



OUTDOOR PLAY AND THE IMPACT IT HAS ON PERSONAL, SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT

INTRODUCTION

My name is Katy Burgess, I am an Ofsted registered childminder in Nottinghamshire. I have worked in childcare for 41 years. I originally trained as a Nursery Nurse, NNEB and worked in inner city state nurseries for 12 years before becoming a child minder in 2005. I completed a BA Honours Education degree in Early Years in 2014 which has been invaluable in my career and developing my childcare setting.

Day to day I have between three to four children, with the youngest being just over two and the oldest three and a half. My love of the outdoors has been with me since childhood, and I hope to instil this in the children that I care for. Within this case study I aim to look at the pedagogy of my setting and how it relates to the personal, social and emotional development of my children through the use of outdoor play.



KATY BURGESS,
CHILDMINDER, NOTTINGHAMSHIRE

EFFECTIVE PEDAGOGY

The Development Matters guidelines sets out seven key features of effective practice, the fourth of these being Pedagogy, which is the basis of how children learn. Being a childminder gives me the autonomy to plan the day according to my pedagogy which is a holistic child led approach. I spend a great deal of time outdoors and encourage the children to learn through connecting with nature.

Research has shown that the most effective pedagogy uses a mixture of different approaches. I implement a balance of child-initiated play, collaborative pedagogy, as well as adult initiated guided learning into my setting.

The EEF recognises the importance of collaborative pedagogy whereby the children work together on a shared goal, but also advises that pupils need support and practice to help develop these skills.

In addition to this I have found that adult-initiated sessions and guided learning can positively influence a child's self-initiated activity.



By observing the child, I am able to encourage their next steps. I provide rich play based learning experiences using the natural environment, for example, when the children came across a very muddy path by the river they followed child A's (3 yrs. 5months) example of lying a branch across the path and using it as a bridge. We worked collaboratively as we mended a broken den together in the woods, the children drawing on past experiences and discussing ideas between themselves.

Equally child-initiated play is just as important as it allows the child to encounter opportunities regarding decision making and problem solving which develops executive function skills leading to strong social and emotional intelligence in the child. Where the child can immerse themselves in nature, exploring, investigating and being curious, they are developing a lifelong passion for the outdoors and a resilience for life. Learning outdoors is a fun process and this is evident through the children's enthusiasm and the delight on their faces.



It is these daily planned trips out in the natural environment that is an important part of my setting. I like to make sure each day is different and fun for the children, be it through a visit to the local woods, a walk along the canal, a trip to a country park or forest school. Each activity is a learning opportunity where the children can experience nature first hand, negotiate different terrains, whilst being physically active alone or with their friends.

The EYFS states physical activity is vital to children's all-round development, enabling them to pursue happy, healthy and active lives.

The Education Endowment Foundation's (EEF) findings suggest that physical development and activity in young children can have a positive effect on their learning. From my own experience parents within my setting have commented on how excited the children are to attend, knowing they will be outdoors exploring and having fun, running through the trees, climbing on logs or balancing on planks over a stream. It is important to remember that active outdoor play is not just linked to the physical development of gross and fine motor skills but also offers a wealth of learning opportunities in all seven areas of learning with the role of the adult being vital in delivering these.



The EYFS states all children deserve 'high quality early education and care' which is fundamental in my setting. I strive to foster positive early relationships with the children, through the warm, kind responses of a focused and understanding adult. This in turn allows them to feel secure, loved and ready to explore, mirroring their home experience. The EEF states that educators who apply PSED focused approaches can improve children's outcomes and where combined approaches are used this can have the greatest effect on the health and wellbeing of the child. These secure relationships lead to strong social emotional development and executive function skills in young children which are vital during early years.

Within the EYFS, spoken language underpins all 7 areas of learning and development therefore it is an important aspect of our daily routine. We spend a great deal of time communicating both verbally and non-verbally between each other. I also educate the children on how important it is for us to be aware of each other's emotions and feelings and how our own actions may affect others. We read stories in the woods, and an example of this is when we recently read 'Stickman'. The children and I discussed together how it would make stickman feel being thrown off a bridge as a 'poo stick', before going on a hunt to find our own stickman, and making a den for him. .

Adding an element of fun, using the child's favourite book, helps facilitate the learning process. The children's understanding of emotions and in turn their verbal communication can be enhanced and they are better able to articulate their own feelings to their care-giver. The EEF suggests teaching awareness of emotions within all age groups can improve a child's emotional understanding which will have a positive impact on their emotional expression and regulation. This allows the children to effectively manage their emotions, which will be beneficial when they interact with others and go on to build future relationships.

Overall, the most important aspect to remember is whether we are in the woods, walking to a local park or playing in the garden, learning opportunities are all around us and it is the interested adult that is key to aiding a child's development.

