruffalo mask making Animal puppets for outdoors Walk to the woods | Masks String Coloured pencils Puppets | Observations of play to see if they show awareness of animals (watch for Photos mis-conceptions and adjust plans as appropriate) |



| | | | | |
|---|---|--|--|---|
| 2 | Read the Gruffalo child Discuss the emotions | Gruffalo animal necklaces made from wood Gruffalo story trail Woodland play session | Wooden discs Drill for children to drill holes (add to risk benefit) Story trail | Discussions with key children during the session to see what they remember reflective work in circle. |
| 3 | Gruffalo story Talk about the animals in this story | Gruffalo stakes to identify possible Gruffalo character homes (hammer them in) Satellite maps Walk older children to identify where the homes are Make log pile homes | Mallets (add to risk benefit) Stake signs for each character home Stakes for the log pile home Small sticks for log pile homes Satellite maps laminated and stickers | Observation of their awareness of sense of place with older children Observation of use of tools in younger children Reflective questions in circle of what they remember doing last week |
| 4 | Read Hide and Seek by Julia Donaldson Counting songs | Revisit Gruffalo animal homes Play hide and seek | Low resource week to reflect staff on training | observe X children counting |
| 5 | Read the Gruffalo story Plan the picnic | (a flexible week to respond to the play observed and needs of the group) | (a flexible week to respond to the play observed and needs of the group) | (a flexible week to respond to the play observed and needs of the group) |



| | | | | |
|---|--|---|--------------------------------------|---|
| 6 | Prepare the picnic Celebrate the term with a reflection diary entry (book with photos and childrens drawings) | Gruffalo picnic Party games Woodland play | TO BE CONFIRMED (food for picnic) | Photos Smiles of children having fun |
|---|--|---|--------------------------------------|---|

The plan aims to make sure that maths language and stories are integrated and that each half term skills are revisited e.g. drilling, hammering. Where possible these activities are revisited by the children on other days of the week too, to enable repetition, reinforcement and increasing independence.

This plan fits into the weekly plan for the setting that might look something like this but may be edited as the week progresses:

| | Mon | Tues | Wed | Thurs | Fri |
|---------------------------------|-----------------------------|------------------------------|--------------------------------|------------------------------|--------------------------|
| <i>Door and register</i> | Chris | Scarlett | Jorje | Chris | Sue |
| <i>Activities</i> | Yoga - Garden Indoors | Cooking Garden Indoors | Gardening Garden Indoors | Spanish garden Indoors | Forest School Indoors |
| <i>Circle</i> | Scarlett | Chris | Sue | Jorje | Ruth |
| <i>Nappies</i> | Jorje | Sue | Lucy | Scarlett | Chris |
| <i>Lunch Clean up</i> | Lucy | Jorje | Chris | Lucy | Sue |
| <i>Quiet time/ nap time</i> | Jorje | Lucy | Scarlett | Chris | Jorje |
| <i>Activities</i> | Indoors Garden | Indoors Garden | Indoors Garden | Indoors Garden | Indoors Garden |
| <i>Planning</i> | Jorje | Lucy | Scarlett | Chris | Scarlett |
| <i>Circle</i> | Jorje | Sue | Lucy | Scarlett | Chris |
| <i>Nappies</i> | Scarlett | Chris | Sue | Jorje | Ruth |



| | |
|--|--|
| <p><i>Other notes (linked to key workers notes and individual needs)</i></p> | <p>Fit in a trip to the park Circle plans to help awareness what animals need Ducklings should be with us Forest school still looking at homes and the Gruffalo Outdoors - have out waterplay, mini beasting, den building materials Gardening harvest strawberries, plant out beans Continue object counting games/songs from 1-5 Sound box this week "b"</p> |
|--|--|

Staff are used to rotating to make sure their staffing reflects the interests of the children. Some days they need more staff indoors and on other days they have more children outdoors and the staff go with them.

The daily routine might look like this.

