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Introduction

“The best classroom and the richest cupboard are roofed only by the sky.”

Margaret McMillan, Nursery Pioneer (1919)

Being outside playing and exploring, gives children the opportunity to be creative, extend their imagination, enrich their language, build their confidence and self-esteem and experience a feeling of freedom. It also helps them to understand, enjoy and appreciate the natural environment, which in turn will encourage them to look after it as a child and as an adult. As the first chapter demonstrates, it goes much further than that even.

Re-connecting with Nature considers extensive research which shows that children’s life chances are actually affected by being outdoors and the growing evidence that children’s contact and involvement with nature affects not only their general well-being but also their long-term health and life pathways.

The publication goes on to show how any early years setting can provide learning opportunities outdoors to support children’s overall learning and development, whether or not large natural outdoor space is accessible and with or without a large budget.

Guidance on developing outdoor learning is provided, with many ideas for fun activities, from Alliance practitioners who run their own outdoor learning and Forest School sessions, which practitioners and parents can undertake together with children on an ad hoc, or hopefully, more regular basis. The process and benefits of developing the inspirational outdoor Forest School learning programme is also explained, with clear demonstrations of how it can successfully be created in all types of environments, including urban areas or in a small patch of unused land.

Whilst many of the case studies and quotes have been provided by practitioners and professionals in the South East area of England, this is simply due to this publication being brought together through the extensive work of Alliance sub-committees in Greenwich, Lewisham and other South Eastern areas.

The Pre-school Learning Alliance strongly believes that all children have the right to experience the essential and special nature of being outdoors. We know that young children thrive, and their minds and bodies develop best, when they have free access

to stimulating outdoor environments, which include learning through play and real experiences. We recognise that access to outdoor green space has therapeutic effects, particularly for children with social, communication or behavioural difficulties, or who have faced difficult family situations. As many children do not routinely experience outdoor play as part of their home life, it is all the more vital that all childcare staff promote and encourage it in every childcare setting, in order to help children develop that vital healthy life pathway.

“The Pre-school Learning Alliance has always promoted the benefits of outdoor play. Here at Limelight we have really embraced that ethos; being outdoors with water, digging holes and making mud pies is an integral part of our curriculum.”

Jan Coleman, Development Manager, Limelight Family Learning Centre

