

# My space

Creating enabling environments for young children



# Contents

<b>Foreword</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Introduction</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Principles</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>The Emotional Environment</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>The Indoor Environment</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>The Outdoor Environment</b>	<b>24</b>
<b>Conclusion</b>	<b>34</b>
<b>Sources of further information</b>	Back Cover
<b>Acknowledgements</b>	Back Cover



# Foreword

The Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) is mandatory for all schools and early years providers in Ofsted registered settings, for children from birth to age five. In order to develop provision the Early Years Foundation Stage documentation lists a wide range of statutory requirements and guiding principles.

One of these principles is Enabling Environments. My space offers support and inspiration to help practitioners put this principle into practice.

This booklet considers the environment under 3 separate headings:

- The Emotional Environment
- The Indoor Environment
- The Outdoor Environment.

It encourages self-evaluation with a strong emphasis on consideration of the child's perspective.

The booklet is accompanied by a CD Rom, which contains video clips filmed in Oxfordshire settings. The very useful downloadable audit and planning sheets can be used as an invaluable development tool.

**Barbara Slatter**

Quality Workforce Development Manager,  
Early Learning and Childcare



# Introduction

The impact of children's surroundings on their development is well-documented. Friedrich Froebel (early 1800s) compared designing an environment for children to planning an organic and ever-changing garden which can inspire and guide children's imagination and behaviour.

*Margaret McMillan, pioneer of the British nursery school said*

- ‘ We are trying to create an environment where education will be almost inevitable. ’

The Reggio approach recognises the environment as a “third teacher” (parents and carers being the first two.)

These values are embedded in the Early Years Foundation Stage and are represented under the guiding principle of Enabling Environments.

My space is a self-evaluation and development resource organised under three headings: **the emotional environment**, **the indoor environment** and the **outdoor environment**.

It supports settings to create effective child-centred environments whether they are homes, schools, pre-schools or daycare settings.

By starting from a child's perspective it aims to help practitioners to look beyond the statutory brief of the EYFS in order to gain an insight into the experience young children have when they attend settings.



By starting from a child's perspective it aims to help practitioners to look beyond the statutory brief of the EYFS.

In each area there are questions to establish the child's perspective. These are followed by points to consider and practical suggestions for development.

*Maria Montessori said*

‘ Adults admire their environment; they can remember it and think about it – but a child absorbs it. The things he sees are not just remembered; they form part of his soul. He incarnates in himself all in the world about him that his eyes see and his ears hear. ’

Sometimes very small changes can have a huge impact on children's experiences and the practitioner's job satisfaction. If there is a good understanding of how you would like things to be it is easier to plan steps to achieving your goal.



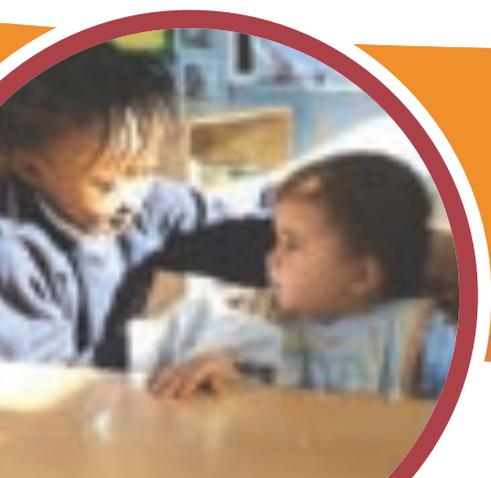
# Principles

## Fostering enabling environments

In order for any early years environment to be enabling, it is essential that all staff understand how children learn and the value of play and children's independence. Another key principle is that of observation. Through ongoing observations you will learn not only what the children are learning but also how they learn as individuals.

The following points apply to all aspects of the environment:

- Pace is all important in children's learning. If you observe young children you will see how important repetition is. Scientific research confirms the need to repeat experiences to strengthen connections in the brain.
- Children need permission and the opportunity to explore, observe, take part in and recreate experiences; adding, changing or combining resources as they want.
- Plan activities which can be explored over a period of time.
- Make sure that the experiences and activities you offer focus on process over product. The thought processes in an activity are far more important than an end product that is attractive to adults.
- Provide young children with experiences such as heuristic play, with interesting objects to explore in their own way without adult interruption.
- Consider the resources you will need in order to meet children's special needs. Do your resources reflect equality and diversity?



