

# DIRTY TEACHING

A Beginner's Guide to  
Learning Outdoors

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## Preface

You could have heard a pine needle drop in the wood. Thirty children sat silently, scattered among the trees. Some were lost in thought. Others were scribbling notes on scrap paper. It was hard to believe that this was taking place on a still January day, five degrees below zero.

Sheltered by the young trees, we gathered to share our work. In turn we read out our chosen lines. Together we created a group poem, where every child's contribution was welcomed and valued. There was a magical, spine-tingling feel to the whole experience that was felt by all.

It did not start out this way. When I saw the children come out of the school building, I knew immediately it was *one of those classes*. The sort that challenge, question and push a teacher to the limit.

After a quick warm-up listening activity, we moved through the forest which had been planted around the perimeter of the playing field a decade earlier. The children were still tuning in to being outside. They rushed along the path, ignoring the task given to them. Some of the boys were pushing and shoving each other. This was not intentional bad behaviour. They were just excited.

So that's how we came to be writing poetry and listening to the sounds of silence. In the woodland, each child found a place where they could sit far enough away from the others. They had time to let those thoughts and feelings surface. Calm descended. The special nature of the outdoors had finally captured this class.



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# Introduction

This book is for primary teachers and student teachers who want to teach outside. It is aimed at those working with six- to twelve-year-olds. The ideas are based upon my own experiences of working with classes where this is a new and different way of learning.

The majority of activities and suggestions are simple and involve minimal planning and resources. They are doable by a teacher with their class in the school grounds or local area.

Whilst training, courses and conversations with outdoor experts make a positive difference, there is no substitute for experience and knowing the children in your class. As a consequence, this book is written in the belief that teachers:

- Have the skills and competences to teach outside as well as inside. Any approach to learning and teaching usually works just as effectively outdoors as it does inside.
- Have an ability to take an idea and tweak it to make it suit the needs of the children in their class. All the ideas in this book can be refined and improved – it is a springboard for experimenting.
- Have to make an effort to learn how to teach outside on a frequent and regular basis. We have been conditioned to think ‘indoors.’ This is a habit that can be changed. The pay-off is very liberating and many teachers who make this change find their practice has a new lease of life.
- Have only just begun to truly appreciate the potential for learning outside and the benefits this brings in the short and long term to the well-being of children and our society, especially when the learning happens in nature.

This is not to ignore the contributions made by the vast array of professionals, organisations, volunteers, expedition organisers and residential centres to the learning which happens outside during a child’s school life. However, I want to empower primary teachers to play an active part in this process too.



## What is covered in this book?

There is a huge diversity of books about learning indoors. Likewise, it is impossible to do justice to the potential of learning outdoors in one book. So, this book mainly concentrates on:

- Kick-starting the process of working outside with a class.
- Simple outdoor ideas that a primary teacher can lead with their class of thirty pupils in the school grounds or within walking distance off-site.
- Practical issues which arise when learning takes place outside.

The structure of the book is designed so that you can read it from cover to cover, or you can dip in and out of it as time and interest permits. I deliberately did not go down the route of detailed lessons or series of lessons. I would like the ideas and activities to be seeds of suggestion rather than directed activities.

## What is outdoor learning?

Before stepping outside with a class, it can be useful to think about what outdoor learning is and why it matters. In a nutshell, outdoor learning is an umbrella term which covers every type of learning experience which happens outdoors. This could be adventurous activities, environmental education, team challenges, an international expedition or a playground game.

The beauty of this definition is that it covers little and large experiences of any sort that happen outside. What matters, however, is that – regardless of where the learning takes place – the quality of the experience is the best it can be and is authentic, meaningful and relevant for the children involved.

Ideally, we want to make the most of the unique and special nature of being outdoors. We need the variety provided by:

- The weather – imagine a world without rainbows: the sunshine and the rain are key ingredients.
- The seasons – these bring variety throughout the year, adding interest to our lives and festivals that celebrate the cyclical events.
- The space and freedom of the world beyond the classroom.
- The landscape – whether this is urban, wild or somewhere in-between.

Many teachers assume that outdoor learning is a subject, discipline or curriculum area. Some consider outdoor learning as an approach to learning, as just one of many tools in a teacher's toolbox. For me, it is about making the most of any place or space outside of the traditional school walls.



