

Learning outdoors

BUILDING A SOLID FOUNDATION THROUGH NATURE



Booklet one of the **Outdoor learning series** by **Pete Moorhouse** with contributions from **Jan White, Jon Cree and Kathryn Solly**



community playthings



Why learn outdoors?

Outdoor environments provide children with some of the finest learning opportunities as they learn through play and their natural curiosity is stimulated by unparalleled experiences. Nature encourages them to explore and discover, to take on new challenges and to learn new skills. Children have occasion to express their imagination, develop their creative and critical thinking skills, and to learn across all areas of the curriculum.

Children have the right to learn and play outdoors,¹ to be active with their bodies and minds and to experience nature in all its wondrous forms. Research concludes that children can learn more effectively outdoors than indoors,² and that they need to be active in order to learn best. When children are given unhurried time in an outdoor environment, their learning can have deeper meaning and create long-lasting memories. The importance of learning in nature has been embraced by many schools in recent years, with some schools successfully spending the majority (if not all) of their day outdoors.³

It is therefore crucial that outdoor learning is given at least the same importance as learning indoors, and that we carefully design and resource outdoor spaces to allow high level engagement and powerful



When children are given unhurried time in an outdoor environment, their learning can have deeper meaning and create long-lasting memories.



thinking. The characteristics of effective learning do not stop at the building's threshold.

Creativity flourishes outdoors as children eagerly pursue their ideas and express their imagination, continually learning from experience. They use creative and critical thinking and problem solving skills when working out how to transport water effectively, designing their own obstacle course, building and re-enacting a petrol station, or creating artwork with loose parts.

Materials should be made available outdoors to support learning across all curriculum areas. For example, with mark-making we can provide a variety of mediums and methods with which children can express themselves: chalk, paints and an easel, painting on both sides of clear Perspex, paintbrushes and rollers with water, mud, charred sticks, and so on. Mathematical and scientific thinking can be provoked by resources that support investigation and discovery such as scales, pulleys, measures, different-sized containers, magnifying glasses and cameras. These allow children to think more deeply

as they generate ideas, arrive at solutions and make connections in their learning. Maths comes alive beyond the confines of the classroom, for example when we measure with giant leaps or sticks. A playhouse or stage and varying provocations such as costumes and props can be offered to facilitate role play.

Learning outdoors clearly benefits health, as children get more exercise and plenty of fresh air. Children spend much more time indoors these days than in previous generations. Current statistics indicate that many children are spending less than an hour a day outdoors. Screen-based entertainment, parents' fears for children's safety, and reluctance to embrace the weather have all resulted in less time being spent outdoors. This is having an impact on health with the rise in obesity and diabetes partly attributed to lack of exercise.⁴ Myopia (short-sightedness) has also increased due to children spending more time indoors and to their growing focus on screens. Evidence suggests that long distance viewing and experiencing the full spectrum of light are the best preventions of myopia.⁵



Playing outdoors bolsters children's social and emotional well-being. They are often happier and more exuberant, thriving in the increased freedom and space. They feel less constrained and self-conscious, becoming more expressive as they run, sing, dance, paint with bold strokes, or hammer loudly. The outdoors makes us feel more alive as we experience a more dynamic environment – we feel the rain on our face and the warmth of the sun, and with energetic movement a greater number of messages are transmitted from our limbs to our brains. With increased possibilities for working on a larger scale there are more opportunities to collaborate and work together, to communicate and build friendships. This relaxed communication can be particularly beneficial for a child who uses few words or lacks confidence.

The outdoors is constantly changing with the weather and seasons, providing an element of unpredictability and surprise in contrast to the more controlled and static indoor environment. Children engage their senses as they feel the wind, smell a flower, hear a bird's distant cry, notice ripples while splashing in puddles or delight

“Is the exploration of the natural world just a pleasant way to pass the golden hours of childhood or is there something deeper? I am sure there is something much deeper, something lasting and significant. Those who dwell, as scientists or laymen, among the beauties and mysteries of the earth are never alone or weary of life. Whatever the vexations or concerns of their personal lives, their thoughts can find paths that lead to inner contentment and to renewed excitement in living...”

