

Outdoor Learning

Forward

We are all designed to be active and connected to nature, and yet we are spending more time indoors in artificial environments and less time outdoors enjoying amazing green spaces all around us.

Spending time in nature is known to have huge health benefits, particularly for children including improved memory, concentration and behaviour. What's more, it doesn't have to be difficult to connect with nature – we don't need to drive off into the countryside or trek miles into the wilderness, instead we can embrace the nature in the heart of our towns and cities.

Outdoor learning offers exciting new ways to reverse decades of declining times spent outdoors by children and provide exciting new opportunities for educating and teaching pupils. By leaving the classroom behind and embracing the outdoors we can connect with nature and help our children develop in an environment we're all designed to explore.

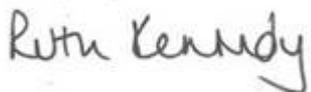


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CEO Intelligent Health

This resource has been endorsed by the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment.

Children are naturally curious about the world around them and as such the outdoors provide a stimulating environment in which to engage learners. The flexible nature of our curriculum can act as a driver to enhance outdoor opportunities right across the Areas of Learning. As Thinking Skills and Personal Capabilities are a core statutory requirement of the Northern Ireland curriculum, they too can be promoted and encouraged in meaningful and relevant ways by schools that extend learning beyond the indoors. CCEA endorses the Outdoor Learning approach as part of the Eco Schools programme in Northern Ireland.

Ruth Kennedy
Business Manager, Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting



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What is Outdoor Learning?

Outdoor Learning in simplest terms means leaving the classroom and going outside to facilitate learning. This learning could be any area of the curriculum. Going outside does not only have to be about nature studies or physical education but can complement all areas of the curriculum, support skills and development. It can also encourage better problem solving, critical thinking, inquiry skills and self-management in pupils.

A teacher doesn't have to have an encyclopedic knowledge of nature to take a lesson outside though pupils' natural curiosity will no doubt throw a few questions your way. This is a great way to explore, investigate and learn along with your pupils about the natural world.

Whether you are counting bugs, looking for shapes and angles, matching colours, seeking inspiration for art, mapping the area, investigating environmental issues, researching and inputting your findings to national databases or just going for a walk to stimulate a literacy task, the outdoor environment provides endless inspiration for all educational levels.

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This resource seeks to encourage teachers to go outside for lessons and suggests easy, stress free ways to do this. We will look at the why, how, where, what to bring, and who might have useful lesson ideas.

Going outside will not only enhance your pupils’ learning and reinforce your classroom work but also complement your Eco-Schools work. School Grounds has always been a popular Eco-Schools topic with 75% of schools applying for their Green Flag stating it is a major or minor topic for them.

Eco-Schools are taking a fresh look at the School Grounds topic and rebranding it as Outdoor Learning. We believe that School Grounds should not just be about making things look pretty, although this can be a pleasant side effect, but also about using and developing the space in your school grounds as an extension of your classroom where, not only the Eco-Committee, but every pupil in the school can explore and expand their learning. We also have some ideas on taking outdoor learning beyond your school grounds to local parks and beyond.

Why is Outdoor Learning Important?

There is increasing media attention and an almost overwhelming amount of research to back up the theory that going outside the classroom for some of your teaching is a good idea for three main reasons:

- Learning** - enhances cognition, enquiry skills and personal development
- Environment** - increases knowledge and personal connection to nature
- Health** - benefits mental health and physical literacy



Children are spending less time playing outside in nature than would have been common 30-40 years ago in their parents and grandparents time. There are various suggested reasons for this; a lack of outdoor play areas, parental fears for safety, a large variety of other play distractions such as electronic games and media devices. The problem is often seen as generational with older generations feeling they played outside more often than their children or grandchildren do. From generation to generation there is a widening gap in knowledge being handed down about the natural world which has been called the “extinction of experience.”

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Playing outside is of course not just lots of fun but also where much crucial learning can happen. Learning about the natural world, of course, but also about how to interact with others, personal responsibility, calculating risk, critical thinking and physical literacy. A lack of this interaction with nature can lead to disengagement with the natural environment; it being seen as an alien place. ‘Nature Deficit Disorder’ a phrase coined over 10 years ago by Richard Louv in Last Child in the Woods, 2005, seems even more relevant today.