## It's about relationships

It can be helpful to think of the learning that happens as a result of the relationships between people, the nature of the activity and the place and time where it takes place.

The idea of using *place* as a key part of the learning process comes from the work of Sir Patrick Geddes (1854–1932), a Scottish town planner, biologist and educator, known for his progressive views, who developed the concept of 'think global, act local'. He also advocated a 'hands, heart, head' approach to learning.<sup>1</sup>



Most initiatives and ideas within education focus on activities and people. For example, reams of advice is available on improving literacy. Yet, this is largely focused upon motivating children and activities which encourage and support children to develop confidence in this area.

Where children read and how this impacts on the acquisition of literacy skills tends to be ignored. It also means that a huge range of possibilities is being missed when you think of the choice of locations in which we could learn. Think of all the places where people freely read, such as a novel on the beach or a newspaper on the bus. It rarely happens at a table with a group of people of a similar age taking turns to read a paragraph aloud, other than in a school.

Time matters too. During the course of a day, the weather and light changes, impacting upon any outdoor place. The seasons bring annual variety and so do the years. If you think about how a three-year-old child might walk down a street, their behaviour and perspective is very different to that of a teenager.

To forget about the impact of place is like removing one leg from a three-legged stool. The stool is permanently out of balance and much harder to sit on. Ignoring the influence of place when teaching makes your job a lot harder. Nature has inspired generations of artists, writers, inventors and scientists to create and innovate. Thus, as teachers, we can use different places and spaces innovatively to inspire our children.



### Have a cuppa

Have a break. Make yourself a hot drink and take it outside. Drink it there instead of where you usually sit inside and compare the experience.

■ What are the similarities and what are the differences?

<sup>1</sup> P. Higgins and R. Nicol, Professor Sir Patrick Geddes: 'Vivendo Discimus' – By Living We Learn. In C. Knapp and T. Smith (eds), *Sourcebook for Experiential Education: Key Thinkers and their Contributions* (New York: Routledge, 2011) pp. 32–40.

- What did you notice about your thoughts and behaviour (e.g. where you sat and how, or did you stand the entire time)?
- What would you change or do differently if you took your cup of tea outside again?

This activity should show you that often people think and behave differently in different places. It is likely that you do not have a comfy sofa outside, so you may have chosen to wander around the garden with your cup of tea. You may have felt quite cold. Perhaps you were keeping a sharp eye on a nearby gull in case it tried to steal your Jaffa Cake!

What this means is that you need to be prepared for children behaving differently outside, especially if they have not spent much time undertaking formal lessons outdoors. Everyone will need time to acclimatise.

## What places outside?

Learning can happen in any outdoor space. For convenience, using the school grounds makes a lot of sense as less time, preparation and money are involved. The supervision ratios tend to be the same as for inside, which means you can take your class outside without needing to rely on volunteers or other staff to support you.

Many schools and nurseries have a designated place off-site, such as a wood, which is used on a frequent and regular basis for a variety of activities. Whilst this can take a bit of time and effort to establish both the site and the routines around its use, the effort is worth it. Often it is a very good way of establishing positive community links with different organisations and professionals.

## Your life in places

How hard it is to escape from places. However carefully one goes they hold you – you leave little bits of yourself fluttering on the fences – like rags and shreds of your very life.

Katherine Mansfield

Think back across your life. Write down your thoughts in response to the questions below. It is useful if you can discuss these with other people, especially the final question.

- Which places are most important to you and why?
- When you are on holiday, what do you miss most of all?
- What is it about the community, culture and landscape of where you live that you most strongly identify with?
- How can you apply this to your teaching?

## Make learning sticky

If you consider your own time at school, the chances are that your strongest memories will be about your time outdoors. This will include residential stays, excursions and playtimes. For some reason, we appear to remember more outdoor activities even though it is quite likely we spent less time outside than in.

Such memories are important for two reasons. Firstly, there is an onus on us to provide lessons in an environment that is conducive to learning, both in the long and short term. Common sense suggests that if being outside is more memorable, then this may be one way of helping children to remember what they have learned. Secondly, we need to consider why the memories stick. What is it about being outside that contributes to making an event memorable?

Chip and Dan Heath spent over ten years looking at why some ideas take hold and others are forgotten. In their book, *Made to Stick*, they suggest that there are six principles which make a story, headline or other experience impact on our memory.<sup>2</sup> These are neatly summed up as the SUC-CES formula: Simple, Unexpected, Concrete, Credible, Emotional, Stories.