Rachel Carson, *The Sense of Wonder*



in a rabbit's soft fur. They observe insects, feel a tree's rough bark and crunch autumn leaves underfoot. Children have an immediate affinity with nature, and connecting with it has a very positive impact on their well-being. Nature provides artistic inspiration too, as children discern details and patterns in objects such as shells and fir cones. Jon Cree's chapter "Natural world"

delves deeper into how children connect with nature.

Outdoor play provides cardiovascular exercise, develops coordination, strengthens muscles and refines motor skills. Children's stamina and coordination improve as they swing, climb, balance and run. Physical skills need to be developed gradually over

time, with increasing levels of challenge being offered, building on previous skills and experience. In her chapter “Physical development”, Jan White explores why children learn most effectively when they are physically active.

The outdoor area can be designed to enable children to challenge themselves and take risks in a controlled environment. This is crucial in helping them develop their physical skills and helping them acquire a sense of how to make judgements and respond to risk positively. We have to trust children’s decisions regarding their physical limits and allow them to make decisions for themselves as they take on new challenges. Kathryn Solly expands on the importance of this in her chapter “Risk, adventure and challenge”.

There are of course also great benefits to learning in outdoor environments beyond the setting, such as forests and woodlands, beaches and other open spaces. In these

“As a child, one has that magical capacity to move among the many eras of the earth; to see the land as an animal does; to experience the sky from the perspective of a flower or a bee; to feel the earth quiver and breathe beneath us; to know a hundred different smells of mud and listen unselfconsciously to the soughing of the trees.”

Valerie Andrews, A Passion for this Earth

booklets however, we focus on how we can shape the outdoor spaces within our own settings.



Pedagogy

Many early education pioneers emphasised the importance of outdoor play for young children. The pedagogy underpinning their practice has had a powerful influence on the evolution of early years outdoor provision.

Comenius (1592-1670), Rousseau (1712-1758) and Pestalozzi (1746-1827)

Comenius, and later Rousseau and Pestalozzi, were early education theorists who introduced the idea that nature and the natural environment have a definite and positive role in the education of children. Comenius introduced the concept of “natural education”, which Rousseau then developed further. Pestalozzi also recognised that children thrive outdoors and saw active play as beneficial to all areas of children’s learning and development.

Friedrich Froebel (1782-1852)

Friedrich Froebel had a great love for the natural world and believed that nature, beauty and knowledge are interwoven, and that closeness to nature is essential in enabling children to understand their world and their place within it. He named the school “kindergarten”, which means “garden for children”. Froebel emphasised the importance of children having direct experience with nature and developing



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

Margaret McMillan

understanding through activities such as gardening: they grew plants, harvested and made things with the produce. They learnt to care and take responsibility for nature. Children in the kindergarten had plentiful space and freedom to explore with their whole bodies, to grow healthily and to challenge themselves through play. Time spent in the garden was also seen as an occasion for fostering independence, imaginative play and creativity.



Maria Montessori (1870-1952)

Montessori's pedagogy resulted from her desire to tackle child poverty and counter the restrictive Roman educational system. Like Froebel, she emphasised the connection with nature because of its positive impact on children's learning. Montessori valued beautiful natural materials that facilitated thinking and interest. She advocated a harmonious, continuous

environment flowing between indoors and outdoors, in which children could freely choose where they wished to learn. This "prepared environment", Montessori believed, encouraged exploration and independent learning. "There must be provision for the child to have contact with nature; to understand and appreciate the order, the harmony and the beauty in nature." (Montessori, 1966)

**Margaret and Rachel McMillan
(1860-1931, 1859-1917)
and open air schools**

Open air schools started as part of a larger movement that originated in Germany with the Waldschule in Charlottenburg in 1904. They were initially established to combat illness and poverty. Emphasis was placed on exposure to the outdoors, fresh air and sunlight, healthy diet, adequate rest, hygiene and health treatments, as well as the promotion of an educational philosophy of learning by doing.

The first open-air school in the United Kingdom was opened in 1907 at Bostall Wood, London. This was followed in 1911 by the open air nursery school in Deptford, founded by Margaret and Rachel McMillan. The school served as a model for other schools, and later became a training centre for teachers. The McMillan sisters recognized that many underprivileged children in England were lacking both care and education in their most formative years. They believed that children learn best by exploring, and achieve their full potential through hands-on experience and active learning, with exercise and fresh air at the heart of their play. The open-air school movement focused on the nurturing of a child's "sense of wonder", and on the importance of teachers knowing what attracts children and engages their attention. Much emphasis was placed on creating a varied and stimulating outdoor space.