Through ongoing observations you will learn not only what the children are learning but also how they learn as individuals.

- Are there enough resources to go round, particularly for very young children who are still developing the ability to share?
- How do you provide for solitary play?
- Does the way your timetable is organised provide opportunities for children to return to their activities throughout the day without having to tidy up repeatedly? Time needs to be set aside at the end of the day for everyone to tidy up, but it should not be necessary to clear everything away at mid day.
- Do you support schemas such as transporting, connection, enveloping, scattering and positioning?

‘ Make sure that the experiences and activities you offer focus on process over product. The thought processes in an activity are far more important than an end product that is attractive to adults. ’



# The Emotional Environment

## What does it mean?

The emotional environment refers to the whole mood or atmosphere of a setting, how it feels. Relationships are what constitute the emotional environment. This includes how people behave, speak to each other and are treated and how inclusive it is.

- Babies and young children are very perceptive and aware of the feelings and atmosphere around them. Relationships between adults and children, between adults and other adults and between children themselves all have an important role to play in developing the young child's sense of self and their understanding of how to interact with others. •

*Birth to three supporting our youngest children. Learning and teaching Scotland 2005.*



Babies and young children are very perceptive and aware of the feelings and atmosphere around them.



**Questions from the child**

Do you know me,  
my family and my  
circumstances?

**In response could you?**

- Arrange home visits or pre-starting interviews
- Use an 'about me' sheet to find out about the child
- Develop ways of sharing information with all staff

Who will I meet here  
and how do I know who  
is special to me?

- Offer open visiting
- Stagger children's starting dates
- Develop your key person approach
- Buddy staff to ensure continuity of supply cover
- Have a daily photo display of staff present
- Observe regularly to inform your practice

How am I welcomed?  
What is the  
atmosphere like?  
Does it feel right?

- Ensure each child is warmly welcomed by name
- Encourage parents to stay and play
- Have an unhurried regular routine that children understand
- Smile!
- Observe from a child's point of view to get a picture of their experience

How do people  
behave here?

- Develop a clear behaviour policy
- Involve adults and children in the development of it
- Ensure everyone understands and adheres to it
- Ensure adults are positive role models
- Promote consideration as a key value
- Encourage young children's ability to empathise



**Questions from the child**

Do you know about and understand my particular needs and can you meet them?

**In response could you?**

- Provide for children in terms of their stage of development instead of age
- Observe children, note their preferences, ways to communicate, friends, interests and learning styles
- Plan activities and experiences in response to your observations to support children's development
- Develop an equality and diversity policy
- Use your area or setting Senco to develop your practice
- Use Step into Training to find training on Special Educational needs, equality and diversity and planning for individual needs

How do you help me to become more confident and independent?

- Plan your environment so that children can access resources independently
- Plan the timetable so that there are not unnecessary breaks in the day
- Keep focus activities for several days or even weeks
- Allow children to repeat activities and pursue interests in depth
- Allow children to choose where they play and who with
- Encourage children's independence, this may mean slowing down the pace of your day

➔ Use the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scales to develop your self evaluation. Your Early Years Support Worker will be able to help you with this.

## Further ideas for developing the emotional environment

### Finding out about the child

#### Home visits and settling

- Plan times when you can arrange meetings with new parents to find out about their child. Home visits give a real insight into a child's life, forging a stronger connection, and parents are often more open in their own environment. If home visits are not possible, arrange a meeting in your setting. Use a quiet space where parents can speak in confidence and staff can give their undivided attention to the meeting. Maybe delay the start of your term by a day or two, finish your session early or free staff from their duties to facilitate this.
- Using a question sheet helps to ensure that all important information is collected. There is a sample question sheet on the CD Rom.

- If possible take a photograph of the child and their parent/carer so that everyone will recognise them when they start.
- Encourage open visiting before the child starts. The more familiar a child is with a setting the less stressful the settling period will be for everyone.

### Key Person Approach

- In order for children to feel secure and settled they need to have a special connection with at least one member of staff – a key person. Develop a key person approach to enable and support close attachments between individual children and individual staff.
- Write a key person approach policy as a staff team, defining the needs and roles of the child, family, key person, buddy and other staff. Ask children and families what is important for them.
- Ensure that staff understand the research and reasons behind the key person approach.



Children are more settled and confident if they are able to predict the routine of the day.