An event or experience does not need to contain all of the principles which can be applied to any learning, outside or inside. However, they easily lend themselves to the outdoors. It is naturally 'sticky'. For example:

- **Simple:** Less is often more. Most activities outside rely on materials found *in situ* and the imagination of those involved.
- **Unexpected:** Outdoor activities often end up being interrupted. A cat might walk through the playground. A patch of mushrooms may be discovered behind a bush. View these interruptions as a vital part of the lesson and go with the flow; even if your original learning objective is not met, another one can easily replace it.
- **Concrete:** Outdoor experiences tend to link better to actual events, people and the community. Often practical skills are required. This makes the learning authentic and real.
- **Credible:** Working outside seems to naturally lend itself to children's lives and interests. The outdoors is multisensory so children acquire an understanding through using lots of their senses.
- **Emotional:** This is the 'ooh', 'ah', 'ugh' factor. Not all time spent outside is pleasant but when you hear these sorts of sounds coming from your class, you know that a connection is being made. Learning is an emotional process as much as a cognitive one.
- **Stories:** It is relatively easy to create a narrative of outdoor experiences. It is much harder to do this when sitting down and completing a page of work in an exercise book. We can use stories as a springboard to an outdoor activity – we can make up stories and act them out. Adventures are often recalled as narratives.

2 C. Heath and D. Heath, *Made to Stick: Why Some Ideas Take Hold and Others Come Unstuck* (London: Random House, 2007).



Being mindful of these principles when planning outdoor experiences may help to make the learning memorable.



## Look for SUCCES in your lessons

Ask children in your class to recall a lesson or activity from a few months ago. What made that experience so memorable? See if you can link what the children say to the SUCCES formula (see page 5). It is also worth trying this in terms of lessons or events that stick out in your mind from your own school days.

## Why does learning outside matter?

Many adults who work with young people can give personal accounts of the enjoyment, freedom, creativity and inspiration that outdoor experiences offer children. The benefits of learning outside have been recognised and documented at least as far back as the fourteenth century.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> R. Joyce, *Outdoor Learning Past and Present* (Maidenhead: Open University Press, 2012), pp. 11–21.

In the past two or three decades, a substantial amount of research has been undertaken which all points in the direction of humans needing nature not just to survive but to thrive.<sup>4</sup> Our cognitive, social, emotional and physical health is affected by time spent outside, especially when in a natural space. This is why there is a growing emphasis on using green spaces, such as beaches and woodlands, in education. It is also why naturalising school grounds to increase plant cover and encourage wildlife makes a positive contribution to children's well-being.

The literature and research in this area suggest that outdoor learning, as part of a planned approach, may:

- Increase attainment in specific subjects.
- Impact positively on the health and well-being of young people.
- Help develop responsible citizens and lifelong appreciation of the natural world.
- Improve the social and communication skills of young people.
- Effectively weave together many of the strands of education for sustainable development.<sup>5</sup>

The parallels between all of the approaches to learning outdoors include:

- Interdisciplinary learning across subject areas.
- The use of the school grounds and local neighbourhoods, especially greenspace.
- Continuous visits over a long period of time, rather than one-off trips.
- Children involved in the planning and decision-making.
- Routines that develop skills and build independence.
- Teaching and learning in, through and about the natural and man-made world.

If you want to find out more about research and robust arguments for outdoor learning, then read *Learning Outside the Classroom* by Simon Beames, Robbie Nicol and Pete Higgins.<sup>6</sup> It provides a very accessible summary with lots of practical advice aimed at primary and middle school teachers.

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4 Visit <<http://creativestartlearning.co.uk/support/outdoor-learning-research/>> for links to some of the main outdoor learning research websites.

5 Visit <[http://www.unesco.org/education\\_for\\_sustainable\\_development](http://www.unesco.org/education_for_sustainable_development)> to find out more about the United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development.

6 S. Beames, R. Nicol and P. Higgins, *Learning Outside the Classroom: Theory and Guidelines for Practice* (New York: Routledge, 2011).



Take your shoes off.



Put your wet suit bottoms on.



Put your wet suit jacket on.



Put your wellies on.



Pull the bottoms down over your wellies.