Look out for: helping the children look at our ducklings

| | |
|--|---|
| <p>Staff arrive at the setting between 7.30 and 8.30</p> | <p>Refresh resources, write up any observations and reflections for plans, have supervisions and work together to make sure the setting is ready for a 9am start.</p> |
| <p>9am the children arrive with parents</p> | <p>Hang their outdoor clothes up and put on their slippers Staff settle children into their chosen activities, some like to watch, others will do.</p> <p>The activities reflect the developmental needs and the curriculum links highlighted in planning. Children freely choose what they want to access e.g. stories, art table, sand trays, life skill trays, number and letter games. New children are given more adult support to do this. The children self access snack and drinks throughout the morning until 11.00</p> |
| <p>9.30 the back door opens into the garden and children continue to make their choices as to what they want to play with</p> | <p>One adult will be involved in an organised activity and each child will be asked if they would like to take part e.g. yoga, gardening (most children want to) but sometimes they choose to stay playing in the garden or other area of the nursery. (sleepy children are supported to access mattresses in a quiet corner if necessary).</p> |



| | |
|------------------|--|
| 11.30 | The adults begin to set up a circle and do any nappy changes, the children join in their own time and enjoy a circle with a mixture of stories, songs, reflections and curriculum input. This is planned by different teachers and fits the planning for the week. |
| 12.00 | Lunch time children bring packed lunches and sit indoors or outdoors depending on the weather. |
| 12.30-1pm | The children are encouraged to have some quiet time with books and an area to lie down/nap if they need to. |
| 13.00 | The children again self access the resources indoors and outdoors often being given the opportunity to go for a walk with 2 members of staff to the park. |
| 14.30 | The children join the teacher for reflection, songs and stories linked to curriculum input. The last nappies and clearing away takes place. |
| 15.00 | The children are collected |
| 16.00 | Most staff have left although often they prepare resources at home in response to their observations. |

Reflection

Think about your daily routine where do you use the outdoors?

| Time | Adult led activities and child accessible resources - staffing |
|-------------|---|
| | |
| | |
| | |
| | |
| | |
| | |

11) A positive approach to Risk and Challenge

INTRODUCTION

In this chapter we will visit the area of risk and challenge in play. It is important to note that in discussing this we are speaking of physical, social and emotional challenges and risk taking. Examples can be jumping off a log, building new friendships and performing new skills in front of their peers and adults.

We have two main issues to consider when thinking about risk and challenge:

The first is understanding and communicating the benefits, immediate

and long term, children experiencing risk and challenge. Risk is often approached from a negative and value-laden model of risk. This approach means that all risk or challenge should be reduced or removed, and is then measured by its absence.

However in education we now take a more positive model, looking at the benefits of risk and challenge to our learners.





DID YOU KNOW

“If children are to be allowed the freedom to play outdoors again, and gain all the social, emotional and physical benefits this brings, then they need to learn how to take risks and keep themselves safe.”

Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents (UK)

“Access to active play in nature and outdoors – with its risks – is essential for healthy child development”

Position Statement on Active Outdoor Play, Canadian Government (Tremblay, Mark S. et al., 2015)

Children making good choices

CASE
STUDY
22

Learning the practical skills of making decisions about risk and challenge, is vital to a child’s development. One of the roles of education is to support this through appropriate contexts and opportunities.

In challenging themselves, children learn to manage their emotional response to failure and success. Experiencing self-concern and reasonable levels of fear, as well as the triumph of success or enjoyment, is therefore helpful in preparing children to be more resilient in emotions and mental health as adults.

We work in an environment where adult concerns for the children’s wellbeing and avoidance of failure can be very immediate and driven by powerful emotions. How

we work with our colleagues and parents needs to be effective enough to overcome some of our innate concerns and response. This positive approach can challenge the dominant narrative of ‘risk is bad’, therefore we need be trained and grounded in the genuine risks, as well as the learning benefits.

“A child in pre-school age uses a common sense and has a lot of pleasure from it. We, however, enter his world and impose upon him our forms of thought. He doesn’t like it, but he adapts to it. Even so, in time, as if that common sense was lost. He no longer wants to think, instead of it he is saying: Show me the formula, show me the rule to follow. But that’s not just our problem, it’s a global problem.” (Hejný, 2011)



11a) Our Legal and moral duties to provide risk

INTRODUCTION

The second issue is to ensure we meet our legal and moral duty of care for the children in our care. Each country has its own set of policies and controls - and complying with them is non-negotiable. However safety does not happen by accident, nor does it happen by having excessive paperwork or rules. Within these controls we are permitted and encouraged to make sensible judgements. The role of the adult is not of a robot following rules, but of a trained and thoughtful practitioner responding to a dynamic, child led situation.

In being positive about challenging our children and supporting them in taking these risks, we must also understand that on occasion there will be minor harm and frights. This level of ethically and legally acceptable risk need to be shared as a community of children, parents and early years professionals to avoid every minor issue being seen as a problem.





