



HOW TO PROVIDE OUTSTANDING LEARNING IN THE OUTDOORS

-
- Support schemas with forest school
 - Overhauling your outside space
 - Inside 'outstanding' Dandelion nursery
 - The 7Cs of quality outdoor play
 - Gardening with the under-fives



Early Excellence
Inspirational Learning

Develop effective
practice with
Early Excellence

[earlyexcellence.com/
outdoor](http://earlyexcellence.com/outdoor)

Enrich Your Outdoor Curriculum

For help in developing
your outdoor curriculum
contact: 01422 311314

Building & Constructing Collection
£845.00 (exc. VAT) ODBC01

Building Crates Collection

£225.00 (exc. VAT)
ODBC05

Set of Steering Wheels

£44.95 (exc. VAT)
ODBC16

Sack Cart

£115.00 (exc. VAT)
ODBC07

Set of Tyres

£44.95 (exc. VAT)
ODBC15

Access
**FREE Planning
Guides with
Early Excellence**

[earlyexcellence.com/
subscribe](http://earlyexcellence.com/subscribe)



Hello



Early years and the outdoors go hand in hand – time spent in the latter is integral to good practice in the former, and every setting, no matter what space it has available, must reflect on how to harness and enhance the unique learning environment offered by the natural world on an ongoing basis if it is to enjoy successful outcomes and inspection results. The good news is that the

outdoors offers countless opportunities to support development across every area of learning, and accessing them needn't cost the earth; but it's also true that there are challenges to overcome, and in some places a reluctance to fully embrace the 'out-in-all-weather' philosophy that ensures children benefit to the fullest degree.

Covering everything the outdoors can provide would take many more pages than we have available here, but in this, the first of a series of digital publications from *Teach Early Years* focused upon key areas of early years practice, we've set out to offer valuable guidance on a few of the most important points as well as inspiration from settings with effective outdoor provision. As such, you'll find insights into what investing in your garden can get you (page 5), the power of the forest school approach – and how to use it to its full potential (pages 6 and 10), handy starting points for reflecting on your learning environment (pages 9 and 16), tips on developing children's green fingers (page 20) and finally reflections on the role the outdoors has to play in school readiness. Come rain or shine, we hope you find it useful!

Jacob Stow - Editor



Get more great advice on best practice in the early years at teachearlyyears.com



THE EXPERTS...



LOUISE SMITH
Early Years Teacher and forest school leader.



ANNIE DAVY
Freelance writer and facilitator.



KATHY BRODIE
Early Years Professional and trainer based in East Cheshire.



SAMANTHA TENNANT
Nursery assistant at a village preschool in Cheshire.



JUNO HOLLYHOCK
Former executive director of Learning Through Landscapes.

5 Investing in the great outdoors

When Boys & Girls nursery in Croxley Green moved to new premises, creating an engaging garden area was a priority...

6 Supporting schemas in forest school

The great outdoors is the perfect place to help children explore their fascinations through play, says Louise Smith.

9 7Cs for quality outdoor play

Annie Davy shares an effective approach to reflecting on your outside space.

10 "Children learn best outdoors"

Come rain or shine, everybody at Dandelion Nursery can be found in the open air. *TEY*

joined them to discuss the benefits of forest school and philosophy...

16 "Embrace everything the outdoors has to offer"

There are huge advantages to escaping the classroom, however much space you have available, says Kathy Brodie.

20 Growing green fingers

Have you been cultivating your charges' gardening skills? It's easy, says Samantha Tennant...

22 "Outdoor play boosts school readiness"

With so much emphasis placed on preparing young children for primary education, the benefits of time spent outside can't be ignored, says Juno Hollyhock.



Editor: Jacob Stow, 01206 505 113, jacob.stow@theteachco.com

Advertising manager: Samantha Law, 01206 505 499, samantha.law@theteachco.com

Group advertising manager: Richard Stebbing

Art editor: David Haddington

Group editor: Joe Carter

Photography: CliQQ Photography, www.cliqq.co.uk

Accounts: 01206 505 995

Subscription enquiries: 0330 333 0043

Subscription department: Kaly Temmick, 01206 505 426, kalyani@aceville.co.uk

Publisher: Helen Tudor

Published by: Maze Media

(2000) Ltd, 25 Phoenix Court, Hawkins Rd, Colchester, CO2 8JY Tel: 01206 505 900

The views within this magazine are not necessarily those of the publisher. Every effort is made to ensure the veracity and integrity of the companies, persons, products and services mentioned in this publication, and details given are believed to be accurate at the time of going to press. However, no responsibility or liability whatsoever can be accepted for any consequence or repercussion of responding to information or advice given or inferred. Copyright Maze Media (2000) Ltd.

Getting Messy!

Messy play is the ultimate sensory experience. It allows children to understand how things feel, smell and look, and how materials differ from one another. Little ones have an innate curiosity, and by allowing them to mix, mush and squelch you're helping them develop creativity, confidence and communication.



- 1. Metal Whisks
HY1782404 pack 3 £7.99
- 2. Dredgers
HY1784545 Large Hole
pack 3 £9.99
- 3. Mud Kitchen Kettle
HY1775648 £12.99
- 4. Metal Sieve Set
HY1775638 pack 3 £4.99

The home of inspirational and best value resources for **Primary & Early Years**

Discover the full Outdoor Collection at www.hope-education.co.uk



Inspire · Create · Educate

Investing in the great outdoors

When Boys & Girls Nursery in Croxley Green moved to new premises, creating an engaging garden area was a priority, as TEY discovered...

EVERY EARLY YEARS setting needs an outdoor space – in the fresh air, young children’s learning can take on new dimensions and develop unconstrained; they can better stretch their physical capabilities, improving their fitness in the process, and connect with nature. But not all outdoor spaces are created equal, and careful thought is needed in the planning process to ensure that the full span of the Early Years Foundation Stage and the needs of different age groups are taken into account – whatever funds are available to invest in the project.