**FS2  
wetsuits**



# The Golden Principles of Teaching Outdoors

As teachers, we have beliefs and values that determine how we teach. They shape what we say and do. When working outside over the past few years, I have found it helpful to:

- Take a sustainable and rights-based approach.
- Value free play and playful learning.
- Provide a nurturing, natural environment.
- Develop children's creative capacities.



For me, these are golden principles because they stand the test of time and change in education. I use them to ensure that I think about the wider purpose of learning outdoors and its contribution to providing children with the best possible education. It is an essential part of making a difference to every child I teach.

Whilst the future may be uncertain, with uncertainty comes opportunity, especially in a rapidly changing society. Therefore, I believe it is our responsibility to help children develop a growth mindset and acquire the practical skills, compassion and empathy in order to live harmoniously and help one another.

## A sustainable and rights-based approach

The best time to plant a tree was twenty years ago. The next best time is now.

Chinese proverb

We need to consider the environmental impact of any outdoor lesson, as we do with any other aspect of our teaching. Over the years, we should be making our school grounds and local spaces into better places as a result of our stewardship. If we have a right to use a place, we have a responsibility to care for it.

My belief is that children need outdoor experiences to understand big issues such as climate change. This includes opportunities to experience wild or semi-wild spaces. As they get older, getting involved in collaborative, action-based projects in the local community may also be relevant. It demonstrates that we can all play our part in looking after ourselves, our communities and our local places and wildlife. Families should be included so that children see close agreement between school and home about the importance of sustainability, and participate in discussions and action in both places. Very often, children will initiate this if they are part of the ethos and approach at school.

We know children need the space and time to play freely outside in nature. Yet, it needs to go hand in hand with a developmentally appropriate progression of wider experiences that encourage children to care for nature and to have a basic understanding of natural processes. This was picked up by Nicol et al. when reviewing outdoor learning research:

Simply 'being outdoors' is not sufficient for young people to express an ethic of care for nature or develop an understanding of natural processes. These things seem to be learned when they are an explicit aim of experiential activities and when they are mediated in appropriate ways.<sup>1</sup>

Adults need to model appropriate behaviour and attitudes too. Sustainable development education is a much deeper matter than remembering to pick up litter or save energy. Make sure you know what sustainability means and how you can incorporate your country's guidelines for sustainable development education into your class routines and practice.

The rights-based approach is two-fold. Firstly, it creates a more child-centred, reflective and positive framework for considering how to teach the big concepts and ideas behind sustainability. It dovetails neatly into the Rights Respecting Schools Award<sup>2</sup> and recognises that the UN Convention on the Rights of a Child<sup>3</sup> needs to underpin educational practice.

Secondly, most countries have laws about what the public can or cannot do when out in the countryside. It is all too often forgotten that responsibilities go hand-in-hand with rights. For example, in Scotland there is a public right to beachcomb on the foreshore. This is the tidal section between the high-water mark at the top of the beach and the water line. However, with this right comes various responsibilities, such as:

- Being able to identify your finds so that you know what you are taking and can make a sensible decision as to whether it is okay to pick it up or not.
- Gathering finds sustainably and only removing a very small sample, or just taking photos.

1 R., Nicol, P. Higgins, H. Ross and G. Mannion, *Outdoor Education in Scotland: A Summary of Recent Research*. (Perth and Glasgow: Scottish Natural Heritage, 2007). Available at: <<http://www.snh.gov.uk/publications-data-and-research/publications/search-the-catalogue/publication-detail/?id=852>>, p. 5.

2 See <<http://www.unicef.org.uk/Get-Involved/Your-organisation/Schools/rights-respecting-school-award/>>

3 Unicef, Fact Sheet: A Summary of the Rights under the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Available at: <[http://www.unicef.org/crc/files/Rights\\_overview.pdf](http://www.unicef.org/crc/files/Rights_overview.pdf)>



- Knowing and understanding the tidal system on a particular beach.
- Behaving in a manner that does not disturb other users or wildlife.

In this example, a sustainable and rights-based emphasis shifts the health and safety concerns about tides and good practice when working near water into a more positive context of knowing and respecting the environment.

## Idea 1.1 Know your rights

Find out about the laws in your country relating to access rights. Have a think about how these can be used to develop children's understanding of how to care for the countryside and as a positive framework for outdoor activities. Think about:

- What behaviours will need to be modelled by adults?
- Are there any games, stories or activities that can be used to reinforce key points or issues? I find these approaches more effective than simply a discussion before going outside.
- What routines can be set up which would help to embed a sustainable and rights-based approach?

