

Subject: Outdoor Learning

Golden Concept: Develop Free Play through Independence

Purpose:

Forest schools are educational settings that take place in natural environments, often in wooded areas, where children engage in hands-on, experiential learning.

Child-led Learning: Free play allows children to take the lead in their learning experiences. It empowers them to choose activities, make decisions, and explore their interests, fostering a sense of autonomy and self-directed learning.

Creativity and Imagination: Free play encourages the use of natural materials for building.

Connection with Nature: Free play provides opportunities for children to explore the outdoors and observe wildlife.

Social Skills: Free play in a natural setting encourages social interactions and cooperation. Children learn to communicate, negotiate, share, and resolve conflicts as they engage in unstructured play with their peers.

The purpose of free play at forest school is to offer a holistic and child-centered approach to education, fostering a love for nature, promoting physical and social development, and encouraging a lifelong passion for learning.

Assessment:

Assessing free play at forest school involves capturing and evaluating various aspects of children's experiences, development, and engagement during unstructured outdoor play.

Unobtrusive Observation: Teachers can observe children during free play without interfering in their activities. This allows for a natural assessment of social interactions, creativity, problem-solving, and engagement with the natural environment.

Child Reflection: Encourage children to reflect on their experiences. This can be done through discussions, drawings, or simple journals where they express their thoughts and feelings about the activities they engaged in during free play.

Questioning: Assess children's curiosity by observing their questions about the natural environment. Engage in discussions to understand their interests and use this information to guide future activities or discussions.

Cross curriculum:

While forest schools often emphasize child-led and nature-based learning, the incorporation of free play into different curriculum domains enhances the overall educational experience.

Science: Free play in natural environments allows children to explore and observe the natural world first hand. They may investigate plants, insects, and animals, fostering an early interest in biology and ecology. Teachers can facilitate discussions about ecosystems, life cycles, and environmental concepts.

Mathematics: Outdoor settings provide opportunities for mathematical exploration. Children can engage in activities like measuring tree circumferences, counting natural objects, or creating patterns with rocks and leaves. Concepts such as size, shape, and quantity can be naturally incorporated into their play.

English: Free play at forest school promotes language development through conversations, storytelling, and imaginative play. Children may use the natural environment as inspiration for creating their own stories, enhancing vocabulary, and developing communication skills.

Physical Education: Forest schools inherently support physical development through activities like climbing, balancing, running, and exploring uneven terrain. These activities contribute to the development of gross and fine motor skills, coordination, and overall physical fitness.

The key to successful cross-curricular integration of free play at forest school lies in the intentional design of activities that naturally align with the learning objectives of different subjects. Teachers can observe children's interests during free play and use those observations to guide discussions and activities that seamlessly integrate various aspects of the curriculum.

Key Stage or stage breakdown:

Bronze: Pupils develop free play and independence in the forest through experiencing a new surrounding when going off-site to explore the forest. Pupils have to work together to explore different elements of the forest and work together in order to achieve a common goal.

Silver: Pupils during this stage will be able to use more independence to create activities that they want to participate in.

Gold: Pupils will start to become leaders during this stage and be able to independently lead on sessions that develop free play for younger peers.