A BLANK CANVAS

When a refurbishment of the business park in which Boys & Girls Nursery’s Croxley Green setting was based necessitated a change of premises, director Natasha Kirby and her team were faced with a blank canvas, and an opportunity to create an engaging outdoor area from scratch.

“Investing money in the outdoor area was really important to us,” the group’s area manager, Kelly Ridge, explains. “We wanted to offer the children the same quality of opportunities outside that we were offering them inside, and to help keep them fit and healthy. It was a big thing for our parents as well – some of our children don’t have gardens, and if their mums and dads are working 40 hours a week it can be hard for them to access outdoor space.”

The outdoor area at the setting’s previous home had features the team were happy to retain, but also deficiencies that they were keen to address. The first step in the process saw Boys & Girls give careful



consideration to finding the right people for the job – essential given that the development of the area had a budget of £60,000. “Our director spent a long time researching options,” Kelly tells us. “Different companies came in and gave quotes, and showed us designs. The company we chose were very flexible in working to create what we wanted, and sent us examples of previous gardens they’d worked on.”

FEATURE PACKED

Importantly, Natasha and her team had a clear idea of what they required in order to support their children’s learning and enjoyment. “We needed to cover all seven of the areas of learning out in the garden,” Kelly says. “For example, we wanted the children to have a bit more access to physical development, so there’s lots of space for them to work on their gross motor skills – their running, their climbing, their crawling. We have a road map on our all-weather area with a wooden bridge, for manoeuvring bikes around, and there’s a built-in tunnel as well – they can go

through it and hide inside, and climb over it too. There are opportunities for them to take risks but they’re managed and safe. And there are areas of grass – before we only had tarmac.”

Alongside the enticements to get physical, the nursery also benefits from a quieter area, for those who don’t want to run around, and a selection of features designed to inspire children’s play – including a designated messy area at the heart of the space with a mud kitchen and water wall (“they can pump the water and turn off parts so it flows through different pipes; it gets them to think about how things work

and what they can do to change the outcomes of that”); a roleplay hut; and big chalkboards that provide large mark-making opportunities which, Kelly says, are fantastic for getting reluctant boys interested in having a go. There’s also a sizeable baby area, and plenty of shelter for all age groups when the weather is inclement.

LASTING APPEAL

The Croxley Green setting’s new outdoor space took only around four weeks to complete, but it is making a lasting difference to children’s learning and the nursery’s appeal. “It 100 per cent helps to attract parents to the setting – when we’re showing them around they’re really impressed,” Kelly says. “It’s a really lovely, well-thought-out space; the children can access it all year round, whatever the weather, and it was well worth the money.”

Boys & Girls runs a group of nurseries in Hertfordshire and London. Visit boysandgirlsnursery.com



LOUISE SMITH IS AN EARLY YEARS TEACHER AND FOREST SCHOOL LEADER.

Supporting schemas in forest school

The great outdoors is the perfect place to help children explore their fascinations through play, says Louise Smith...

PICTURE THE SCENE. YOU look around your setting and spot a child who is constantly filling a pram and/or bag with your lovely loose parts before depositing them all over the room. Another child is forever hiding in the den. Another is using wool to tie two pieces of furniture together, and another is pulling tissues out of a box while their friend is launching toys into the water tray. Sound familiar? These are not children who aren't engaged, though it's easy to assume that's the case; they are in fact working through their schemas.

What are schemas?

Schemas are repeated patterns of behaviour adopted to allow a child to understand a concept they are interested in. Each time they repeat a behaviour they might modify it slightly to make new connections in their brains. We adults have schemas too – they are just more hidden, and usually one dominant schema remains. Do the hangers all face the front in your wardrobe? Do you sleep wrapped up? Do you like rollercoasters? Do you enjoy taking things apart? Are the things on your desk always in the same position? You'll be amazed at how heavily schemas feature in your life.

Finding ways to support and enhance schematic play is an important

part of an early educator's role, and as a forest school leader I was delighted when I realised just how effective forest school is in this regard. The forest school approach gives children the freedom and time to explore their schemas without interruption or adult input – but there are things we must do to ensure they can learn successfully.

Identifying schemas


My journey to the forest school approach began with a phrase I read, 'bred in captivity'. I couldn't get it out of my head. Its author, Tim Gill, is a passionate advocate of outdoor learning and I delved further into his work, which led me to discover the importance of allowing children to explore and play without adult interruption.

Doing so shifted my entire established pedagogy. It became totally and absolutely child-led; I wasn't making children school ready any more, I was building adults. I introduced more opportunities for children to take managed risks – for example, we

Supporting schematic play helps children to work through processes to enhance their future learning.

made pancakes on an open firepit in our nursery garden for Pancake Day recently, with our two- to four-year-olds trying to light the fire themselves!

But getting your role right as the adult in a forest school setting can be problematic: you need to observe,



15 WAYS TO ENCOURAGE SCHEMATIC PLAY

You should loosely plan forest school sessions to support schemas, but don't interfere if the children don't engage...

ENVELOPING – try den-building and digging for worms.

TRANSFORMING – try making mud pies, potions and perfumes; cooking over a fire.

ENCLOSING – try playing hide and seek, providing hammocks, or drawing on trees with charcoal.

TRANSPORTING – try organising a treasure hunt or playing 'Show Me' (a game where someone says "Show me something yellow" and the children race off to hunt and return the item).

TRAJECTORY – try rolling down hills.

CONNECTING – try wand-making with ribbons.

ORIENTATION – try tree climbing and rope swings.

Remember... Identify schemas through observations, keeping in mind that there could be more than one for each child.

interact, discuss and plan, and yet not lead the play or interfere. This is the case when it comes to supporting a child's schema; the adult should simply provide the tools necessary to enable the child to move forward in their learning. During forest school sessions, this can be done in a number of ways, and I have highlighted several in the panel opposite – but more fundamentally, it's essential that you can identify the schemas you are seeking to support. Here is a rundown of nine of the most common, including behaviours to look out for and pointers on the learning taking place:

TRANSPORTING (e.g. moving all of your loose parts from one side of the room to another). Learning about: distance and journeys, changes in quantity, adding, taking away and dividing.