By 1937 there were 96 open-air day schools in operation throughout Britain, designed with sliding doors and large open windows

"It is also necessary for his physical development to place the soul of the child in contact with creation, in order that he may lay up for himself treasure from the directly educating forces of living nature."

Maria Montessori

for fresh air and to encourage as much outdoor activity as possible. At St Werburgh's Park Nursery School in Bristol where I work, and which was established as an open-air nursery in 1931, we still have archived pictures of children taking afternoon naps outdoors in small camp beds, having communal baths, and engaging in a wide variety of active outdoor play. In 1930, Margaret McMillan said "Children want space at all ages... space, that is ample space, is almost as much wanted as food and air. To move to run, to find things out by new movement, to feel one's life in every limb, that is the life of early childhood."

Susan Isaacs (1885-1948)

Susan Isaacs, the progressive teacher and psychologist, was also inspired by Froebel's ideas. Believing outdoor play to be essential, she provided her Malting House School (1924) with a well-resourced garden with a play house, pet animals, sand pit, woodwork area, fruit trees, plots for gardening and one of the first climbing frames in Britain (highly innovative and original at the time). Isaacs believed children are endlessly creative when allowed to pursue their curiosity,



so she ensured they could move freely between the indoors and the outdoors. She also founded Chelsea Open Air Nursery in 1928. Play was the vehicle for development, the “breath of life to the child, since it is through play activities that he finds mental ease, and can work upon his wishes, fears and fantasies so as to integrate them into a living personality.” (Isaacs, 1951)

Loris Malaguzzi (1920-1994)

The Reggio Emilia approach emerged from practice developed by Loris Malaguzzi. The first school was established shortly after the Second World War, with the aim of creating an education system that encouraged independent thinking. Loris Malaguzzi drew on the work of previous pioneering educators and placed great importance on the

role of a child's environment. He referred to it as "the third teacher": "There are three teachers of children: adults, other children and the environment". The emphasis was on creating beautiful, well-resourced, and flexible environments that allowed children to follow their interests and engage in higher-level thinking and questioning that sparked remarkable creativity and independent thought.

Forest School (1990s onwards)

Forest School has also had a significant impact on outdoor teaching and learning. The Forest School movement emerged in the UK in the 1990s, following a study visit by teachers from Bridgwater College in Somerset to Danish pre-schools. Scandinavian countries embraced outdoor learning from the 1950s onwards. In Denmark, Forest School pedagogy was formally established as part of the early years curriculum during the 1980s. The emergence of Forest School has certainly been a positive step in promoting the multiple benefits of children learning outdoors, connecting children with nature and helping them feel part of their wider natural world.

The present day

It is a statutory requirement of the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) in England that providers must provide access to an outdoor play area or, if that is not possible,

"Play has the greatest value for that young child when it is really free and his own. It is through play activities that he finds mental ease, and can work upon his wishes, fears and fantasies so as to integrate them into a living personality."

Susan Isaacs

ensure that outdoor activities are planned and experienced on a daily basis. One of the overarching principles of the EYFS is that "Children learn and develop well in enabling environments" (EYFS Framework 2017) which include indoor, outdoor and emotional environments.

There are of course a great number of settings embracing outdoor learning positively, but there are others that tend to use time outdoors for children to "let off steam" or have a break, rather than as a valuable time for learning and development. I hope this booklet encourages schools and nurseries to utilise the wonderful learning potential of their outdoor areas.



Natural world

by Jon Cree

A movement to connect children to nature has gained great momentum recently, particularly in early years. Far too many children, however, still do not have the meaningful experiences in the natural world that they naturally crave, and indeed require, for their development. In fact, despite an increasing realisation of the benefits of time outdoors for well-being, increased relaxation, encouragement of focussed attention and improved physical development, just 10% of children play in a natural environment compared to 40% of today's adults who played outdoors when they were young.⁶ The last Natural England study between 2013 and 2015⁷ showed that only 8% of school-aged children (aged 6-15) in England visited the natural environment with their schools.