- Keep parents informed about when key people will be away and the cover arrangements in place. Display a photo board of which staff are in each day so that parents can prepare their child for changes.
- Encourage a strong key person/buddy relationship so that information is shared enabling staff to work together to provide continuity of care.

### Observations and self evaluation

- Encourage all staff to make observations of all children and to share these. Encourage peer observation, maybe one member of staff could observe a child with different staff members, are there differences in expectations and routines? This can be very unsettling for the child.
- Note the children's body language and facial expressions; are they happy for their parents/carers to leave them? Do they move in a relaxed and confident way? Can they access the resources they need or are they dependent on adults to find or do things for them? How might you improve this?
- Children are more settled and confident if they are able to predict the routine of the day.
- A visual timetable which shows the structure of the day can be reassuring.
- Are the adults affectionate, patient and calm? Do they interact with children sensitively? Do they have fun with the children and share their interests but also give them space to be contemplative?



- To establish parental opinions, distribute a questionnaire or put a comment box in your entrance. If something is referred to by several parents then it needs to be looked at. Communicate your findings and what you plan to do.

### Arrival time

- Observe children arriving; are they greeted by name? Do they know who and where to go to? Are the parents/carers welcome to stay and settle their children and share information with the staff at this time?
- Do the children have to sit still and wait for others to arrive? Consider an open registration so that you can extend the amount of uninterrupted time children have to develop their play. Can you arrange for children to go inside and outside?

### Behaviour

#### Setting ethos

- In order for a setting to be happy and secure there needs to be a strong ethos that embraces equality of opportunity for all. If this underpins everything that your setting does then consideration and respect will be promoted and the atmosphere will be positive and friendly.
- The strongest role models for positive behaviour are the adults in the setting. If all adults treat everyone with respect in a friendly and courteous way the children will learn from them. It is important that all staff have a shared vision for their setting and are clear about what they are working towards and why.
- Rota staff to work in different combinations to learn from each others strengths.



Home visits give a real insight into a child's life, forging a stronger connection.

- Meeting together regularly to discuss ideas and perceived difficulties helps to foster team spirit.

### **Behaviour management**

- Do all staff have the same approach to behaviour management?
- Work together with children and adults to develop a clearly structured behaviour policy with examples, which everyone understands. It is best to think about the attitudes and values that you wish to develop. Try to think of how children can develop their own skills in resolving conflicts and not have complex rules waiting to be broken! See sample behaviour policy on the CD Rom.

### **Equality and Diversity**

- Promote equality and diversity by providing multicultural resources and displaying pictures/posters and providing books that promote positive images of race, cultures, ages, abilities

and gender. Promote positive attitudes to diversity and difference. Encourage children to value aspects of their own lives and those of other people. Ensure that all children and their families are listened to and respected and feel included.

- It is important to actively avoid racial or gender stereotyping and challenge expressions of prejudice or discrimination.
- Plan for both care and learning needs of individual children e.g. those learning English as an additional language, to help all children get the best possible start.



# The Indoor Environment

The impact of children's surroundings on their development has long been noted. Friedrich Froebel (early 1800s) compared designing an environment for children to planning an organic garden, which can inspire and guide children's imagination and behaviour.

*Maria Montessori said*

- Adults admire their environment; they can remember it and think about it – but a child absorbs it. The things he sees are not just remembered; they form part of his soul. He incarnates in himself all in the world about him that his eyes see and his ears hear. ›

*Margaret Macmillan said*

We are trying to create an environment where education will be almost inevitable.

The Reggio approach also recognises the environment as 'a third teacher'.

Julia Manning – Morton writes that "the physical environment in a setting impacts directly on the quality of practice, making environment a critically important component that practitioners need to plan for and review regularly."

This section focuses on the indoor environment, but the principles apply to outside as well.



The physical environment in a setting impacts directly on the quality of practice.



### Questions from the child

Does this place look a welcoming and exciting place to be?

### In response could you?

- Observe the environment from a child's height, can you reach resources and see displays
- Use posters, photographs and interactive displays to stimulate interest
- Make sure the setting is clean, tidy and inviting

Will I be able to play in lots of ways, to explore, be active, be creative, or be solitary or reflective?

- Rearrange your environment to create distinct activity zones including quiet areas and messy areas
- Create boundaries to different areas, with shelving, furniture, fabric or different floor surfaces
- Create softness with drapes, cushions and rugs
- Make areas flexible to accommodate groups of children with varying needs

Can I practice and develop my physical skills such as crawling and toddling here?  
Is there room to move about and play freely, and to use mobility aids?