TRAJECTORY (e.g. throwing toys; hitting, kicking, climbing; playing with the taps in the bathroom). Learning about: how things move and respond, height and distance.

TRANSFORMING (e.g. adding the sand to the water tray, putting play dough anywhere it shouldn't be, mixing up the paint, dressing up). Learning about: cause and effect.

ENVELOPING (e.g. hiding toys, wearing lots of layers of clothes, covering themselves in cream or paint, filling up containers until they overflow at the water tray). Learning about: space and capacity, and themselves and how they fit in the world.

ENCLOSING (e.g. posting items down the back of the radiator, making dens, hiding themselves, painting on the walls, sticking their fingers in holes!). Learning about: size, shape, measurement and volume.

CONNECTION AND DISCONNECTION (e.g. taking off their seatbelt, tying things up, taking things

apart, knotting shoelaces, ripping books). Learning about: joining and separating with different materials.

POSITIONAL (e.g. lining up toys, fussy with food presentation, eats in a certain order, lays under tables). Learning about: logic, order, sequencing, classification and symmetry.

ROTATION (e.g. fiddling with dials and knobs on IT equipment, turning on taps, loves watching wheels turn, watches washing machines, loves spinning around). Learning about: how things move, spin and turn.

ORIENTATION (e.g. rocking on a chair, hanging upside down, running up a slide). Learning about: balance, width, weight and height.

I have also found a really useful free app (search for 'NDNA Schemas' in your app store) that can help you to pick out the schemas if you are unsure – it's also a great way to offer support to staff who are less confident with identifying schemas in action.

Striking a balance

Forest school, for me, is a balancing act. It's about giving children time to follow their own path and explore free of any adult agenda – for example, in my setting they are free to play out of sight, but we set agreements and boundaries together so they know how far they can wander, and we have safety games so that I can do a sneaky head-count! In this context I provide them with tools to support their schemas, but if they choose not to engage in schematic play, I don't force it.



You can read more from Louise on her blog – visit allplaymatters.co.uk

Playground Creation Specialists

Red Monkey



At Red Monkey we **design, manufacture, supply** and **install** original children's playground equipment. Everything we do is **designed to stimulate children's learning** through curiosity, imagination and excitement.

Check out our latest projects

www.redmonkeyplay.co.uk

Email hello@redmonkeyplay.co.uk
or ring **0116 366 9922** and book your free site visit
to transform your outdoor space!

7 Cs for quality OUTDOOR PLAY

Annie Davy shares an effective approach to reflecting on your outside space...



EVERY EARLY YEARS SETTING NEEDS TO think about the design of its outdoor learning landscape, but what should you focus on in your efforts to ensure the highest quality play and engagement and developmental benefits for children? In a study (bit.do/TEY7cs), researchers Herrington, Lesmeister, Nicholls and Stefiuk identified seven criteria (7Cs) to consider: character, context, connectivity, change, chance, clarity, and challenge; here's how you can reflect on each to improve your space...

1 CHARACTER

What kind of character or 'feel' does your outside area have? Is it spacious enough or too cluttered? Is it nature-friendly? Involve the children in making the space personal to your current group – planting, mosaics, sculptures, weavings. Avoid creating a theme park, using plastic toys or fixtures that 'fix' identity and that cannot easily be changed.

2 CONTEXT

Work with the things that you cannot change such as the climate in your area, the type of soil, the direction of the sun, and the immovable elements such as walls and trees which might become obstacles or features.

Get advice on any planting you do. Notice where is shady, sunny or sheltered at different times of day and year. Create warm spots and cool spots accordingly. Use trees, walls and fences as part of your environment – they present vertical opportunities for climbing up or along, for displaying art work or for growing plants.

3 CONNECTIVITY

Watch how children move around the area. What gets in their way? Does the movement around the centre 'make sense' to children? Are the indoor and outdoor areas connected? Are there different pathways for different kinds of mobility – crawling, running, wheeled access? Is there water close to the sand? Is equipment stored close to where children are likely to use it – e.g. gardening tools near the vegetable patch, mark making stations everywhere!



Annie Davy is a freelance writer and facilitator.



To receive 20% off Annie's book, *A Sense of Place – Mindful practice outdoors* (Bloomsbury Education (Featherstone), £17.99), use code **Davy20** at checkout on bloomsbury.com

4 CHANGE

Children like spaces where they can play in groups, but also spaces to play alone. Nature also changes the landscape in different seasons and some areas. For example, shady ones will be more useful in summer. Build in flexibility so that areas can be changed around over time. In one nursery an area turned from beach to construction zone to market garden over the course of one season. As the children's interests changed, so did the materials and set-up.

5 CHANCE

Chance is about the opportunities children have to manipulate the environment and encounter spontaneous or unexpected features in their learning landscape. A fresh pile of fallen leaves or a sudden fall of snow can all be exploited by children for this purpose. Add a little mystery through the introduction of a fairy door at the bottom of tree one day. What stories might this provoke? How can the mystery be resolved?

6 CLARITY

Notice what wants to emerge in children's play. Whilst it is not necessary to have all children in your view at all times (hiding places are popular with children!) you also don't want unnecessary obstructions to views from one part of the site to another. Create clear pathways for children to move in and out in between and around the area. Acoustics can also be important. Listen to what you hear in different areas. Can you create communication-friendly spaces where children are encouraged to speak to each other and develop their own narratives?

7 CHALLENGE

A high quality outdoor area will give opportunities for children to test their abilities and extend their learning. This means building in a level of risk. Create climbing opportunities at different heights for different stages of development, balancing opportunities – both fixed and wobbly. Set up hoops to throw balls into. Provide a variety of loose parts for construction. And when there's a real problem to solve, ask the children to help find the solution!