Why is this? The Kings College study carried out in 2011 showed that the main barriers for teachers taking children outside were not related to curriculum restrictions – indeed there is a requirement to take them outside in early years. The reasons for keeping the children indoors were that practitioners lacked confidence, capacity and competence.⁸ In this chapter I will outline the benefits of having contact with the natural world in early years and the importance of play – a child's deepest type of learning. Jean Piaget (1896-1980) said, "Play is children's work".



"Those who contemplate the beauty of the earth find reserves of strength that will endure as long as life lasts."

Rachel Carson



Having worked in environmental education for 36 years, I've seen the benefits of nature connection in early years – the most exciting years for brain development. The early years are the most natural time for us small humans to grow our imagination,

from which comes innovative thought and a sense of self. In her milestone book *The Ecology of Imagination in Childhood*,⁹ Edith Cobb shows that the natural world is essential to developing curiosity and cognitive growth.

Watching children outside, I often observe curiosity sparking quicker than in more sterile environments. It seems as though a wellspring of story, invention and experimentation suddenly bubbles forth when a child crawls into an uncut meadow, runs among trees or rolls on a sandy beach. These places provide the “compound flexibility”¹⁰ that allows children to fill in the “distance” between self, the immediate sensory objects and experiences, and the worlds of imagined forms and desires. In environments where there is less flexibility and less “natural world contact” there are fewer possibilities for problem solving and imagining¹¹.

In Dudley, it was a privilege to observe three four-year-olds, two girls and one boy, armed with metal buckets full of acorns collected from a copse near their setting. I overheard them discussing how to plant the acorns and how high their trees would grow, what to put into the soil and how to protect the trees. The trees were going to grow to the moon where the mice on the moon would be able to travel to Dudley to rescue the mice here from the “giant mice-eating mice”! With this imagined scenario in mind (stimulated by the natural world and previous experience), they started trying to manipulate the soil. Finding it too hard, they entered into a deep dialogue about how to soften it. Prompted by a question from one of the girls: “will water make it softer?” they began a windy channel. This joined to a pipe that attached to a water butt on the equipment shed on the edge of the copse – this, I learned,

“If I had influence with the good fairy who is supposed to preside over the christening of all children, I should ask that her gift to each child in the world be a sense of wonder so indestructible that it would last throughout life.”

Rachel Carson, *The Sense of Wonder*

was a water dragon in action! During this entire play episode other conversations around the mice and the dragon kept alive the story and the motivation to get the seeds planted.

What was the practitioner’s role? The previous week she had told an acorn story, and then provided small metal buckets and “real” trowels. She then remained available if the children needed help – which they did with attaching the piping to the water butt tap. The rest of this inventive play was stimulated by the natural elements of the copse. It provided the sensory stimulus which young children thirst for and an adventurous environment in which dragons, mice and large planet-bridging trees can thrive! From the curiosity sparked by buckets, acorns, soil and seeing the moon in the sky came three collaborative journeys of discovery.



The benefits from this one episode are plain to see: plenty of language development, imagination, collaborative learning, focussed attention, and fine and gross motor development – from the strenuous digging of hard soil, to the making of a wiggly tail-shaped channel and fixing the pipe to the water butt tap. One of the key benefits was the relational aspects of this episode. The children were developing

their social and ecological connections simultaneously – with humans, acorns, trees, mice and dragons. Even a relationship with the cosmos was emerging: the moon is miles away!

The natural world provides flexibility of materials and elements – multiple spaces and possibilities in which we can realise our individuality. A stick can become anything

you want it to; it is still the most popular toy in the world. Safe comfortable refuges can be made in bushes or wide open spaces that provide security of “sight”. In contrast, a screen game is dictated by technology and its designer, and the imaginative possibilities are more restricted.

I cannot emphasize enough that the early years are the time to promote a child’s unique individuality and to nurture through natural world experiences. We must not lose ourselves in the specialised technocratic world of today, which will be introduced to the child anyway before long. Peter Gray ¹² states that it is essential for our children to have playful contact with nature if they are to equip themselves with the capacity to adapt to our ever-changing world and find their own sense of self.

I leave you with the words of Rachel Carson, the ground-breaking environmental biochemist of the 1950s and 60s.