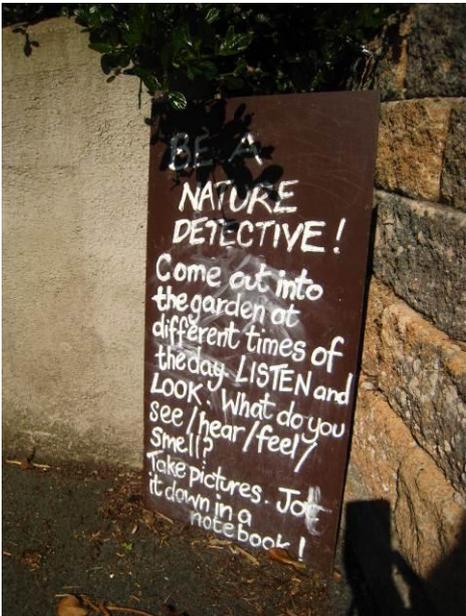
From an environmental perspective this is concerning. If a young person does not have a personal connection to the natural world it is unlikely that they will feel much compulsion to protect it. This is a dangerous trend when the environment needs attention and protection more than ever before.

Now here’s the good news - children still love to go outdoors. We are genetically predisposed to be curious about our natural environment and to feel soothed and simultaneously reenergised by it, given the right conditions. It is not called the ‘natural environment’ for no reason.

“It is believed that time spent in the natural environment can reduce stress and improve mental health. It can also have a restorative effect on attention spans therefore rejuvenating children and enabling them to perform better when in the classroom.” Schutte et al., 2015.

Research suggests that the quality of learning done in the outdoor environment may be superior to classroom learning in the depth of understanding and information retained by pupils.

“Children’s ability to concentrate and be more self-disciplined has been associated with contact to nearby nature... Increasing the amount of accessible and natural environment should be considered as a way of improving overall performance and ability....” William Bird, 2007.



As educators it is important that teachers lead the way in enabling children to go outside more. If children are familiar and comfortable in the natural environment during school they are more likely to look for opportunities at home to go outside too. What they experience and enjoy when children, as we know, is likely to inform their behaviour as adults. Outdoor Learning should also benefit the teacher as they reap the rewards of a class with improved cognitive abilities.

“Out-of-classroom learning opportunities provide the learners with inspiring, sensory and memorable experiences that bring the curriculum to life in an inclusive way.” ETI, 2010.

How to do Outdoor Learning

Now that we have considered the many reasons why Outdoor Learning is a good idea the next question is how best to implement it. It may seem a little daunting if you have never tried integrating lessons outside into your curriculum delivery before. Although the first few attempts may be a little chaotic the pupils will soon settle into the routine and Outdoor Learning will become the 'norm.'

Here are a few ideas to get you started:

Step 1: Plan ahead.

Just going outside without a plan will no doubt result in the pupils having a great time but your own satisfaction of what has been achieved from a learning viewpoint may be less. It is important to frame your activity with the pupils before you leave the classroom. Giving the activity context and sharing the learning expectations with the pupils will help keep them more focused on the task outside. It is also a good idea to communicate your expectations of behaviour before the activity begins. Planning ahead will also mean you have any equipment or resources you need for the activity ready to go.

Of course spontaneous trips out of the classroom are great too, especially if the weather is just too good to miss. So a handy portfolio of stand-alone activities and an 'always ready to go' toolkit are a useful things to keep in mind.

Step 2: Risk management.

Risk assessments are your friend! There are lots of great examples of risk assessments available online and your school may already have its own format. Keep them simple and concise to the activity you have planned. You may be able to use the same template for many similar activities and just tweak the finer details. Do make sure you complete one for each activity.

Remember it is impossible to eradicate all risk and in fact you shouldn't even try. Risk is a natural part of life and pupils need to experience and assess it for themselves too. Managing risk means reducing it to acceptable levels and being aware of your surroundings but not terrified by them!

If you are planning a litter pick or any other outdoor activity then the Live Here Love Here '[Hints and Tips](#)' booklet is very helpful and available off www.livehereandlovehere.org

There are a great range of risk assessment templates available from the [Education Authority](#) ranging from environmental activities to safety around water margins.

There is an example risk assessment on the Eco-Schools website in the [resource library](#). It is based on a format from the OPAL [website](#).

If you are interested in the health and safety of science projects then the Association for Science Education's resources may be useful to acquire [read more here](#).

