

A Practitioner's Guide
to
OUTDOOR PLAY BASED LEARNING
Forest Kindergarten training programme
Guest Blogger : Student Mairead-
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Mairead's story-studying on the Forest Kindergarten training programme!

Hello, I am Mairead I am 18 years old, I am currently studying for my HNC in Childhood Practice at Glasgow Clyde College at the Cardonald campus. Last October I took part in a 3-day Forest Kindergarten training programme along with a group of my peers and two of my lecturers. Personally, I was quite apprehensive for the experience as I did not know what to expect and what I would experience while attending this training. The key concepts from the training programme were about the **place** and **environment** that the Forest Kindergarten would be taking place, who and what individuals would need to be contacted when organising a Forest Kindergarten, pedagogy, and the quality of outdoor play.

My top tips....

- **Wear appropriate PPE** – PPE is Personal Protective Equipment this includes all kit needed for any individual. During the Forest Kindergarten training I made sure that I had my appropriate clothing as it was October the weather was very unpredictable especially here in Scotland. It was raining one minute, sunny the next but overall very cold. I made sure that I had waterproof clothing, hats, and gloves, so plenty of layers! I also had suitable footwear, I wore walking boots with thermal socks to keep me warm and comfy as we were on our feet for long periods of time, we were also walking through lots of mud and wet ground.
- **Be Prepared** – Being prepared and preparing well is another key tip. Again, you need to be prepared for all types of weather if it is raining, snowing or sunny. Appropriate clothing is required for any outdoor outing. For all outdoor activities being appropriately equipped is key.

- **Conduct a site appraisal** – If a Forest Kindergarten, or any outdoor learning is to take place a site appraisal needs to be done. The space that is going to be worked in needs to be risk assessed for any hazards. When partaking in my own Forest Kindergarten training our lecturer would do a site appraisal and risk assessed before we entered the site and area that was being used to make sure that there was no hazards such as broken glass, animal droppings or fallen trees. A site appraisal would need to be done each time before entering the area that was being used. The area selected is an important factor as it needs to be safe and secure, there also needs to be parts of it that can be discovered such as fallen trees that are safe to climb on or sit on.
- **Communicate** – Communication is key in any environment but especially if you were planning a Forest Kindergarten or outdoor excursions. The importance of having contact with all external agencies such as park rangers and the council to ensure the availability and request that you can use a certain area or space.
- **Bring your kit** – You will need kit such as a first aid kit in case there are any accidents, any medicines that children require such as antihistamine or an Epi-pen if a child has an allergic reaction. Easily transportable resources, like a small bag of resources with walking sticks, water first aid kit, registers, and an extra waterproof jacket. You could be walking for a long period of time so want to be carrying as little as possible unless you have a facility nearby where equipment can be held so it isn't needed to be carried back and forth for a long period of time before arriving at the site.

My learning experience...

I thoroughly enjoyed my experience and this programme. It was not what I expected, I learnt so much more about how children react to being outdoors in nature and I also learnt more about myself and the benefits of getting out and being around nature. I also believe that this experience made me think about outdoor learning and the importance it will have when I am a practitioner. When we observed a Forest Kindergarten, I saw that the children were not afraid to climb trees to get mucky, but this is all positive risk taking. When children climb trees or get muddy, they are exploring and growing in resilience and confidence, it teaches them not to be afraid. When I first arrived at the forest kindergarten that I was observing I was worrying about the children that were climbing in case they fell, but I learnt that if they fall but they will get back up and try again. Observing and learning about the benefits of children outdoors has been powerful in pursuit of my own practice as I now have a greater understanding of the importance of the outdoors for children when creating confidence character and resilience. The experiences also emphasised the importance for child-led learning as the Kindergarten was based around what the children wanted to do if they wanted to gather sticks and use their numeracy skills to count them the could or they could personify a stick and pretend it is a wand and play and enjoy themselves in a natural environment.

The benefits of outdoor learning!

I believe that there are being outdoors offers benefits for everyone not just for children. After our training I have realised the importance for myself of getting out and about each day, being outside even just for a small walk makes me feel so much better. Especially at the moment when we are all facing the current pandemic. I think it can be hard to stay positive and motivated, but I believe that even going a walk around where I live has made the rest of my day so much better, and I feel more motivated and energised. I lent myself to the experience and I have personally felt the benefits from doing so. Getting out and exploring has improved my health and wellbeing and I appreciate nature more now than I ever has. Going on this 3-day experience where we were outdoors each day for long periods of time taught me a lot, I know how good I felt after those 3 days and how refreshed I felt after getting fresh air and exploring new places. I do think that the outdoors and nature have benefits for all for example educational, building character, health and wellbeing for children and wellbeing and health, mood, and exercise for adults.

New experiences

This experience led to the opportunity of meeting my peers for the first time, this meant that I was able to make friends as I did find it difficult at the start of my course as we were not able to make those connections as we are partaking in online learning. I was also able to meet some of my lecturers which made me feel more comfortable with the course itself as I got to know my lecturers better and they got to meet me for the first time in person too.

I would highly recommend this training to any professionals or students that get the opportunity to partake in it as I was able to see the benefits for myself and also the benefits and knowledge that I can take forward in my career as a practitioner.

Enjoy this blog? Do you have top tips that you would like to share?

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Useful Links

Our handy hints and tips on #outdoorplay

<https://www.inspiringscotland.org.uk/thrive/>

Want to learn out this course read here:

<https://www.glasgowclyde.ac.uk/courses/451-hnc-childhood-practice/695>

Learn more about Forest Kindergarten in Scotland here:

<https://creativestarning.co.uk/forest-kindergarten-in-scotland/>