## Value free play and take a playful approach to learning

If you want creative workers, give them enough time to play.

John Cleese

We have a paradox in schools. We accept the value of play, especially in the Early Years, but the idea of play in the primary sector and beyond often does not feel like a legitimate use of the precious time available.

For some children, school playtimes may be the only informal outdoor play opportunities available to them on a regular basis. It is a time for children to recharge their batteries between lessons. Some children find their lives are full of structured activities, such as music lessons and sports classes, or spend lots of time doing sedentary activities, such as playing computer games. Others may live in places where going out to play is not possible.

As part of developing learning outdoors, you can demonstrate that you value playtimes and facilitate daily outdoor free-play opportunities, regardless of the weather, season and the ability of a child to play with others or complete their work.



There are many different types of play. However, it is ‘free play’ which we need to encourage during breaktimes. Play is often described by play experts as happening when children choose what they want to do and how they want to do it. It is child-initiated and child-led with no external goals or rewards.<sup>4</sup> This is how children learn to socialise, develop independence, improve their physical coordination and enjoy themselves without adults directing proceedings. It is how they learn about grit and resilience, power and control, to apologise and make friends.

A lot happens at breaktimes. As educators, we can look for opportunities to capitalise upon this and to acknowledge the contribution of playtimes to the rest of children’s time in school. Children appreciate creative, as well as physical, play opportunities – particularly in nature-rich outdoor spaces. I often hear teachers and children comment positively about such experiences and how it helps children to be more settled and better able to concentrate when back in class. The health benefits associated with free play are numerous and include increased physical activity, improved physical and mental health, well-being, and social and emotional development.<sup>5</sup>

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4 This is an abbreviated version of the definition given in J. Santer and C. Griffiths, with D. Goodall, *Free Play in Early Childhood: A Literature Review* (London: Play England and the National Children’s Bureau, 2007). Available at: <<http://www.playengland.org.uk/media/120426/free-play-in-early-childhood.pdf>>, p. xi.

5 J. Gleave and I. Cole-Hamilton, *A World without Play: A Literature Review* (London: Play England, 2012). Available at: <<http://www.playengland.org.uk/media/371031/a-world-without-play-literature-review-2012.pdf>>, p. 3.

If your school keeps children inside during inclement weather, you will know how this affects the class time afterwards – cabin fever! The primary schools who enable children to play outdoors all year round and in all weathers, find the benefits outweigh the hassles of managing wet clothes and mud.

As a teacher, you may feel you do not have much say in whole-school approaches to play. However, the children in your class will have plenty to say on the subject and may consider this a worthwhile matter to take forward to their pupil council or other child-led committees.

When it comes to thinking about play in the context of learning outdoors, we need to bear in mind the following factors:

- The informal learning that happens during breaks, lunchtimes and out of school – think about how much of the curriculum may be being covered during this time.
- The need for children to have daily free play experiences and to simply be able to play for the sake of it.
- The inclusion of play as a valid part of formal learning which happens during class time – this may be more directed than at playtimes so is not necessarily free play.
- The use of playtime activity as a stimulus to formal work during class times.



- Naturalising and making the school grounds play-friendly spaces (this is considered in Chapter 9).
- Different types of play can be facilitated by the right social and physical environments (e.g. social, role play, team games, journeying).

A playful approach to learning is very different to free play. A playful approach tends to be planned for by a teacher and is usually adult-initiated and adult-led. Generally there are specific learning outcomes in mind.

However there is a place for this during class time. A playful approach makes learning fun. Being asked to gather round and look at a wildflower and listen to the teacher talk about the functions of different parts of a plant is dull. Instead, it is better for children to make a personal connection to a plant in some way. For example, after undertaking a weeding activity, set aside time for children to play with the leaves, stems and roots they have removed. Ask them what they want to do next, in terms of finding out more about a plant's structure and its functions. You may be surprised how much they will strive to teach themselves when given an incentive, a supportive environment and not much structure.

A playful approach also brings variety. It is easy to develop confidence in one type of outdoor activity and stick to this. Yet, we all know variety is the spice of life, so planning and undertaking a range of playful outdoor activities helps.