DID YOU KNOW

“Bumps, bruises, tumbles and falls are part of learning and we must not succumb to overwhelming anxiety or recklessness.”
Helen Tovey, 2008

In Scotland the Care Inspectorate of nurseries has a policy that opportunity for risk and challenge should be a daily occurrence for children. Children here have a right to ‘freely chosen play in high quality outdoor spaces, which includes contact with nature, risk and challenge on a daily basis’. This policy reflects the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. When inspected, early years professionals are expected

to demonstrate how this happens in their practice and how it is supported in policy. <https://www.unicef.org/crc/>

Nature Kindergartens **in Denmark** and Forest Schools **in the UK** actively encourage children to learn how to use tools such as fire, knives and saws. This is done to enable children to independently be creative and solve problems. The practitioners are confident and support children to manage their own risks. This is the same approach to supporting children to assess risks in climbing trees (knowing that some trees or branches aren't safe and how high to climb).





TECHNIQUES AND IDEAS

On occasion there may be incidents that we see as unacceptable. If an incident occurs, we will therefore want to understand the emergent influences and factors that lead to an incident - we will record, share and discuss them. In understanding the multiple influences leading to an incident we can decide if it is possible or desirable to avoid it in future. This process is not a blame finding process, nor seeking to isolate a single cause or individual. An enquiry goes beyond a systems based approach, into a culture of openness and learning for all.



11b) Positivity is contagious

INTRODUCTION

In fully understanding the real risks our children face, we can balance the risks versus the benefits.

We find that staff who operate without clear support for and policies about risk management will often make overly cautious decisions. Often the fear of a parent complaint can also reduce the activities the educator will be comfortable with.

From this reason, discuss the possible risks with parents and agree on the acceptable risk level. Do not forget to present the benefits of being outdoors to parents, along with the risks, to present the risks in positive way.





EXTENDED

Case study one

CASE
STUDY
23

A two year old has climbed onto a small log in the settings garden area, surrounded by grass. The educator watching is concerned that the child may not have the physical skills to land on her feet. As expected the child steps off, lands and falls to one side firmly. Lying on the ground there is a moment's pause from the child, the educator suggests to the child 'You are OK' as a verbal statement, and does not rush to pick the child up. The child stands back up, climbs onto the log again and tries for a second time to jump off, this time staying upright for a little longer before falling. Within half an hour of this game, the child is stepping off without falling, and has drawn in other children to the new jumping off game. Some of the children are now climbing onto a higher part of the log, and leaping with both feet. The first child looks on with envy, trying to work out if she can manage the bigger jump without it hurting if she falls.

In this short experience the child has developed considerable physical skills - balance, timing and strength. She has also developed a sense that falling can hurt - the first fall was not pleasant - however she has also balanced this against the fun that jumping off can be, and the pleasure of mastering a new skill. Finally, she has also learned what fear can feel like, and how to

manage that feeling. Her experience means that she is now positive about continuing the jumping off game to the next level, but will not take to the higher log until she is confident of success. The watching educator makes a quick note to add this experience to the child's learning record, keen that the child and parents are able to reflect and understand the learning that just took place.





EXTENDED

Case study two

CASE
STUDY
24

An older child is walking with his class in the woods. The educator points out two older children who are managing to reach into a thorny bush and pick some blackberries. They are eating the berries, clearly enjoying the taste, and discussing what they taste like. The child reaches into the bush, but clumsily grazes his hand on the thorns, so pulls back quickly. He reaches in again, only to discover he cannot reach as far as the other children, and so cannot reach the berries. After thinking about this for a moment, he asks one of the older children if they would reach in and pick

a berry for him. The older child actually reaches down and carefully holds one of the thorny stems, moving it aside so that the younger child can now reach the berries. The younger child pauses, unsure about putting the berry in his mouth. At this point the watching educator walks over, carefully moves the branch out the way and picks a berry herself. She joins the child in eating the berries together, comparing the flavour.

In this example the child not only takes physical risk of reaching into a spiky bush, but also takes a social risk by asking for help. The older children could easily have rejected the request for help, or even been negative about the younger child's abilities. The educator notes that the older child moving the branch out the way, and moves over to model the same behaviour and encourage the final step - enjoying the fruit!





TECHNIQUES AND IDEAS

In both the previous case studies the educator was at a slight distance. In observing and judging the possible risks, in not stepping in to control or alter the situation, the adult has both met their statutory duty of care and confirmed the benefits of the risks to themselves. A confident educator would step in only when the risks were too high.