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Step 3: Get the right gear.

Pupil Clothing -

Alfred Wainright once said, "There's no such thing as bad weather, only unsuitable clothing." This is true up to a point! Really we are blessed with a fairly mild, if sometimes slightly damp, climate. If your pupils are well prepared with a good coat and waterproof shoes then getting outside shouldn't be a problem.

Many nursery and primary schools now request of parents that welly boots be supplied for small pupils at the start of the year so that they are available when needed. Older pupils will probably be fine with suitable shoes or sports shoes. In the summer it would be a good idea to ask for sunhats and sun cream to be supplied for pupils by parents. These items can be kept on their coat hook in a bag or in their lockers ready to go when needed. High-vis vests are a good idea for younger pupils, when going off school grounds, especially where traffic might be encountered.

Teacher's equipment – this list is not exhaustive and perhaps you will think of other items to have at hand for trips outside:

- Weatherproof clipboards and pencils
- Ropes and string of various lengths and thicknesses
- Ziplock bags for collecting things
- Pegs for hanging items
- Tarpaulins and mats for sitting on or using for water collection/play
- Tarpaulins with grids for various teaching and learning (6x6, 8x8, 10x10 grids)
- Buckets for collecting things
- Bug boxes/magnifying glasses
- Tape measures
- Blindfolds
- Whistles or bird-callers
- First Aid Kit
- Mobile phone, camera or i-pad for pictures.

Step 4: Get out there!

Don't wait for the perfect day or the perfect school grounds - these things are a myth! The time is now, to get outside and see for yourself the benefits of Outdoor Learning. Yes the first couple of times might be a little chaotic but the more you and the pupils become used to the idea of Outdoor Learning the smoother the transition from being inside to being outside will become and the more useful the experience will become.

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Step 5: Reflection time.

Once back inside complete the experience with your pupils by reflecting on what they have learned, enjoyed, not enjoyed, and discuss what they might still like to learn. Complete any follow up classroom work and consider how effective the learning has been. It will benefit you as teacher if you review the activity you have completed and consider how you could improve or build on it in the future.

Developing your school grounds into an Outdoor Learning area

It would be ideal if you could develop your own wild nature area or woodland in your school grounds. Many schools have been planting native trees and hedges, wildflower meadows, increasing wildlife habitat areas and creating vegetable gardens. The creation of these areas provide a huge amount of learning opportunities for pupils as they plan, plant and observe the results. Once matured they provide a wonderful resource for generations to come. Perhaps you are lucky to already have mature planting on your grounds and all that is needed to transform it into a useful Outdoor Learning space is some clearing out and consideration of safe access routes.

Even the smallest patches of ground can yield great returns with the addition of bug hotels, log piles, planters, bird feeders and homes, small water features, recycled art etc.

CCEA have developed a great resource [Growing for the Future](#) which presents a seasonal guide for growing food in your school and complementary teaching resources.

Have a look at Groundwork's [website](#) for ideas on developing your grounds. The RSPB have lots of smaller scale ideas on how to introduce biodiversity into your school garden with [Give Nature A Home](#).



Of course this is not possible for everyone in which case finding out what is on your doorstep is a great idea.

Going beyond the school gates

Once you have explored the benefits of leaving the classroom in favour of Outdoor Learning you may feel that your pupils would benefit from further exploration of your local area and natural spaces that Northern Ireland has to offer. A trip to the local park, nature reserve, beach, forest or even mountains will provide a wealth of experiences. Some may even be within walking distance and provide a low cost or even free option!

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Find out more about your local parks through your local Council - contact details can be found on our [Partners](#) page on the Eco-Schools website.

Belfast City Council also run the [ParkLife Education Programme](#) with Ulster Wildlife.

If considering pond exploration tips on water safety can be found on the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents [website](#).

The [Northern Ireland Forest School Association](#) provides training on forest schools

and a wealth of resources on their website.

[Woodland Trust](#) also has great resources for learning about forests and provide [free native tree packs](#) to schools.

Visiting a nature reserve for a guided workshop may help boost your own knowledge and confidence for future trips. Try [Oxford Island](#) at Lough Neagh Discovery Centre, the [Field Studies Council](#) or [Speedwell Trust](#) for ideas.

A trip to your local mountains is a fantastic option and will help pupils with self-management, and also provide an opportunity to study map skills while examining the surrounding biodiversity.