Children learn best outdoors

Come rain or shine, everybody at Dandelion Nursery can be found in the open air. TEY joined them to discuss the benefits of forest school and philosophy...

DO YOUR CHILDREN 'GO OUT IN all weathers'? Really? It's no secret that outdoor play has incredible benefits for children; research suggesting we should all try to get our under-fives into the fresh air more is plentiful. But when the skies are leaden or the winds icy, the temptation to find something to do indoors can be hard to resist. For staff and children at 'outstanding' Dandelion Nursery in Marsham, Norfolk, however, that's simply not an option.

The idea of an entirely outdoor nursery might seem infeasible – there's no denying it presents sizeable challenges (more on those later) – but that's exactly what Dandelion is. For owner-managers, Emma Harwood and Hayley Staniforth-Room, both qualified teachers, it's also something of a labour of love, the result of a passion for education tailored to the needs of children, not what they see as the harmful target culture increasingly prevalent in schools.

Blessed with an abundance of open space, trees to climb up, laurel hedges in which to hide, a firepit, mud kitchen and yurt, and much more besides, Dandelion

could hardly be further removed from traditional classrooms, but it's the fascinating combination of pedagogies that Emma and Hayley have woven together which is really interesting. Alongside their forest school ethos is a focus on enquiry-based learning, built upon the internationally practised Philosophy for Children approach, that's nurturing their children's creative critical thinking, and emotional resilience and literacy, and preparing them for academic challenges to come. The results, they say, are more than justifying their decision to forgo shelter, power and running water...

No compromises

"We had a conversation one day under a magnolia tree – our children had grown up and we talked about how we would have liked education to be for them. From that the philosophy and the forest school ethos, which we had already developed in our teaching roles, began to come together," Emma says of Dandelion's origins. After many years spent working in state-controlled primary

schools, both she and Hayley had become disillusioned with the direction bureaucracy was pushing them – away from the holistic, child-led approach they believe in, towards a more prescriptive, spreadsheet-dominated alternative.

They knew from the outset that they wanted to abandon indoor learning completely, but it took two years' planning before they opened Dandelion, "down some very, very tiny lanes," in the village of Erpingham. "It was a bit bonkers!" Emma admits. "But it felt right. Outdoors is where children need to be; it's where they learn best. If you go to other nurseries, that free flow door that's 'always open' never really is..."

"We had an ideal, didn't we," Hayley agrees, "and when you want the best for children, you shouldn't compromise."

While others had their doubts – "Even the local authority came along and said, 'It's a nice idea, but no one will come!'" – Emma and Hayley had the courage of their convictions to persevere through what they admit has been a learning process. After a slow

TALKING POINTS

1 Emotional literacy

With P4C's help, children at Dandelion become both more able to accurately express their emotions and respectful of their peers. Staff use emotion fans and name both the positive and negative actions they encounter, celebrating the former and encouraging their charges to consider why the former are undesirable. "They're managing conflict more themselves, without so much adult intervention," Hayley notes.



start, word of mouth and a change in location to their more accessible Marsham site has boosted numbers (though Dandelion operates with a maximum of just 25 children), with some parents travelling for over an hour to access the unique provision. When *TEY* visits (July 2016), plans are afoot to offer stay-and-play sessions in two locations, while a group of parents home educating their children have also expressed an interesting in accessing Dandelion's services on a regular basis.

"I think people waited to see if we'd all drown or freeze!" Emma says. "They soon began to realise that our children weren't actually shrinking in the rain, that they weren't getting cold and that they were learning..."

That's not to say the elements haven't proved a challenge. Emma and Hayley soon found that garments designed to keep staff and children warm and dry for short bursts in the great outdoors couldn't cut it at Dandelion. "Most clothes just aren't made for the kind of conditions we get," Hayley tells us. "Wellies are no good because your feet get too cold, even with two pairs of socks. So we have ski layers, a couple of



2 Take cover

Shelter is at a premium at Dandelion – the cosy yurt is used sparingly, for power naps or quiet stories, while small sheds serve as an office and changing area. Need to use the facilities? Head for the compost toilet. "When we started we didn't even have the yurt – we had a tent, so we're much more mainstream now!" Emma says.

pairs of thermal socks, thermal-lined boots. Em and I wear all-in-one suits – they're bright orange and go down to -40; we look like fishermen!"

"I don't think it has put any parents off," Emma says of the need to come to Dandelion prepared for the worst possible weather. "They're always concerned at first, but we give them a really prescriptive kit list, and have lots of spare clothes too."

Prepared for the elements, children at Dandelion are free to access the expansive learning environment throughout most of the 8am till 4.30pm day. There are defined spaces for specific experiences – a 'theatre' and music area for impromptu performances; a reading pod that offers somewhere warm to sit down with a book all year round; and a spot for the setting's daily 'forest phonics' sessions – but also plenty of open ground.

Carefully planned activities are provided every day but are never compulsory, and open-ended resources abound. Supporting children's learning alongside Emma and Hayley is a highly experienced team – at times there are six qualified teachers on site – while generous staff:child ratios ensure that there's always an adult on hand to follow every child's interests.

What structure there is largely centres on the setting's mealtimes: in the morning, when children enjoy a second, hot breakfast around the firepit to prepare them for an energetic day; and at lunch, when everyone gathers around a single, covered table. Both

3 Grow your own

Having only offered a warm breakfast and snack to date, Dandelion will provide cooked vegan lunches from September. "The children will make them with us," Emma says. "We'll grow as much of it as possible, and obviously there's a huge amount of learning that comes with cooking and sharing your own food." Why vegan? "With no power or water, everything has to be low-risk!" she says.