The adult's role is focussed on the child as a learner, enabling by learning by allowing risk and challenge. In order to fulfil the role of enabler, there needs to be a clear set of boundaries and systems in place. This approach records the real risks, and allows staff to work

within simple and clear protocols that focus on the significant risks.

Staff will also have a system where they can share concerns and incidents. Here we set the agenda of staff making sensible decisions, that are broadly in line with the rest of the staff team. This empowers the staff team rather than singling out individuals for blame.

Early years professionals will need to develop their own practice and view of risk and challenge - some will be more comfortable than others with these things. This is not a problem for the children, as they just accept this as the differences in us all.





11c) Enabling Policies and Practice

INTRODUCTION

Working within National Laws or local Policies is non-negotiable, for the protection of our children and ourselves. Early years settings should then ensure they have a copy of the latest appropriate documents.

It should be enacted upon through leadership and collaboration with staff who understand their role and responsibilities. There should be a system in place for when a new staff member starts work, and for when all staff can refresh their knowledge of the Laws and Policies in place, usually on an annual basis.

Moving to a model that expresses the benefits of risk and challenge alongside the possible risks and control measures in our paperwork can be a very valuable exercise for all educators in a setting to be involved in. This team led approach can even out the extremes of practice, and ensures the team has ownership of what risks are deemed reasonable and learning that is taking place.

The wording on our paperwork should be carefully considered to be positive about the ethically and legally acceptable challenges and risks that our children will take.





DID YOU KNOW

'Risky play is any behaviour in which there is uncertainty about the outcomes. It involves a consideration of the benefits against the possible undesirable consequences of the behaviour as well as the probability of success or failure'
(Little, 2006)

From the practice in Denmark and the United Kingdom, we have learnt that children are not necessarily going to have more accidents because they are playing outdoors.





11d) Enabling Environments for risk taking

INTRODUCTION

An outdoor space that has been clearly thought through will have a variety of opportunities for risk and challenge which engage the children and sends a message to staff and parents about the experiences their children will have.

A simple audit of the challenges that children can choose from or create when outdoors, can often highlight either a deficit of opportunity, or indeed highlight risks that are too high.

DID YOU KNOW

“Much of the joy of play lies in challenges a playful activity that becomes too easy loses its attraction and ceases to be play. The player then modifies the activity to make it harder or moves on to something different.”

(Gray, 2011)





TECHNIQUES AND IDEAS

Examples of resources that can create a challenging environment might include:

Resources providing the opportunity for climbing, jumping, rolling or sliding.

Resources that create physical instability, ie. wobbly bridges, balance beams or stepping stones etc.

Varied topography with different surfaces, levels and slopes on mounds or hills.

Portable resources useful for construction or creation of child led physical activities. Items typically include crates, planks, barrels, tyres, ladders and sticks.

The opportunity to use hand tools such as hammers, screwdrivers and garden tools.

The inclusion of flora that varies in growth, and may have elements of risk such as thistle or raspberries.



ENABLING ENVIRONMENT

A suitably challenging environment welcomes mistakes as well as challenges and lures children on to create their own challenges, not purely pre-prescribed activities. This process

offers children choice of engagement, drives ever more complex challenges in children's play. It broadens abilities, deepens learning and leads to increased independence.



11e) Communications

INTRODUCTION

Communicating the reasons why challenge and risk is a good learning experience for our children is a key issue which should be addressed before changes are made. Ensuring that parents and the wider community understand your approach and the benefits, can prevent complaints being raised.

Settings should consider how they currently communicate to parents and the community. Typically this is through speaking with parents, 'stay and play' sessions and recording of learning through floor books or displays.

This approach then extends into more formal policy - a few words and images in a parents handbook or contract can explain much, and share our view.

DID YOU KNOW

"Risk and challenge is an essential part of living a meaningful and satisfying life."