- Create clear floor areas to support developing skills by reducing the number of tables and chairs
- Invest in folding tables for use at meal times
- Ensure furniture is correct size for children
- Observe how the children use the space and rearrange cramped or unused areas
- Arrange furniture to provide hand holds for toddlers



**Questions from the child**

Can I explore using all my senses?  
Are my developing schemas supported?

**In response could you?**

- Offer a wide range of natural objects for heuristic and exploratory play
- Encourage children to explore and experiment with resources
- Permit and support transporting and other developing schemas

Can I find resources and my personal items independently?

- Store resources in accessible containers that are clearly labelled
- Provide children with their own basket or drawer to store their precious items safely
- Provide each child with a coat peg and area to store spare clothes
- Teach children where to find things and support them in tidying up with you



### **What can we do? Planning the organisation of the environment**

As a team, observe how children are using the environment, and then work together to involve children in planning activities/experiences:

- Draw a plan of your setting, note where there are entrances and exits, toilets, sinks, fixed units and storage areas. Distinguish hard floor and carpeted areas, mark electrical sockets and windows.
- Make several copies of this plan so that you can experiment on paper before moving everything about!
- Think about where care routines, eating and sleeping will take place.
- Mark in the main flow of travel through the setting. If pathways are well defined, children, including those with developing movement skills, can move easily through the setting.
- Arrange activity areas around the room, not just the edges with empty space in the middle.
- Think about the different types of areas to include, such as a quiet area, an active area, creative/messy areas, a construction area, an eating area and a book area. (Refer to further ideas section on page 22).
- List what resources are used in each area, and note how these will be stored. Storage needs to be safe, attractive and easily accessible for the children.
- Plan a time to rearrange your setting, some changes can be made easily, others will have to be made over time.



*Introduce the areas to the children, explore them together to see what you can do and find in different places.*

- One of the quickest and most effective ways to transform a setting is to de-junk! Get rid of broken and incomplete resources; reject any resources or furniture if they are unsafe or rarely used. Group resources together and label storage clearly. Use shelf tops and window sills for interesting and attractive displays.
  - Arrange your areas; make sure there is room to move around freely.
  - Introduce the areas to the children. Explore them together to see what you can do and find in different places.
  - As time goes by, review how the areas are being used, what impact have your changes had on the children? If an area is not well used consider why and redevelop it. Above all have fun and enjoy the transformation!
- ‘ Think about the different types of areas to include, such as a quiet area, an active area, creative/messy areas, a construction area, an eating area and a book area. ’



### **Further ideas for activity areas**

The following areas are a guide only and in no way exhaustive; always check that your resources reflect equality and cultural diversity. Try to use real objects whenever possible:

#### **Activity area and resource suggestions**

##### **Home corner**

- Multicultural fabrics, cooking utensils and food packaging.
- Dolls in a range of skin tones, cots and baby equipment, child size broom, dressing up clothes, suitable size furniture (not too small!) kitchen furniture may be made out of cardboard boxes. Phone, diaries, note books, directories, pencils, books, clock, ornaments, tool box, laundry equipment.

##### **Role play**

- Dressing up clothes, props which can be used in a variety of ways, scarves, drapes, and saris. Shop and office equipment.

##### **Creative workshop**

- Well-sorted modelling resources; boxes, plastic bottles, corks, bottle tops. Sticky tape, masking tape, glue,

paste, string, glue sticks, scissors, pens, pencils.

##### **Painting**

- A range of brushes, sponges, paint easels, printing items, offer a range of techniques over time.

##### **Graphics or mark making**

- Well organised pencils, crayons, pens, chalks, white boards, paper, chalk boards, clip boards, alphabet books and friezes, name cards, envelopes, different types and shapes of paper, note books, cards.

##### **Tactile or sensory**

- Open access to resources to use with play dough or clay, cutters, rolling pins, textured materials, garlic presses, bun tins, bowls and utensils.
- Builder's trays, gravel, soil, lentils, rice, cornflour gloop, shaving foam, pasta, aprons, a bucket of soapy water for cleaning hands. Replenish resources as needed. Check for allergies.

##### **Music and dance**

- Music from a wide range of cultures, visits out and visitors or videos to observe performances of music and dance. Named musical instruments,



home-made and bought; Space to dance, mirrors, scarves, ribbons, streamers, and bells.