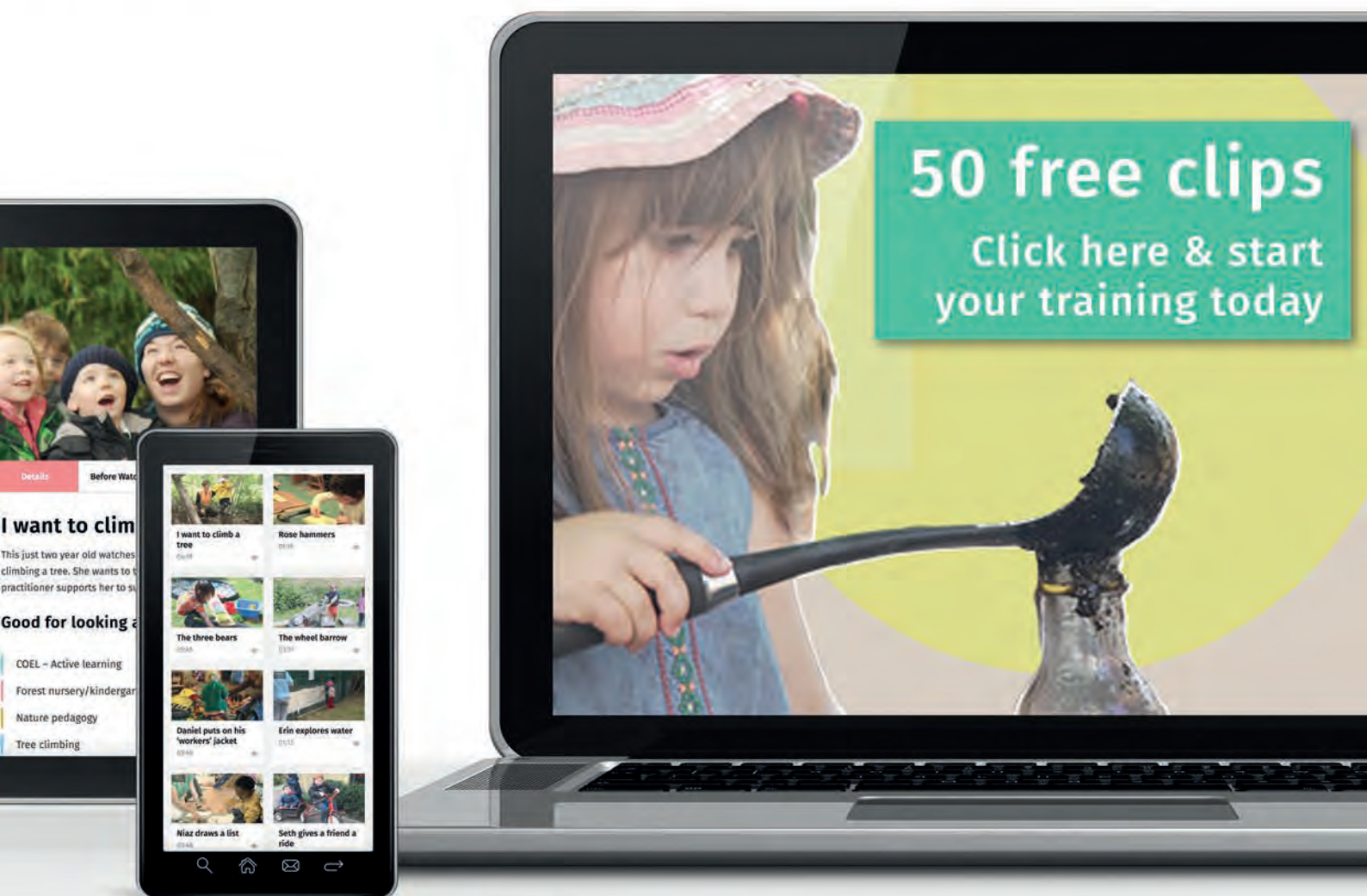
occasions are an opportunity to reinforce the sense of 'family' and focus on good manners that Emma and Hayley believe are important, and to deliver discrete Philosophy for Children (P4C) sessions.

These are the occasions when Dandelion's P4C focus, which has already been recognised by a SAPERE Bronze Award, is at its most visible. In

EARLY YEARS CLIP LIBRARY

Access hundreds of high quality training videos showing quality early years practice.

Build your own playlists and create bespoke training to fit with the needs of your setting.



Subjects covered include:

Characteristics of effective learning

Starting your own forest nursery

Observation, assessment & planning

Supporting high quality outdoor play

Effective environments and materials

Developing your key person approach

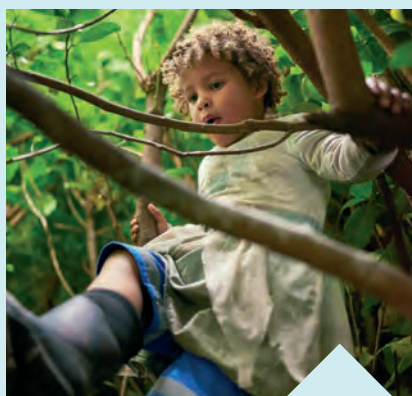
Contact Seb@sirenfilms.co.uk for a free trial

www.SIRENFILMS.co.uk



4 Assessing progress

With their years of teaching experience, Emma and Hayley are leaving nothing to chance: “We’ve devised our own assessment for philosophy and phonics; we’ve got our own types of tracking grids and our own planning documents. Ofsted might think we’ve got too much, but coming from a teaching background you’re always wondering whether you’ve got enough of a paper trail...”



5 Sharing practice

For those interested in learning more, the Dandelion team offer consultancy packages for settings and schools, sharing advice on creating environments inspired by their provision. “We’d love every city to have a Dandelion, and to go and train the staff,” Hayley says of their ambitions, “but to do that we need to be sustainable. Once we’re solid here, we can think about spreading our roots.” Visit dandelionsnorfolk.com

the mornings, children engage in a ‘mystery box’ activity that encourages them to use their closed questioning skills to identify a hidden object: “They ask us questions where there’s only a right or wrong answer,” Hayley explains, “like ‘Where did you find it?’ or ‘Can you eat it?’ We’ll only give them one response: ‘Yes, you can eat it,’ or ‘No, you can’t.’ When they have

all the criteria, they whisper to each other, shout out what they think it is, and we open the box. They’re learning to ask questions and make a judgements, and that it’s okay if you’re wrong.”