## Provide a nurturing, natural environment

**I never teach my pupils; I only attempt to provide the conditions in which they can learn.**

Albert Einstein

A nurturing, natural environment is my description for an outdoor space which truly meets the needs of the children who play there. It is about providing a place that benefits their health and well-being. It sends a strong message that children are welcome and valued.

As a result of a two-year research project, *Special Places; Special People*, Wendy Titman demonstrated that school grounds, by design, influence the way children behave. She suggested that children seek a range of opportunities from an environment which is 'required to offer the potential for children to "do" and "think" and "feel" and "be" all at the same time.'<sup>6</sup>

Greenspaces, especially areas that feel wild, appear to have a particularly positive effect. They are calmer environments – places to think, be and experience time out from the stresses and strains of everyday life. The constant rhythms of the natural world, such as day and night, the seasons and

6 W. Titman, *Special Places; Special People: The Hidden Curriculum of School Grounds* (Winchester: World Wide Fund for Nature/Learning through Landscapes, 1993), p. 58.



the weather, provide consistency for children, especially those who live chaotic lives.

Children will actively seek out different ways of interacting with features in the landscape. Woods, beaches and other natural spaces offer great potential in terms of how they can be utilised for play and learning. By contrast, asphalt playgrounds with fixed equipment rarely offer the range of play opportunities children need to explore and challenge themselves.

Finally, we need to consider the activities we offer children outside and how these contribute to developing resilience so they are able to look after themselves and others.

## Developing children's creative capacities

*By creating we think, by living we learn.*

Sir Patrick Geddes

Creativity is a term that means different things to different people. It is often assumed to refer to subjects such as art, drama, dance or music, which can offer much scope to be creative. However, so do science, the social sciences, technology and many other facets of human activity.

It is the innovation, the motivation, the drive and the passion of any person, group or community wanting to change and improve circumstances that is the linchpin of creativity. If we have the capacity to imagine, innovate and ensure our efforts have value to humanity, then we have the potential to shape the future. This can give us a sense of control over our destiny and that of our pupils. We can see the impact of what we have set out to achieve and this further encourages us to be active and engaged. This is the gift of creativity.

As teachers, our job is to look at the outdoors in terms of its potential for developing creative capacities, such as:

- Positive risk-taking and management.
- Divergent as well as convergent thinking and ideas generation.
- Being able to transfer and apply skills and concepts in new and different ways.
- Finding practical solutions to everyday problems.

### Idea 3.23 There's angles everywhere

Separate the found objects according to the angles identified. For example, a block of wood or an empty crisp packet will contain right angles, whilst leaves often have examples of acute angles in their veins.

What can the children deduce from this evidence? Are there more right angles to be found in man-made objects than in natural ones? How can this theory be proved? From here, an angle hunt can take place within a designated area.



### Idea 3.24 The same and different game

At the gathering circle, ask the children to pair off with the person beside them. Each pair looks at their objects and asks, 'What's the same about these things?' and 'What's different?' They must come up with two or three similarities and differences. This activity helps children look closely at objects to distinguish key characteristics and features.

### Idea 3.25 Why five?

Why five? is a useful development from Idea 3.24 and takes its inspiration from the fact that many inventors and designers look at ideas from one system or area and apply them to another.

The found objects are compared in groups of up to five children. The group has to come up with a chain of five connections between the objects. For example:

- 1 Birch leaf – this can be found at the end of a living branch, which, when it dies becomes a stick.
- 2 Stick – a stick is a dead branch upon which a pine cone once grew.
- 3 Pine cone – as the scales of the cone dry out, they open up, releasing the seeds which are distributed by the wind.

- 4 Dandelion – also relies on wind dispersal of its seeds. If you blow hard enough on a dandelion clock, the seeds disperse in an explosion of fluff.
- 5 Lichen – this is fluffy and soft to feel and can be found growing on birch trees.

### Idea 3.26 The biography of an object

The children should find someone with a similar or the same object. Together, they invent a brief biography or life history of the object using a maximum of five sentences. For example:

My dandelion was born from a seed that landed on the playing field. It nestled into the ground one late spring day and immediately began sprouting. Within a week the dandelion had put down a strong tap root. Within a month it had grown a beautiful golden head. Then I picked it.