(Gill, 2007)





REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS

1. Do you have the latest copy of any relevant regulations or guidance when assessing whether you are meeting your legal or moral obligations to managing risk with your children.
2. Which risks come to mind related to outdoors? How can you eliminate these and/or use them positively for children's development?
3. Does your risk management system strike a balance of paperwork against the benefits of an acceptable level of risk and challenge? Daily use of settings garden or local trips should only require annual permissions and risk benefit assessing.
4. More adventurous activities such as travelling further, using sharp tools or being near a large area of water may require a more frequent paperwork, increased staff training and competence, as well as more specific permission and risk assessing.
5. Does your management of risk and challenge introduce other hazards in the avoidance of specific issues, or indeed are your restrictions always necessary?
6. How do you involve and empower the children in a visible and authentic process of managing risk and challenge?
7. What steps can you take to train and support staff to develop an open approach to managing risk and challenge, even when an incident occurs?
8. Do you have a simple policy on outdoor play and learning, which includes a positive statement about risk and challenge for your children?
9. What method works best for you to communicate the benefits of risk and challenge to parents?
10. What is the hidden curriculum of your settings outdoor spaces and venues that you visit with the children?





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More Activities

This handbook is designed to be used in conjunction with our online activities

<http://takemeoutproject.eu/outdoor-education/>

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Featured Nurseries include

Droxford BW Montessori, England, <http://droxfordmontessorischool.co.uk/>

Stockholmsgave Centrum, Denmark, <http://stockholmsgavecentrum.kbhbarne.kk.dk/FrontEnd.aspx?id=643403>

Rukkilille Lasteaed, Estonia, <http://www.rukkilill.eu>

England Polli:Nation schools, <http://www.polli-nation.co.uk>

Forest Edge schools

Leicester NE schools

Arnold schools

Outdoor Classroom Day schools, <https://outdoorclassroomday.com/>

Wishaw and Thornlie Primary, United Kingdom

Torriano Primary, United Kingdom

Other settings we visited on field trips included

Nature garden Copenhagen – Naturværkstedet Kløvermarken, Denmark, <https://www.groen.kk.dk/alt-om-os/nultilseks/naturvaerksted>

YMCA Fairthorne Manor Nursery, England, <http://www.ymca-fg.org/for-children/>

Itchen Valley Country park Forest School, Eastleigh Borough Council, England <https://www.eastleigh.gov.uk/sport.-countryside.-parks-culture/countryside/little-owls-woodland-pre-school.aspx>

St Marys Episcopal Primary, Dunblane, Scotland <http://stmarysepsdunblane.org.uk>

Raploch Nursery School, Scotland <http://my.stirling.gov.uk/services/education-and-learning/nurseries-andplaygroups/raploch-nursery>

Beaconhurst Nursery, Scotland, <http://www.beaconhurst.com>

Stramash Outdoor Nurseries, Scotland, <https://www.stramash.org.uk>

Rukkilille Kindergarten, Keila, Estonia, <http://www.rukkilill.eu>

Vosukese Kindergarten, Estonia, <http://lasteaiad.rae.ee/vosukese-uudised>



Other key sources of information and advice include

Danish

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United Kingdom

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Estonia

Rukkilille Lasteaed youtube page <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kZ40Fhrxa8Q>

Slovakia

Forest schools in Slovakia. Available at: <http://bit.ly/lesneskolky>

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CASE STUDIES INDEX

| | |
|---|-----|
| Case study # 1 - What are we all called?..... | 18 |
| Case study # 2 - A Slovak Perspective..... | 21 |
| Case study # 3 - Sleep - What do you do?..... | 26 |
| Case study # 4 - New children..... | 27 |
| Case study # 5 - I don't want to wear wellies!..... | 29 |
| Case study # 6 - Hygiene and Food..... | 31 |
| Case study # 7 - Our role at work..... | 38 |
| Case study # 8 - Nature and creativity..... | 39 |
| Case study # 9 - SWOT Analysis..... | 47 |
| Case study # 10 - Where do we want to be?..... | 48 |
| Case study # 11 - Wider influences on a child's development..... | 50 |
| Case study # 12 - Low cost resources..... | 54 |
| Case study # 13 - Get them out!..... | 57 |
| Case study # 14 - An experts view..... | 59 |
| Case study # 15 - Experience of a Slovak practitioner..... | 67 |
| Case study # 16 - Information Technology outdoors..... | 71 |
| Case study # 17 - Lessons taken from our Scottish partners..... | 77 |
| Case study # 18 - Evidence and evaluation..... | 81 |
| Case study # 19 - What does a good manager do?..... | 84 |
| Case study # 20 - The impressions..... | 87 |
| Case study # 21 - An example half term plan..... | 89 |
| Case study # 22 - Children making good choices..... | 95 |
| Case study # 23 - Positivity is contagious # 1..... | 100 |
| Case study # 24 - Positivity is contagious # 2..... | 101 |



TAKE ME OUT

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