[Tollymore National Outdoor Centre](#) provide training courses on mountain safety as well as more ambitious outdoor activities for pupils.

Contact your regional [EA regional office](#) to find out about Residential Education Centers in your area. Read the [EA guide to Educational Visits](#) for a comprehensive look at how to plan your own.



Booking an outdoor activity with any [LOtC Quality Badge](#) holding provider reduces the red tape associated with learning outside the classroom, as it is a recognised indicator of good quality educational provision and effective risk management.

Leave No Trace

When using your school grounds for Outdoor Learning pupils will learn how to act responsibly and look after the natural environment. Those behaviour choices will be carried beyond the school and into other areas you may wish to explore. It is useful to reinforce this behaviour and Keep Northern Ireland Beautiful's ethos of binning your litter or taking it home. Leave No Trace is a good way to introduce your pupils to responsible use of natural areas.

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We recommend visiting the [Leave No Trace website](#) for more information on how to train your pupils. There is a range of teaching resources also available on the topic on the Leave No Trace website.

Weather and Tide times

It's a good idea to keep an eye on the weather forecast so you can prepare your equipment accordingly or perhaps make a decision on whether an activity can go ahead or not. The [BBC weather page](#) provides a simple and reliable forecast. The [Met Office](#) also provides reliable and more technical reports - you could even use the Met Office [surface pressure charts](#) to teach your pupils about weather patterns.

If you are planning an activity or litter pick on a beach it is a good idea to know what the tide is doing so you aren't disappointed by a lack of available beach, or more seriously, in danger of getting cut off by the tide. Have a look at [Tides4Fishing](#) which also provides useful beach weather forecasting or [Tide Times](#) which is also good.

School examples of Outdoor Learning Activities

Here are some great ideas shared by Eco-Schools teachers (in their own words!) who are already successfully implementing Outdoor Learning. Use or adapt these to create your own activities.

| | | | |
|---|---|--|--|
| Downpatrick Nursery School | | | |
| Key Stage of Pupils involved in activity: Pre School | | | |
| Location: School grounds and local parks | | | |
| Name of activity: Seasonal fun | | | |
| Key learning areas covered: Cross curricular but mainly "The World around Us" and "Physical Development" with plenty of "Personal, Social and Emotional" and "Language Development" | | | |
| Season activity occurred in: 4 seasons | | Is this activity limited by season? A bit | |
| Describe any introduction to activity completed in class prior to going outdoors – if any: Not necessary, just get out there.... | | | |
| Length of time for introduction – if any: 0 | | | |
| Length of time for main outdoor activity: 20 minutes – 2 hours! (as long as possible) | | | |
| Describe the main outdoor activity: | | | |
| AUTUMN: Rake leaves Pretend to be hedgehogs Transport to compost Jump on leaves Weed veg. Garden + Make soup with "finds" Plant bulbs | WINTER: Make bird cake Feed birds RSPB – Big Schools Birdwatch Keep warm (move/clothes) Snow, ice + Hot choc Ice "pictures" Ice "puddles" | SPRING: Water bulbs Transport compost Plant seeds Big Spring Clean | SUMMER: Car wash Picnics/Camping Den building Harvest crops Salad sales Pick and taste |

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Suggested equipment list for this outdoor activity:

| | | | |
|---|--|--|--|
| Rake, shovel, brush Wheelbarrows Pots and compost Spring bulbs | Lard, seed, etc.... Seed, crumbs, fat balls RSPB online resources Plastic containers Leaves, seeds, string | Watering cans Wheelbarrow, shovel Pots and trowels Litter pickers | Buckets, sponges Mud kitchen ++ Loose parts Veg garden/pots |
|---|--|--|--|

Describe any plenary to activity completed in class after to going outdoors – if any:
Chat about activities at lunch time to reinforce vocabulary and recall events

Length of time for classroom plenary – if any: Incidental interactions with staff

Follow on/homework task - if any: Newsletters and photos to share with parents.