Conversely, during lunch, ‘Felicity the Philosophy Fairy’ shares a question or game that requires children to engage with open questions: “There are lots of answers; they know that everybody is right and it’s okay if you don’t agree with your friend,” Hayley says. “It’s all about expressing an opinion. For very young children, we might simply show them a picture: ‘Do you like this hat, or would you choose this one?’ ‘I’d choose this hat.’ ‘Why?’ At first they won’t know, they just know that that’s their preference, but it’s the start of their philosophy journey. As they get older, they justify their choices: ‘Oh, I agree – I like the same hat as you, but I have a different idea...’”

P4C is embedded throughout the day, though, its influence present in the setting’s therapeutic approach to behaviour management, and in staff’s ongoing efforts to develop children’s confidence, communication and enquiry skills. In this, it’s the ideal complement to Dandelion’s forest school ethos, which further nurtures resilience and teaches independence. For these reasons, when Emma and Hayley remark that their children leave them incredibly well prepared for the demands of more academic schooling, their confidence is fully justified.

MEET THE TEAM



**Emma Harwood,
Owner**

“This feels to us the best education that we can give to children, and it’s a joy. Every day I wake up and think I’m so lucky, so privileged to work with children anyway, and so amazingly privileged to work here, outside. If it feel like this for us and feels like that for them, I don’t want brick walls!”



**Hayley Staniforth-Room,
Owner**

“From the outset we believed that the best learning and development comes from high-quality interactions, and to get those high-quality interactions you need high-quality staff who are articulate, who are knowledgeable, who are skilled, who can bond well with children, who can move children’s learning and development on in a way that suits them and their interests.”

Gratnells

Rover



The Gratnells Rover with its elegant and minimalist design is easy to use yet designed to operate easily on rough terrain and can even manage heavy loads up and down stairs. The runner system can accommodate a variety of Gratnells trays meeting many storage needs.

Trays are secured into place with a handy strap to ensure no accidents on your journey around school or when taking lessons outdoors. Special inserts for added protection are available for the trays, as are lids to protect contents while in transit.

The Gratnells Rover is also compatible with the Gratnells PowerTray² and SmartCase.



Features:

- Sold in a variety of tray configurations adapting to suit your storage needs
- Hard wearing, all-terrain, rubber wheels
- Allows objects to be moved easily between buildings
- Strap allows trays to be secured in place for transportation
- Able to hold up to three extra deep trays
- Ergonomic tubular steel framework with loop handle
- Maximum tray load - 10kg
Total maximum load - 25kg
- Optional lid and inserts available for purchase.

Dimensions:

1170(H) x 760(D) x 560mm (W)



NBB Recycled Furniture

The Benefits of Recycled Plastic

- ✓ Drastically reduces pollution & plastic waste
- ✓ Zero maintenance required
- ✓ Guaranteed to last 25 years
- ✓ Eliminates splinter injury

**FREE
DELIVERY**

on all orders
(UK Mainland*)



MORE THAN
2,000
MILK BOTTLES SAVED
FROM LANDFILL



Turning Plastic Bottles Into Outdoor Furniture



Call us today **0800 1777 052**
Visit **www.recycledfurniture.co.uk**

* Please note free carriage to UK mainland only. Some locations may incur an additional supplement.



KATHY BRODIE IS AN EARLY YEARS PROFESSIONAL AND TRAINER BASED IN EAST CHESHIRE.

“Embrace everything the outdoors has to offer”

*There are huge advantages to escaping the classroom, however much space you have available beyond the door – so get messy, noisy, creative and active today, says **Kathy Brodie**...*

1 A sensory feast

The most obvious benefit of being outside is that it is a full sensory experience. Children will experience hot and cold weather, smell flowers and plants, see many colours and feel varied textures, from sticks to mud. As the seasons change, the outside environment changes too. The autumn is particularly noticeable for the changes in the leaves – it may be the first time the children have noticed that their favourite tree is changing colour from day to day. At this time of year there may be more windy days, which can lead to conversations about weather we can feel but not see.

2 Up & down

In most settings, the floor tends to be flat, even and on one level. However, outside children have to negotiate many different types of terrain and changing levels. Walking down a slope or climbing steps may be easily achieved, but greater challenges can be created by leaving some of the environment outside uneven, so children need to balance or walk with care. Rolling down slopes and spinning in circles on the spot also help to develop children's vestibular systems.

4 Special spaces

Due to the unstructured nature of being outside, it can offer many more informal social spaces, created by the children for themselves. For example, you may find that some children like to huddle together behind a tree or that under the climbing frame becomes the place to meet friends. These hideaways give children the opportunities to imagine and invent their own narratives around the space. One day it might be a spaceship, another day a bear's cave!

3 Creatures great & small

Outside is packed with mini-beasts, animals and birds, plants and flowers.

This gives huge opportunities for sustained shared thinking and prolonged conversations about caring for living creatures, or even what constitutes being 'alive'. For example, when is a stick a piece of living plant and when is it dead wood? Conversations like these help to foster compassion and caring for creatures.

For some children, this may be an opportunity to discuss the nature of death as well. This is also a good time to explore sustainability and caring for our own environment.

5 Creative play

Being outdoors offers inspiration for many types of creativity and art, often using free and found materials. For example, leaves, stones, twigs and grass can be gathered to create pictures or 3D sculptures. Colours and paints look different in the changing natural light – even from morning to afternoon – and noticing the way that the sun streams through coloured glass to produce coloured patterns on the ground can be mesmerising.



6 Glorious mud

Another great free material outside is mud. Mud kitchens are almost universal now, which is not surprising as they offer almost limitless opportunities for children to imagine, investigate and explore. Playing outside, where it doesn't matter if anything is spilled, with such a versatile material allows children to be messy while practising all their pouring, tipping and mixing skills.