My wrapper was created with a purpose – to protect the Mars bar from the dangers in its life. It encased the snack bar and they lived happily together for several months on a shop shelf. One day, a boy bought the Mars bar. Without caring one jot, he tore the wrapper off the sweet and chucked it into the wind. I found it sheltering in the corner of the playground.

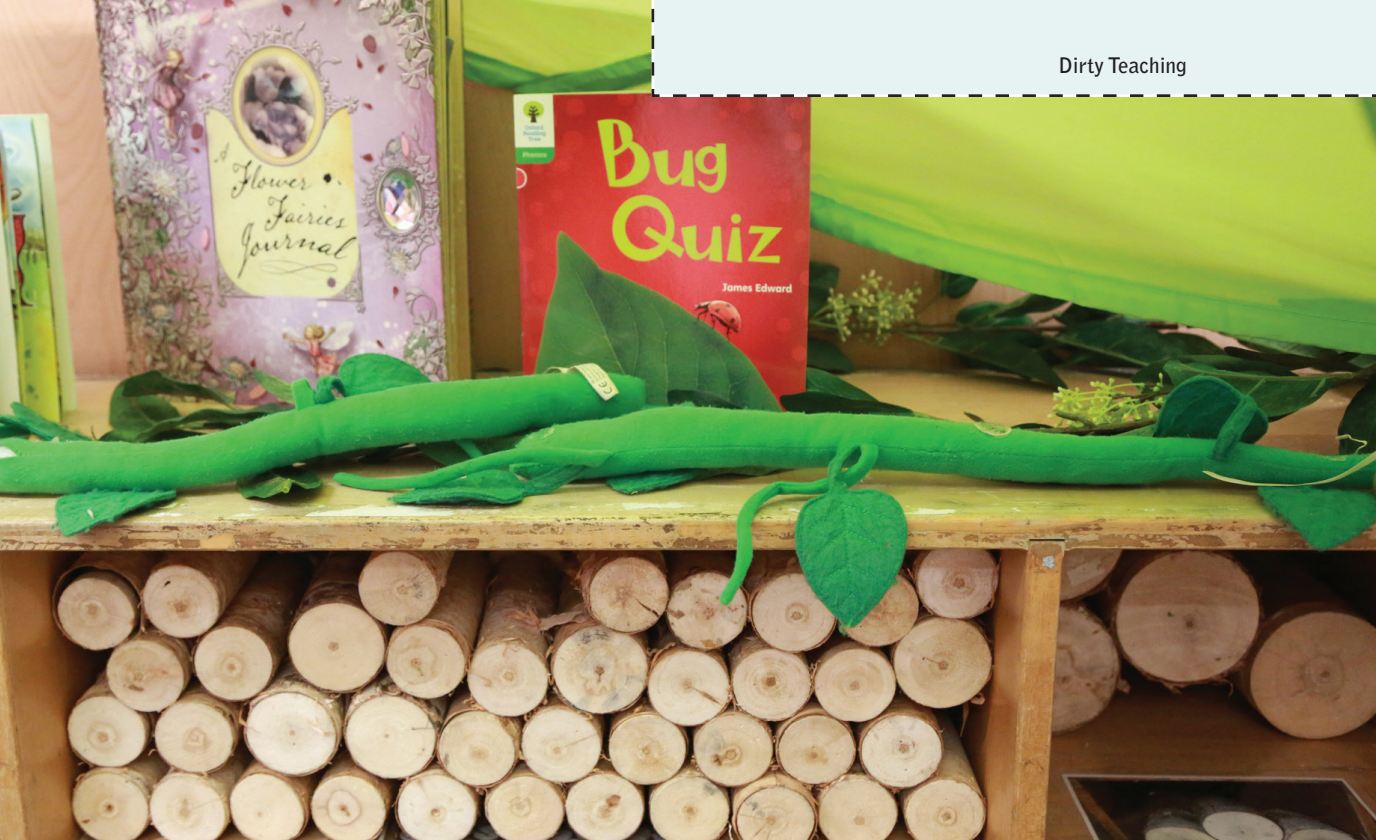
Back in the classroom, these biographies can be written into miniature books and placed beside each object on a display table.

### Idea 3.27 Symbols and map making

If a gathering circle happens on asphalt, then a class-sized map can be created from the found objects. Have a discussion about what the objects could represent. Ask the children to arrange the objects in an interesting way to create a territory, land or country. For example, a big rock might be a mountain. The weeds might be a meadow. A piece of old blue rope might be a river.