“To move, to run, to find things out by new movement, to feel one’s life in every limb, that is the life of early childhood.”

Margaret McMillan

This quote is from her book *The Sense of Wonder* ¹³ – an essential companion to any early years educator:

If I had influence with the good fairy who is supposed to preside over the christening of all children, I should ask that her gift to each child in the world be a sense of wonder so indestructible that it would last throughout life...If facts are the seeds that later produce knowledge and wisdom, then the emotions and the impressions of the senses are the fertile soil in which the seeds must grow. The years of early childhood are the time to prepare the soil.



Physical development

by Jan White

Physical development in young children is about the emergence of their robust sense of self along with awareness of objects and others in the space around them. It involves the growth of good control and coordination in large and small movements, becoming able to move safely and confidently in a wide range of ways, and learning to comfortably navigate the environments they live in. It is also about a growing ability to manipulate materials and objects, and learning to use tools with ease and enjoyment. Critically, it is about feeling good in your body, good about yourself and secure in the world.

We experience the world and relate to it through our body and the many sensory systems within it. Increasingly, we are coming to an understanding that language, thinking and imagination are created and defined by the physical feelings our bodies give us. Thinking arises from our sensory experiences, and use of the body feeds the brain with the material it needs to learn about the world: we can only think with what we experience.

Therefore, not only does physical development sit at the heart of well-being, health and good functioning, it also underpins an outward attitude to the world, enabling a positive disposition to exploration,



Thinking arises from our sensory experiences, and use of the body feeds the brain with the material it needs to learn about the world.



interaction and enquiry – the characteristics of effective learning. It is at the root of effective brain functioning, learning and memory.

Emerging lessons from psychology, paediatrics and neuroscience tell us strongly that body and brain develop together, and research is revealing just how much moving and being active impact on all domains of child development. Sound physical development takes place through basic experiences

that put in place the core neurological structures in the brain and body needed for balance, body awareness and coordination across the two sides of the brain/body. These all require movement, action and physicality – and do not develop when the child is sedentary or still.

Children's bodies tell them what they need to be doing, and they are driven to do what is currently required. They are biologically programmed to seek the

appropriate physical experiences; our job is to make these safely available for as much time as possible. In order for young children to develop well physically (and in all other dependent areas), they need a vast number of opportunities every single day to play and investigate with their bodies the spaces around them, and the people, features, equipment and resources in their environment. This needs to happen naturally and throughout their day, both indoors and outside.

Opportunities for spontaneous movement are much more valuable than adult-devised, adult-led programmes of activity. Children crave a movement-rich environment and culture from which to choose what they need, when they need it. We must notice each child's unique path of physical development and support in relevant ways to help him or her become resilient, capable, confident and self-assured. Physical activity is the foundation for well-being, learning and development, and it creates school readiness.

Checklist for a movement-rich outdoor environment:

- There is space to move and run without obstruction.
- There is a variety of surfaces: soft, hard, rough, level, bumpy.

Physical activity is the foundation for well-being, learning and development.

- There are interconnecting pathways with variety and challenge built into them.
- There are different levels, and a range of ways to move between them including slopes and steps.
- There are raised surfaces to balance on and jump off, and stepping stones to jump between.
- There are things to clamber, climb and wriggle over, under, between and through.
- There are large vertical and horizontal surfaces for aiming, bouncing and painting on a grand scale.
- There are places and materials for digging and filling: sand, soil, gravel, wood chips.
- There is a wide variety of self-propelled wheeled vehicles.
- There are lots of things to lift, carry and transport, especially big, heavy and awkward items.
- There are lots of containers/vehicles to fill, empty and move things in, including carts, wheelbarrows, baskets and buckets.
- There are soft, comfortable places for rest and retreat from activity.

This is an edited extract from *Every child a mover*, published by Early Education.



COLOR YOUR
WORLD

ROBOT
HERO

BEYOND

Risk, adventure and challenge

by Kathryn Solly

Outdoor play provides children with valuable opportunities to practice making judgements, become able to avoid hazards and learn how to react to risk positively. This is a crucial part of their development. We cannot eliminate risk completely, nor would we want to, as risk is part and parcel of living. Life is full of risks and challenges and we must prepare children to meet these by allowing them to take risks within a safe environment. It is vital that children are given opportunities to stretch their capabilities in order to develop their physical and mental skills. We have to trust children's decisions regarding their physical limits, while staying vigilant about their safety. The outdoor environment should be designed to provide physical challenge and allow children to build their confidence in risk-taking.