### Quiet space

- Make sure this is out of the flow of traffic. Supply cushions, bean bags or drapes to soften noise and make the area more private. Also provide books and a few good quality soft toys.

### Book area

- A wide selection of good quality fiction and non fiction books which children can access independently. Include big books, board books, and home made books with photographs. A comfortable space for adults to share books with one or two or a group of children. Puppets and props for story telling. Story sacks.

### Construction or block play

- Good quality wooden blocks, small and large blocks which work together. Concentrate on a good stock of one or two sets. Consider the different techniques required when buying new construction sets.

- Store small world resources near the construction area.

### Exploration and discovery

- Collections of resources such as magnets, torches, pulley systems, collections of items such as utensils, fabrics, wooden or metal objects, delicate natural items such as birds nests, reference books and magnifying glasses paper and pencils.

### Display

- Ensure displays are interesting and interactive for the children, and include photographs of their recent experiences, celebrate children's individual creativity, display 3D models with labels and a photo of the child working on the displayed piece. Use pictures of people familiar to the child. Make sure displays reflect equality and diversity.



# The Outdoor Environment

## Outdoors is special

- It offers a rich, multi sensory environment that is meaningful, stimulating and motivating for all young children.
  - Children can move more freely, take risks.
  - Children can develop their health and strength and coordination.
  - Opportunity to experience nature and the weather.
  - Relationships are different outdoors children who are quiet indoors are often less inhibited outdoors.
  - Working on large scale activities provides the opportunity for children to cooperate, negotiate and collaborate.
  - Outdoors does not limit itself to your grounds. Explore with your children. Visit the park, the shops or the train station so they can learn about and start to make sense of their world.
- ‘ It offers a rich, multi sensory environment that is meaningful, stimulating and motivating for all young children. ’



Relationships are different outdoors children who are quiet indoors are often less inhibited outdoors.



**Questions from the child**

When can I go outside?  
How long can I stay out?

**In response could you?**

- Increase the uninterrupted time that children have to develop their play outside
- Offer open access to outdoors
- Review your timetables and routines to offer extended periods of time outside

Do the grown ups like being outside?

- Train staff to understand the importance of the outdoor environment
- Promote the value of outdoor learning to parents
- Make displays highlighting the value of outdoor play
- Use attitudes to outdoors as part of your selection criteria
- Observe staff to ensure that they engage positively with the children outdoors

Can I find out about the real world?

- Grow flowers, fruit or vegetables with the children
- Provide wet weather or warm clothing, shade and sun hats so that children can experience playing in all weathers
- Make log piles for mini beasts, or put up bird feeders
- Provide a mud patch for digging and exploration
- Offer resources such as magnifying glasses and reference books to encourage observation



Consult with the children as to the types of experience they would like and ask where they feel they can currently enjoy these.

**Questions from the child**

What can I do outside?  
Can I be messy,  
boisterous, relax or  
find places to hide?

**In response could you?**

- Audit your outdoor environment and resources to see what experiences you offer
- Give space, time and permission for children to be noisy and energetic
- Develop areas of the garden where wheeled toys and ball play can be enjoyed
- Create shaded areas with planting or fabric drapes, out of the way of active areas
- Make dens with willow, blankets or small sheds
- Create secret pathways using willow or other planting or screens

What skills and  
knowledge can  
I develop?

- Observe children outdoors and list the skills and knowledge they are developing
- Plan and provide for the development of a wider range of knowledge and skills to ensure a broad curriculum outdoors
- Plan focus activities for outdoors

Am I able to get outside  
and move about there?

- Ensure your space is user-friendly for children with mobility issues
- Ensure all groups and ages of children have equal access to outdoors
- Create calm zones for less confident children
- Provide resources suitable for the age and stage of your children, offering sufficient challenge

### **What can we do? Planning the organisation of the outdoors**

As a team use all your senses to observe the outdoor environment and how children are using the environment. Work together to:

- Make a plan of your outside area, mark entrances and exits, boundaries, hard surfaces, soil and grass and any fixed safety surfaces or constructions.
- Mark where there is light or shade.
- Mark where outdoor taps and drains are.
- List the experiences, skills, knowledge and attitudes you wish the children to have or develop. Concentrate on what you would like the children to be able to do, before investing in new equipment.
- Consult with the children as to the types of experience they would like and ask where they feel they can currently enjoy these.