7 A sense of wonder

One of the most profound aspects of being outside is the sense of wonder children can experience when investigating the magic of the natural world. This may be snow falling, or noticing how a dandelion changes from a yellow flower to white, fluffy seeds – or how strawberries grow from the heart of the flower. For adults these aren't remarkable events, but it is worth remembering that, sometimes, it's the simplest of natural changes that are most awe-inspiring to children.



WHAT DO YOU HEAR?

Outside, sounds are different, and music and singing can be more exuberant, giving children more opportunities to explore making different noises...

- Have metal saucepans, tin trays and large spoons hung from the fence for children to freely access whilst outside.
- Listen for environmental sounds together – e.g. the birds singing at different times of the day or the different types of traffic noises. This will help children to cue into specific sounds, an essential skill for distinguishing voices over background noises.

Visit
earlyyearssummit.com
for lots more ideas on outdoor
play and learning.

Godstone Farm

Explore • Discover • Play

With 40 years experience we're the
place for a fun filled farm trip!



Based in the rolling Surrey Hills, Godstone, RH9 8LX



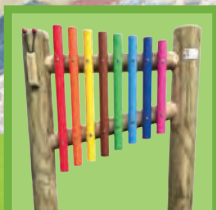
Timotay
PLAYSCAPES

Consult Design Construct

Delivering Your Inspirational Outdoor Space



FREE
Consultation
Book now!



Transform Your Outdoor Play Space

Timotay Playscapes, your access to award winning inspirational outdoor play spaces. Using imaginative thinking and natural materials to create an inclusive and nurturing environment specific to your setting.

01933 665151 for your free consultation

For outdoor play products

www.timotayplayscapes.co.uk

Facebook @TimotayPlayscapes Twitter @TIMOTAY_PLAY Email enquiries@timotayplayscapes.co.uk



SAMANTHA TENNANT IS A NURSERY ASSISTANT AT A VILLAGE PRESCHOOL IN CHESHIRE.

Growing green fingers

We all know that time in the fresh air is vital for small children, but have you been cultivating your charges' gardening skills? It's easy, says Samantha Tennant...

OUTDOOR LEARNING IS A KEY part of the early years curriculum, and that includes encouraging children to grow green fingers. Gardening, as opposed to simply playing outdoors, has many benefits, including the development of fine and gross motor skills, understanding of mathematics and science, patience and responsibility, and plenty of opportunity for open-ended questions.

Don't delay

The best time of the year to plan what you want to do with the outdoors is during the autumn and winter. Use these less clement seasons to clear areas and see exactly what space you have, and to install any hard landscaping you may need such as raised beds or new paths. The outside space should be usable whatever the weather, so chances are you will need to work out where you need to create shelter and shade, and what needs to be underfoot. Mobile storage is an easy way to utilise whichever area is most appropriate. Have a look at the current permanent features such as trees, fences, hedges, canopies and buildings. Can you use them? Do they need repairing or replacing? Would you be better off without them and is removing them feasible? If you just need a good tidy up, power wash and replant but simply don't have the time, see if you can get a working party of parents and helpers from the community together – the promise of tea and cake can go a long way!

When the audit is done it's time to let your imagination run wild. There is no reason why the broad-brush planning that goes on inside your setting cannot be extended outdoors too. Experience has shown me that any topic, theme or learning objective can



You can't involve children in the creation of elements of their environment and then expect them not to touch or interact with it.

be adapted and enhanced by taking it outside (courgette leaves make amazing hiding places for dinosaurs!). The tricky part, especially for those less green-fingered, is making gardening part of that adventure, so here is a list of things to consider. Tackle as many or as few as you feel comfortable with to add an extra dimension to your setting.

PLANTING EDIBLES

These are pretty self-explanatory but you need to plan ahead. If your setting is a preschool that will be closed for the long summer holidays, it's best not to plant crops such as strawberries, cucumbers or tomatoes that are harvested then. Instead choose potatoes or other roots or brassicas that will keep until autumn, or lettuces and radishes that are quick to mature and can be picked in June. It is also worth noting that if you plan to garden in containers, somebody needs to water them during the holidays.

GROWING SUNFLOWERS

Great for learning about growth and decay as well as mathematics, sunflowers start as a small seed and finish up as a towering stem with a big flower whose seeds will feed the birds in the winter. If you plan to grow the tallest ones they will benefit from being grown next to a (sunny) fence, so that they can be tied in and supported. It is also nice to put them near to a climbing frame so little ones can follow the flower heads as they get taller.

DECORATING TREES

Try creating a topic tree – this can be a real, small one or simply a group of artificial branches; the point is that it can be decorated with absolutely anything. Again, take your indoor planning outside and use the craft table to make trinkets that tie in with your



ARE YOU READY?

Four tips to ensure you're prepared to garden successfully...

- Think about investing in a set of overtrousers and jackets so that you can access all parts of the garden whatever the weather. Gardening gloves can be cumbersome but they are useful for those children for whom dirty hands are a barrier to learning.
- Don't forget to include some kind of seating area; children struggle to observe change in the environment unless they stop still for long enough, and everybody loves a den!
- Look out for poisonous or irritant plants; a quick internet search will give you a lot of information about what to avoid.
- Little is constant in a garden, it evolves as plants grow and decay with the seasons. It is useful to keep a perpetual diary to make a note of what has been particularly successful or not, ideas for next year and to remind yourself to do seasonal tasks.

current learning objectives. Obvious themes are Christmas or the seasons, but everything from minibeasts to jungle animals works well.

PAINTING PEBBLES

Take literacy, numeracy and art outside by painting pebbles with children's names, numerals, spots, shapes, minibeasts or simply a rainbow of colours. Large plant pots or saucers are great for sorting them too.

SENSORY STIMULATION

A sensory theme to a garden is a good starting place when you are planning your space as it means you will get a bit of everything. You may want to start by concentrating on just one of the senses and add more as the garden develops, or go for all of them in a sensory corner. Bright colours from flowers or ornaments can sit beside aromatic herbs such as thyme, rosemary, mint and lavender. The latter are robust and hardy, will not mind being bruised and will complement seasonal fruit and vegetables. Mix in some different textures, some spiky tufty plants, soft wavy grasses and polished pebbles. Sound can come from tall, swishy-swashy bamboo or, if you are lucky, a

bubble fountain or other feature with no standing water.