What is risk?

Risk 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). As children start formal schooling at an earlier age and as outdoor play spaces reduce in size, adults are becoming more fearful of children coming to harm. Some misquote Health and Safety within the perceived culture of blame and litigation to emphasise "keeping children safe."



"If you are going to keep children safe ...you must provide places in which they can get the thrills they need; there must be trees they can climb and ways in which they can safely get the experience of adventure and the sense of challenge that they crave."

Susan Isaacs, 1938



The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) “fully supports the provision of play for all children in a variety of environments. HSE understands and accepts that this means children will often be exposed to play environments which, whilst well-managed, carry a degree of risk and sometimes potential danger. HSE wants to make sure that mistaken health and safety concerns do not create sterile play environments that lack challenge and so prevent children from expanding their learning and stretching their abilities” (*Children’s play and leisure – promoting a balanced approach*).

It is important to communicate, listen to concerns and be ready to learn when discussing safety issues, whilst becoming

very good at explaining to parents and colleagues why risk-taking matters!

Being born is risky, and young children are programmed to take risks. Making mistakes can help build confidence, persistence and the executive function to problem-solve throughout life. Taking risks thrills and excites children; they love the physical and mental challenge. It tests their physical limits, develops their perceptual-motor capacity, and helps them learn to avoid or adjust to dangerous environments and activities. Therefore, eliminating risk leads to a child’s inability to assess danger in a world where change, risk and uncertainty are key features of life. Risky play involves:

- experience of height, motion and speed
- inverting the normal order of things – tipping, hanging
- the thrill in precariousness, unpredictability
- being ‘on the edge’ of capability – testing skill, endurance
- exploring elements such as earth, fire and water; tool use, rough-and-tumble play; hiding and privacy

What is challenge? Children thirst for exploratory experiences and create these for themselves. If play is not suitably challenging the child naturally moves on and searches for new experiences.

Challenging experiences are those that are novel, creative, imaginative and productive. They are often cognitively complex and involve several elements, materials, actions or ideas. A child often faces a challenge in a systematic and purposeful manner, devoting care and mental effort, and becoming deeply engrossed in the experience. Learning a new skill or trying to improve an established one can be a vital step in problem solving.

Adults can enhance challenging play by providing a supportive framework of time, space and open-ended resources while fine-tuning children’s experiences by interacting sensitively, feeding ideas and pointing out resources at appropriate times. They can also act as catalysts by creating appropriate challenges and providing real choices.

Young children are highly complex thinkers who need the experience of ‘flow’. This is a state “in an activity that nothing else seems to matter; the experience is so

“Play is great for children’s well-being and development. When planning and providing play opportunities, the goal is not to eliminate risk, but to weigh up the risks and benefits. No child will learn about risk if they are wrapped in cotton wool.”

(HSE 2012)

enjoyable that people will continue to do it even at great cost, for the sheer sake of doing it” (Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, 1979).

This is not complicated. Foster a calm and relaxed, yet stimulating environment and encourage play that fascinates children. Welcome mistakes as chances to learn, and let the children explore in a hands-on way. Provide rich, open-ended resources for children to discover at their own pace, following their particular interests. Children need:

- adults who interact with them, value their ideas and extend their learning, and who enjoy being outside
- time to explore, observe and make sense of things
- easily accessible equipment and clothing that can get dirty
- to be given context and meaning alongside repetition and consistency so they learn the rules and boundaries
- adults who walk the talk!

Final words

The value of the outdoors to children's well-being, health, learning and development is clear. Now as children spend increasing amounts of time indoors, it is more important than ever that we embrace outdoor learning. We have all seen the joy and enthusiasm of children when they are actively learning in an outdoor environment. We must allow them to experience, connect to and be nurtured by the natural world. Opportunities outdoors will allow children to develop life-long attitudes whereby they will continue to embrace the outdoors and be truly motivated to cherish and protect the natural world.