- Use the suggested activity areas to draw up a plan of how you would like to organise your outside area and plan how you will do this in small stages.
- List the resources you may need to offer these experiences and plan how they will be stored.

### **Ideas for small areas**

- Plan provision over time, you may not be able to offer everything all the time.
- Be creative with space, grow flowers and vegetables in window boxes or containers, pile logs in corners for mini beast homes, hang bird feeders, use washing up bowls for water play.
- Make use of parks, allotments, riverside walks.

### **Further suggestions for outdoors**

Outdoor areas can be divided to provide a range of permanent areas defined by different surfaces and physical structures such as trellis, hedges and fences. Temporary boundaries such as chalk lines, old tyres or cones can also be used.



*Working on large scale activities provides the opportunity for children to cooperate, negotiate and collaborate.*

The transition zone between indoors and outdoors is a space where children and adults can observe others and make choices without being in the way.

A low level coat rack and wellington boot storage needs to be close to the exit to support independent access and encourage free flow between in and out of doors. A covered area here will give more observation space and shelter.

The following areas are a guide only and not exhaustive; check that your resources reflect equality and diversity. Try to use natural resources whenever possible:

#### **Climbing areas**

- Moveable equipment e.g. A-frames, ladders, planks, tunnels and tyres offer stimulating physical challenges.

#### **Quiet and secret areas**

- A space where children can hide or be protected from energetic or noisy play. A blanket can be put under a tree or used to make a small den.

#### **Space to use wheeled vehicles**

- Create a designated vehicle riding area with the children so safety can be discussed; parking bays for return of vehicles can be near the storage shed.

#### **Space to develop new skills**

- Sometimes you may wish to zone off an area so that children can practise developing new physical skills such as throwing, rolling, catching or aiming balls, beanbags or hoops.



### Sand

- Make your outdoor sandpit as large as you can, it will never be too big! Dig out and line with mypex membrane; for more permanence have a deep brick pit built. This will not be a cheap project but it is well worth fund raising for.
- Alternatively fill a builder's tray with sand or empty sand onto a large tarpaulin. Cover with pea netting weighted down with tyres or try a sonic deterrent.

### Water

- Invest in an outdoor tap. Use hose pipes to fill containers or transport water in buckets. Inexpensive washing up bowls, buckets, washing up liquid bottles, old guttering and milk crates to offer a wide range of stimulating activities.

### Natural areas and areas for planting and growing

- This area may be raised beds, hanging baskets or a few old tyres filled with compost, bulbs and seeds. Encourage

exploration of the natural environment; define an area for digging in the mud. Provide wellington boots, wet weather gear and child size gardening tools.

### Space to construct and to be creative

- Inexpensive items such as milk crates, tyres, large cardboard boxes and bakers' trays are useful. A set of hollow wooden blocks is more expensive but a good versatile investment. Props for imaginative role play, drapes.
- Children who rarely mark make inside may be happier to do so outside. Good resources include paint rollers and trays, large chalks, blackboards, fat paint brushes and water, clip boards, pencils, pens which can be stored on easily transportable trolleys,
- Make collections of natural resources such as shells, fir cones, conkers, leaves and pebbles and store in baskets.
- Create sound sculptures from old pans or oven trays, provide beaters, group wind chimes together or use old trays to make drums or cymbals.





# Oxfordshire Forest Schools Project and Outdoor learning

Opportunities to encourage children and families to experience the outdoor environment are being increased through the Forest Schools and Without Walls projects.

## What is Forest School?

- Forest School is – an inspirational process that offers children, young people and adults regular opportunities to achieve, and develop confidence and self esteem through hands on learning experiences in a woodland environment. ’

*Forest Education initiative 2005.*

Forest School is based on the Scandinavian model of outdoor education where children spend a considerable amount of their day outdoors throughout the year. Children engaging in practical activities and having the ability to achieve, builds

self confidence and self esteem. In the outdoor environment children learn to communicate more freely and cooperate more easily than in the classroom.

In Oxfordshire there are an increasing number of schools with a qualified Leader taking children to a designated woodland Forest School site on a regular basis throughout the year, recognising the benefits of children being outside.

## What happens at Forest School?

These natural ‘wild’ settings become familiar and distinct from the classroom where children are encouraged to follow rules and routines, to be responsible for their own safety and assess risks – all under close supervision!