Once the 3D map has been created, use chalk to carefully draw round or under each object. Next, remove the objects – their outline will remain on the ground. With very young children, they can take turns to guess and put the objects back onto the 2D outlines. With older children, you could discuss various features of maps, such as how to annotate them correctly, the purpose and use of a key and so on.

After this sort of activity, children will very often want to go and make their own miniature versions nearby. This can be an ideal springboard into writing about the landscape.



### Idea 3.28 The rhythm of words

All words have a rhythm which helps us to understand how they are constructed. Ask children to think about their object and describe it. For very young children, a simple description may be enough (e.g. green grass, long stick, tickly feather). With older children, you might ask for alliteration, the creation of a simile or the invention of a plural noun or a metaphor.

Once the children have made up their descriptive words or phrases, it is time to get the rhythms going. In turn, each child tells the class their description. The class must repeat the description and, at the same time, clap the rhythm out loud. For example:

- Green grass            2 syllables = 2 claps
- Long stick            2 syllables = 2 claps
- Ticky feather        4 syllables = 4 claps

If the children get tired of clapping, then snapping their fingers, slapping their thighs, stamping their feet or jumping up and down work well too.



A greater challenge is to break a phrase into its syllables with each child in turn clapping just once. For example, tickly feather would be clapped by four children in turn, each saying aloud their part of the phrase:

tick (clap)      ly (clap)      fea (clap)      ther (clap)

From here, syllable poems can be developed, such as a haiku or tanka.

## The First Few Sessions checklist

Have you:

- Decided your line-up routine with the children and how you are going to exit the school?
- Chosen a suitable gathering place and activities that will help children gather there quickly?
- Put together a few circle games, familiar games and activities that you and your children already know, such as traditional playground games? Think about how these could be adapted to class interests and themes and used during outside sessions or for outdoor circle times.
- Planned a series of outdoor sessions based on the ideas in this chapter and elsewhere? Aim for at least one outdoor session per week.
- Planned how this will be followed up back in class or the next time you are outside?
- Have alternative indoor activities ready, if needed?

## Idea 7.5 Geocaching

Geocaching is a world-wide treasure hunting game which uses GPS.<sup>1</sup> In order to play, you sign up to the free website to find out where the nearest geocache is to your school. Then, using GPS or a smartphone, you enter a specific set of coordinates and attempt to find the geocache (container) hidden at that location. These may be hidden or disguised in some way. Inside the cache you will find a logbook to sign and sometimes they contain messages or presents – you remove one and replace it with another.

It is quite straightforward to set up private geocaches within your school grounds – it could be an interesting project for the children to do this for another class to complete.

## Idea 7.6 Digital trails

Mobile devices, such as tablets and smartphones, provide lots of opportunities for developing hunts and trails. Ask on social media platforms such as Twitter for ideas and advice. Common examples include:

- Photo trails. These involve taking photos at different places for others to find and match. This can be undertaken as a problem-solving challenge where children have to find the correct location and take a photo from the same angle. It can be a good way to introduce photography skills, such as how to frame a photo, how to avoid a fuzzy shot, etc.
- Quick Response (QR) codes are a form of bar code that capture different forms of information, such as websites, text or photos. Each child or group will need a mobile device with a QR reader.
- Use an augmented reality app (see Idea 6.12).

## Idea 7.7 Musical sticks

Take a stick on a musical walk! The children can bang the stick against various objects and surfaces to make different sounds as they walk along. How many different sounds is it possible to make with a stick? Is there anything children need to remember when undertaking this activity, regarding the use of sticks and their interactions with the environment and others?

<sup>1</sup> See <<http://www.geocaching.com>>

## Idea 7.8 Make signs, clues and directions from nature

By their nature, natural trails tend to be well camouflaged. They can be created from various materials, such as long grass tied into knots, mini stone stacks or arrows made from sticks. Your class can experiment beforehand and come up with their own designs. It is a good idea to discuss the pros and cons of the markers. For example:

- Length of time needed to make each marker.
- How well they blend into the landscape and whether this matters or not.
- The purpose of the trail. Is it to practise way-finding? Is it to guide people to look at specific features?
- Is the trail temporary or permanent?

If your school is in a very urban environment, brainstorm with your class for alternative environmental clues which could be used.

- Could eco-friendly white paint be used to create fake bird droppings?





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