As practitioners we can develop children's potential by providing stimulating outdoor environments which are furnished with inspiring resources that encourage play and exploration across all areas of learning. Outdoor learning is holistic. As children negotiate with each other to construct a house from blocks, work out how to lift a tyre up a slide, experiment with how best to transport water to a mud kitchen, or discover dew drops in the grass, they are growing their understanding and connection with the world and building a solid foundation for lifelong learning.



About the author



Pete Moorhouse is an early years creative consultant and artist educator with a passion for supporting children's creativity, outdoor learning and woodwork. He is an honorary research fellow at the Graduate School of Education, University of Bristol, researching creative and critical thinking in the early years. Pete is an associate trainer for Early Education and delivers CPD training throughout the UK and overseas. CPD trainings include Enabling Environments, Creativity and Woodwork. Pete is the author of several books and journal articles. More information at irresistible-learning.co.uk.

About the contributors



Jan White is a leading thinker and advocate for young children's right to be active and outdoors. Working internationally, she has authored several books and delivers training courses, conference keynotes and consultancy for a wide range of early years settings. Jan is an Early Education Associate, advisory board member of the International Association for Nature Pedagogy, and strategic director of Early Childhood Outdoors.



Kathryn Solly is the former head teacher at Chelsea Open Air Nursery School and Children's Centre. She has written several books and is a specialist early years consultant and trainer. Kathryn is an associate trainer for Early Education, and is an active member of the Froebel Trust.



Jon Cree is training coordinator at Bishops Wood Centre in Worcestershire, managed by the Field Studies Council. He has been training early years educators and teachers for almost 30 years, and working with children outdoors for 36 years. Worcestershire council was one of the first local councils to bring Forest School into the early years. Jon has helped develop this since 2000. In 2006, he began running Forest School trainings at the centre. Jon is chair of the Forest School Association and his passion lies in stories and storytelling and all things wooden!



References:

- ¹ Statutory framework for the early years foundation stage, DoE 2017
- ² childrenandnature.org/research-library (collection of research papers supporting outdoor learning)
- ³ Examples include: littleforestfolk.com, elves-fairieswoodlandnursery.co.uk, outtherebristol.co.uk, littlefoxesforestschoo.com and stramash.org.uk
- ⁴ Obesity: Preventing and Managing the Global Epidemic. Report of a WHO Consultation on Obesity, 3–5 June 1997, Geneva, Switzerland: World Health Organization (2001) WHO/NUT/NCD 98.1
- ⁵ Roski Eye Institute, University of Southern California eye.keckmedicine.org/incidence-childhood-myopia-rise and Outdoor Activity Reduces the Prevalence of Myopia in Children – (2008) K. Rose, PhD
- ⁶ Report to Natural England on childhood and nature: a survey on changing relationships with nature across generations, (2009) England Marketing
- ⁷ Monitor of Engagement with the Natural Environment: a pilot to develop an indicator of visits to the natural environment by children (2016) Natural England
- ⁸ Beyond barriers to learning outside the classroom in natural environments (2012) Kings College London
- ⁹ The Ecology of the imagination in childhood (1977) Cobb, E
- ¹⁰ A theory of play and fantasy, Psychiatric Research Reports, 2: 39-51 (1955) Bateson. G
- ¹¹ *Playwork theory and practice* (2003) Brown. F, Maidenhead: Open University Press
- ¹² Gray, P. (2013) *Free to Learn*, Basic Books.
- ¹³ Carson, R. (1956) *The Sense of Wonder*, Harper and Row.

- Carson, R. (1956) *The Sense of Wonder*, Harper & Row.
- Fröbel, F. (1887) *The Education of Man*, New York, London: D. Appleton Century. Translated by W.N. Hailmann.
- Gill, T. (2007) *No Fear: Growing up in a risk adverse society*, Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation.
- Isaacs, S. (1937) *The Educational Value of the Nursery School*, London: Nursery School Association.
- Isaacs, S. (1951 edition) *Social Development in Young Children*, London: Routledge.
- Little, H (2006) Children's Risk Taking behaviour: Implications for early childhood policy and practice, *International Journal of Early Years Education* Vol. 14 no. 2.
- Louv, Richard (2010) *Last Child in the Woods: Saving Our Children from Nature-Deficit Disorder*, London: Atlantic Books.
- Montessori, M. (1966). *The secret of childhood*, Notre Dame, Ind.: Fides Publishers.
- Moorhouse, P. (2018) *Learning through woodwork: Creative woodwork in the early years*, David Fulton/ Routledge.
- Ouvry, M.(2003) *Exercising Muscles and Minds: Outdoor play and the early years curriculum*, National Children's Bureau; UK ed. edition.
- Solly, K. (2014) *Risk, Challenge and Adventure in the Early Years*, Abingdon: David Fulton/Routledge.
- Tovey, H. (2007) *Playing outdoors: spaces and places, risk and challenge*, Open University Press.
- White, J. (2015) *Every child a mover*, British Association for Early Childhood Education.
- White, J. (2013) *Playing and Learning Outdoors*, 2nd edition, Abingdon: Routledge.