Each session is a unique combination of discovery, exploration, investigation, play, and practical tasks all predominantly child-initiated and child-led.



### **But what if you don't have a woodland?**

You could adopt the Forest School ethos of child-led and child-initiated learning in even a small area of your outside space which could be set aside allow children to 'do their own thing' using natural materials. Leave the grass long and if you have trees and shrubs let them play around them. Providing the children with a small tarpaulin and some ropes, baskets and small pieces of wood will encourage them to build dens and do some problem solving. They will soon realise that this space is theirs and they can do all sorts of things without being interrupted.

Observation of these sessions will provide information about the children which is unlikely to be gathered in any other way!

To find out more about Forest Schools visit [www.forestschoools.com](http://www.forestschoools.com).

### **Without Walls**

This is a new project which will help and encourage families in Oxford City to discover and access the outdoor spaces in their locality. With support from schools and children's centres they will be invited to become involved in practical tasks to help improve these areas, such as planting bulbs and growing vegetables. There are also opportunities to have fun with their families out of doors and start their own community projects.

For ideas about how you might involve families in the outdoors please contact the Without Walls project on **01865 458765**.



# Conclusion

In this publication we have reflected on the importance of the environment on a child's well being and development. In each of the three areas, the emotional, indoor and outdoor environment, we have encouraged you to:

- Observe your setting from a child's point of view
  - Develop your self evaluation – recognise your strengths and plan to develop the areas that are not as effective
  - Work as a team and to establish your aims and vision and to plan for development
  - Involve the children, their parents/ carers and the local community
  - Be positive, creative and enjoy your setting and it's ongoing development
  - Use this booklet and the accompanying CD Rom to locate useful websites, suggested publications and training details.
- Above all else, develop positive and effective relationships; it will transform your setting. Work at the quality of the interactions that take place between adults and children. Take time to listen to the children and to understand what they are telling you, this will enable you to understand their interests and needs and to plan to meet these. Ensure that adults are friendly, polite and sensitive to others at all times, this will make your setting a happy place for children and adults alike.

*...Good luck and have fun!*



# Sources of further information

- All of Us Inclusion checklist for settings  
➤ [www.kids.org.uk](http://www.kids.org.uk)
- [www.CommunityPlaythings.co.uk](http://www.CommunityPlaythings.co.uk)
- National Children's Bureau  
➤ [www.ncb.org.uk](http://www.ncb.org.uk)
- Learning through Landscapes  
➤ [www.ltl.org.uk](http://www.ltl.org.uk)
- [www.playengland.org.uk](http://www.playengland.org.uk)
- [www.playlink.org.uk](http://www.playlink.org.uk)
- The Lighthouse for Education  
➤ [www.tlfe.org.uk/foundationstage/outdoorplay](http://www.tlfe.org.uk/foundationstage/outdoorplay)
- [www.forestschools.com](http://www.forestschools.com)
- [www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/earlyyearstraining](http://www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/earlyyearstraining)

## Acknowledgements

We are indebted to Claire White (Headteacher of Lydalls Nursery School) for sharing her extensive knowledge and expertise in writing this booklet and overseeing the My space project.

Thanks also to the following settings for allowing us to document their practice:

Abi Wedmore – Childminder

All Saints Primary School Foundation Stage Unit

Comper Foundation Stage School

Lydalls Nursery School

Shepherd's Hill Pre-School and Windale Foundation Stage Unit

The Slade Day Nursery

Wheatley Nursery School

## **Bibliography/Recommended reading**

### **Time to Play in Early Childhood Education**

Bruce T – London, Hodder and Stoughton (2001)

### **The Great Outdoors**

Edgington M – British Association for Early Childhood Education (2002)

### **Starting from the Child**

Fisher J – Open University Press (1996)

### **Learning through Play**

Bruce T – Hodder and Stoughton (2005)

### **Exercising Muscles and Minds**

Ouvry M – National Children's Bureau (2005)

### **Playwork**

Davy A – Thomson Learning (2001)

### **Listening to Young Children, The Mosaic Approach**

Clark A and Moss P – National Children's Bureau (2003)

### **Early Childhood Environment Rating Scales**

Harms T, Clifford R M, Cryer D – Teachers' College Press (1997)

### **A Nurturing Environment for Children up to Three**

Hope S and Hertzberg E – Islington Borough Council (2007)