Encourage families to provide for hedgehogs and birds and plant/care for bulbs/seeds at home

Length of time for follow on/homework – if any: Every little helps

List any reading or resource links you think would help a teacher deliver this activity:
RSPB website, Live Here Love Here has funding for Litter picking, Eco-Schools website and partners

Ambassador Eco-Schools would share ideas/experience (Contact us!)





| | |
|---|--|
| Ballycraigy Primary School, Antrim | |
| Key Stage of Pupils involved in activity: Foundation Stage | |
| Location: School grounds and school Wild Wood area | |
| Name of activity: RSPB Big Schools Birdwatch | |
| Key learning areas covered: WAU, Numeracy, Literacy, Art/Design | |
| Season activity occurred in: Winter | Is this activity limited by season? No |
| Describe any introduction to activity completed in class prior to going outdoors – if any: Setting up feeding stations in the schools grounds with fat balls and bird seed to make it easier to observe birds. Making your own bird feeders – many examples with the RSPB Schools Wild Challenge site | |
| Length of time for introduction – if any: RSPB Schools Wild Challenge site visit 15 mins | |
| Length of time for main outdoor activity: 30 mins | |
| Describe the main outdoor activity: | |
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. 15 mins <ol style="list-style-type: none"> A. We took the children on an outdoor walk with their binoculars. Looking for birds in the air, birds in the trees and birds on the ground. B. Observing the nests in the bare trees C. Listening for bird song D. Deciding on bird food sources 2. 15 mins <ol style="list-style-type: none"> A. Taking out the clipboards and pencils B. Recording their observations on prepared RSPB ID sheets C. Each pupil gather some twigs for follow up classroom activity | |
| Suggested equipment list for this outdoor activity: For outside: Binoculars, Clipboards, ID sheets – two levels, ID Posters | |
| For follow up task indoors: Writing books, clay balls, twigs gathered from outdoor walk, cardboard bases, moulding tools, plasticene. | |
| Describe any plenary to activity completed in class after to going outdoors – if any: | |
| 3. 15 mins | |

Collating and transferring the birdwatching data onto the RSPB website

4. 30 mins

Making clay bird nests following on from emergent pupil 'instruction' writing:

Firstly, you gather up old sticks form outside.

Next, you mould the nest shape out of clay

Then you put the twigs into the clay.

Lastly, you make some birds and eggs out of plasticene

Put them in the nest

Art gallery to display bird's nests

Length of time for classroom plenary – if any: 15 mins, 30 mins

Follow on/homework task - if any: RSPB Big Garden Watch - January

Length of time for follow on/homework – if any: RSPB suggests one hour for Garden birdwatch but could be shortened.

List any reading or resource links you think would help a teacher deliver this activity:

RSPB Schools' Wild Challenge



Mill Strand Integrated Primary School, Portrush

Key Stage of Pupils involved in activity: Foundation – Key Stage 2

Location: Local beach – any natural area would work

Name of activity: Poetry in Nature

Key learning areas covered: Literacy/WAU including observations in science

Season activity occurred in:
Any but needs to be a dry day to avoid soggy paper!

Is this activity limited by season? No

Describe any introduction to activity completed in class prior to going outdoors – if any:
Children write out the numbers 1-10 down the left hand side of a page (use a clipboard to assist writing) Explain to the children that they are going to look/observe the environment around them very carefully to see if they can write beside all of the numbers to create a poem (does not have to be written in order and does not have to rhyme!) Example: one sun shining in the sky, two birds flying by!

| |
|---|
| Length of time for introduction – if any: 10 minutes |
| Length of time for main outdoor activity: Depending on distance to area being used 40 mins approx. |
| Describe the main outdoor activity: Children write their poem (foundation stage children can draw to record) Children can also work in differentiated pair, one observing and one writing. |
| Suggested equipment list for this outdoor activity: Clipboard and pens Paper with numbers to 10 and name of child (children) High-vis vests if travelling off site! |
| Describe any plenary to activity completed in class after to going outdoors – if any: Children can read over their poems to edit. I have asked 10 different children to read out a different number from their poem to create some class poems. One child reads 1. Another reads 2. etc. Poems can be illustrated and displayed. |
| Follow on/homework task - if any: Same activity can be set as a homework for use in back garden/local park etc. |



| | |
|---|--|
| St Francis' Primary School, Lurgan | |
| Key Stage of Pupils involved in activity: Key Stage 1 – Key Stage 2 | |
| Location: School grounds or local nature reserve | |
| Name of activity: Pollinator colour survey - The activity was a follow up experiment to a child's question "Why are flowers different colours- why can't you get black flowers?" | |
| Key learning areas covered: World Around Us, ICT, Numeracy | |
| Season activity occurred in: Spring | Is this activity limited by season? Spring and Summer only |
| Describe any introduction to activity completed in class prior to going outdoors – if any: We were mind mapping for our science topic "Plants." Our school had just started its own allotment and so the whole school were learning about plants. We spent about 2 hours doing a | |

formative assessment lesson (“What do you know, what do you think you know, what do you want to learn...”). One of the girls asked the question about flowers - “Why are flowers different colours- why can’t you get black flowers?”

