

CeDARE

Centre for Developmental & Applied Research in Education

PROJECT TITLE

The Outdoor Learning Project

RESEARCHERS

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PARTNERS/FUNDING ORGANISATIONS

Northamptonshire County Council and Northamptonshire EYDCP



PROJECT OVERVIEW

The Outdoor Learning Project (OLP) is ongoing and takes place in two different early years settings in the UK, one in England and one in Wales. The project started in January 2004 in Setting 1 (England) and expanded in September 2005 to include Setting 2 (Wales). In the project children aged 3-11 years are given regular opportunity to play and learn in natural wild environments (such as woodland and river banks) and are afforded the opportunity to explore and play in the environment with minimal adult direction and intervention.

The focus of the enquiry is to investigate how the children interact with the natural surroundings and evolve an outdoor pedagogy with practitioners. The study is designed around a multi-method framework adapted from the well-known 'Mosaic Approach' developed by Clark and Moss (2001, 2005). A range of methods is therefore used, including observations, video film and photographs taken by the children. In addition, the children and adults co-construct 'learning stories' (Carr, 2001) to document and reflect on the shared experiences.

The OLP has so far revealed a wealth of information about the children's views of the outdoor environment, including places they liked and their play with friends. Similar methods have been used in both settings. The initial findings from the project were reported by Waller et al. (2004). One feature of these findings was that involvement in the project promoted a high level of reflection on the benefit of giving children opportunities to create their own learning environments. The project therefore became more focused on eliciting children's views and perspectives. Further papers on the methodology and ethics were given (Waller 2005a, b) and young children's geographical literacy (Waller 2005c). Also in Waller (2006) a critical discussion of participatory research methods is offered. Waller (2007) discusses the construction and development of children's narratives located around their outdoor experiences and Waller (2008) offers a critical evaluation of the validity of 'learning stories' in research with children.

The full project report will be available to download once published