Resources:

Early Years 360° Environment Audit
irresistible-learning.co.uk/resources

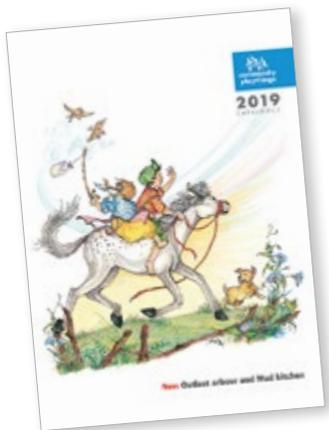
Books:

- Bilton, H. (2010) *Outdoor Learning in the Early Years*, David Fulton/ Routledge.
- Bruce, T. (2001) *Learning Through Play*, London: Hodder Education

Websites:

- Forest School Association: forestschoolassociation.org
- Eco Schools: eco-schools.org.uk
- EYFS Framework: foundationyears.org.uk/eyfs-statutory-framework/
- Children's play and leisure – promoting a balanced approach: hse.gov.uk/entertainment/childrens-play-july-2012.pdf
- Early Childhood Outdoors: earlychildhoodoutdoors.org



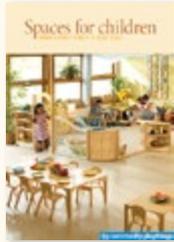


Community Playthings produces solid wood furniture and play equipment. Our products are developed to support children's play and creativity. We design and manufacture at workshops in East Sussex and Kent. You can find free training resources and our full product line at **communityplaythings.co.uk**, or call **0800 387 457** for a Community Playthings catalogue.



Free training resources

Request online at communityplaythings.co.uk or phone **0800 387 457**.



Spaces for children

Room layout for 0-5 year olds

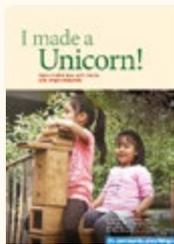
Design quality environments for children in your setting. This booklet will help you make the best use of your spaces.



A good place to be two

Developing quality environments indoors and out

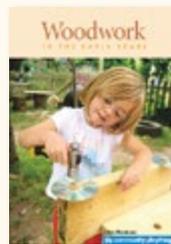
Guidance for settings providing the two-year-old entitlement.



I made a unicorn

Open-ended play with blocks and simple materials

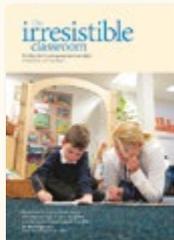
When free to experiment with the simplest materials, children find ways to express and develop their thoughts in imaginative play.



Woodwork in the early years

A practical guide to introducing woodwork in your setting

Artist and educator Pete Moorhouse offers a practical guide to introducing woodwork in your setting.



The irresistible classroom

Getting the learning environment right in Reception and Key Stage 1

The child does the learning. The teacher facilitates that learning. The environment must support them both. How can Reception and Key Stage 1 classrooms inspire education?



Learning outdoors

Building a solid foundation through nature

This booklet details the pedagogy behind outdoor learning and its importance for every setting.



DVD: Foundations

The value of Unit block play

Instructive video illustrating the value of block play.



DVD: The Nursery gym

in action at Pen Green

Highlights the importance of physical activity and positive risk-taking for young children.



Play and learning blog

Join us in observing how children discover, develop and learn through play. Sign up at: communityplaythings.co.uk/blog

communityplaythings.co.uk • 0800 387 457



community playthings