ATTRACTING WILDLIFE

While worms, bugs and spiders are not everyone's cup of tea they are all part of a garden and it is well worth keeping an area relatively undisturbed with logs and piles of leaves in it to see what moves in. At the setting I work in we are fortunate to have access to a woodland area which the children love to explore, turning over logs to see what lies beneath. We also keep bird feeders topped up and can watch the visitors (birds and squirrels) from inside whatever the weather.

DEMONSTRATING CHANGE

Summer is a time for instant gardening – planting a few tubs with bright annuals are a welcome boost, but things like spring bulbs need to be planted in autumn so planning is essential. Again, this is something that every child can easily get involved with and it is a useful way to demonstrate 'change over time' as once they get going growth is rapid.

Finally, accept that you cannot be precious about anything in your garden! You can't involve children in the creation of elements of their environment and then expect them not to touch or interact with it. Give them the opportunity to learn, explore and nurture in a way that complements what they do indoors and you will have a happy setting!



JUNO HOLLYHOCK IS A FORMER EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF LEARNING THROUGH LANDSCAPES.

“Outdoor play boosts school readiness”

*With so much emphasis placed on preparing young children for primary education, the benefits of time spent outside can't be ignored, says **Juno Hollyhock**...*

‘SCHOOL READINESS’ IS SOMETHING we hear a lot about. Indeed, depending on where you sit on the ‘too much, too early’ campaign, it can feel like something parents should be considering pre-birth! I am fully expecting magazine articles and resources on ‘womb music to make your child ready for school’ and ‘If I give birth in a classroom is my child guaranteed better EBacc results?’ posts to appear online shortly. On a more serious note, it is suggested that children from ‘disadvantaged families’ should start at school nurseries from the age of two (ow.ly/qQMYH).

So, let's take a closer look at what school readiness means and what role the outdoors has to play in that.

For a teacher it is important to be working with a child who can pay attention, focus and sit still when required; but, as we all know, school readiness is about much more than this. A ‘school-ready’ child needs to be confident with his or her peers, socially able, curious and comfortable in his or her space. Activities that take place outdoors often incorporate these skills naturally and in a way that allows the child to be self-directed. Children playing outside often mix with a wide range of age and interest groups in a way that the more prescriptive indoor play does not necessarily allow for.

Additionally, the natural environment develops curiosity and interest that can drive a child's desire to learn and understand. Children playing outside also have to overcome more obstacles and be more collaborative in their play as they have bigger hurdles to overcome, which often require a helping hand. This prepares them well to integrate with a bigger school community.

But don't just take my word for it: a research project funded by the Economic and Social Research Council has shown that outdoor learning and play can make a valuable contribution to helping children make the transition from early years education into primary school (bit.do/TEYoutdESRC).

The project highlights what many will already have assumed – that as children go into more formal schooling, the amount of time they spend outdoors drops rapidly. During the research a group of children were given a digital audio recorder that tracked their play and their conversations. In the early years, activity outdoors accounted for about two-thirds of the conversations recorded, but by Year 1 this had dropped to less than one-third.

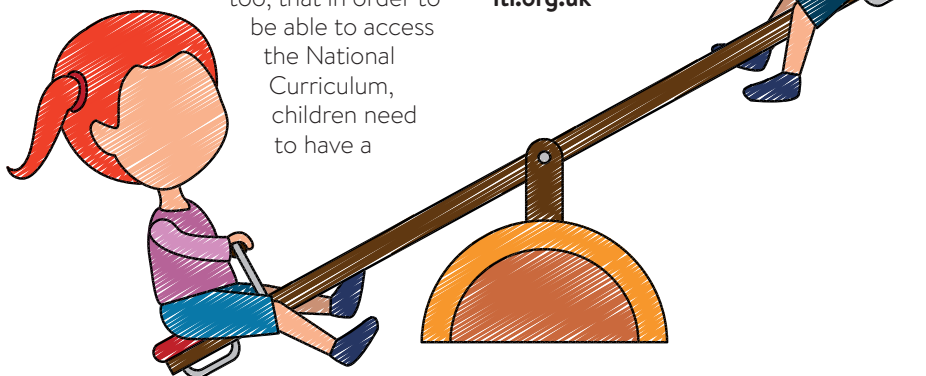
But whilst more formal schooling allows less time for going outside, and the free-flow encouraged during the Early Years Foundation Stage is not reflected in primary and secondary schools, there are still opportunities for children to make the most of their playtimes. It is worth the investment of time, as the ESRC study also found that a readiness to learn in children was far more evident when they had experienced a longer transition of play-based outdoor learning. It is well known,

too, that in order to be able to access the National Curriculum, children need to have a

certain level of literacy. Outdoor activity engages children in a way that encourages and motivates them to have conversations; it is these conversations that lay down the patterns for the neural pathways that develop their language, reasoning and problem-solving skills. The more that children have to talk about, the more the language skills are refined. The outdoors is multisensory, interesting and often surprising; this stimulates the desire to talk.

In the end, whatever age you believe is the right age for children to receive the more formal education systems that prevail in our schools, there can be no doubt that outdoor play gives them a sound base to build upon. In an ideal world we would hope that early outdoor play would segue neatly into lots of active outdoor learning throughout the primary and secondary years.

 **Learning Through Landscapes is a UK charity dedicated to enhancing outdoor learning and play for children. Visit ltl.org.uk**





GREAT WAYS TO SUPPORT
COMMUNICATION,
LANGUAGE &
LITERACY

Coming April 29th

-
- Sue Cowley's tips on developing talk
 - Make mark making irresistible
 - Six ways to put the fun into phonics
 - Using 'story scribing' in your setting
 - Boost the confidence of early writers