Introduction: create a simple slideshow of native flowers of any type, weeds, wildflowers, tree blossoms etc. Ask the children what they notice about all the flowers. Direct the questions to discussion about the colours they see. Which colours are most common? Why? Are there differences in popularity of colour depending on whether the flower is on the ground or in the trees? Why? What colour did you not see on the flower petals? Why?

Explain to the class that today we’re going to see why flowers come in different colours.

Length of time for introduction – if any: About 10-15 minutes

Length of time for main outdoor activity: about 30 minutes

Describe the main outdoor activity:

You will need a sunny day to do this activity.

You will need: Blank pieces of A4 card of different colours. I recommend each group has a different set of 5 coloured cards, but you can vary each group as much as you like. Try to cover the whole spectrum. It’s good to include black or brown for the discussion in the conclusion. You can also introduce/revise controlled variables by talking about how each piece of card must be the same, colour, size, shape etc. I think it’s really important to do things like this regularly so that children grasp the basics of scientific investigation (but then I am a scientist at heart!).

Put the class into groups of 3-4. Each group will need a clip board, pencil and worksheet to tally how many bugs land on their different coloured card. Lay the 5 cards out on the lawn and watch them for about 5 minutes, tallying how many bugs (it doesn’t matter what type) land on each colour. You can also ask the class to note down the names of any bugs that visit if you want to follow up with a minibeast identification lesson later in the classroom. Better yet, if the class has i-pads, photograph the bugs, then research what they were in class later.

Get the groups to swap their sets of cards a few times so that each group has a varied exposure to different colours.

Back in class, get the groups to discuss their own results within their group. See if they noticed anything. Allow each group to share their findings. Direct the discussion towards identifying the colours that were visited most regularly, which were ignored. Think back to the flower Power Point- do they notice any connections? Why or why not? What does this information tell you?

I usually get each group to draw up their own graph based on this information in a maths lesson- I then get them to collate all their data and draw a larger bar graph, explaining that science experiments can only be validated by repetition and that we have repeated the experiment in each group so our data is even stronger for this reason.

Suggested equipment list for this outdoor activity:

Power Point of flowers

Clipboard
 Colour chart to record tallies on
 Pencil.
 Various coloured card sheets.

Describe any plenary to activity completed in class after to going outdoors – if any:
 I would use the large graph we have created from all the data and ask the children so why are flowers colourful? Hopefully they will realise it's to attract bugs. So the next question is why do they want to attract them? Some might know they drink nectar, but then you ask so why would the flower want to feed the bugs, what's in it for them? And you have a great opener for pollination!

Length of time for classroom plenary – if any: a good 15 to 20 minutes to really unpick and dissect everything from the lesson!

Follow on/homework task - if any: You can follow it up by redoing the experiment a few months later to see if there are differences between the popularity of colours in different months... just an idea, who knows what you'll find!

Length of time for follow on/homework – if any: Best to wait until later in the year, June say.

List any reading or resource links you think would help a teacher deliver this activity:

[OPAL Polli:Nation Survey](#)
[OPAL ID guides](#)

St. Colm's High School, Draperstown

Key Stage of Pupils involved in activity: KS3- Comparing Biodiversity

Location: School nature trail – any nature reserve local to your school would work

Name of activity: Comparing data on the variety of trees in Susan's Trail and other areas of the school grounds.

Key learning areas covered: Biodiversity, Special Areas of Conservation (SAC)

| | |
|--|--|
| Season activity occurred in: All seasons | Is this activity limited by season? No |
|--|--|

Describe any introduction to activity completed in class prior to going outdoors – if any:

Students will need to study:

- Variety of native trees
- Planting and maintenance of trees
- Mid Ulster Biodiversity Action Plan 2014-17
- Designations –Special Areas of Conservation in Northern Ireland

Susan's Trail is a site of approximately 0.5 Ha (1.23 acres). The site was developed in 2013 to include a path through mini-habitats native to the Ballinascreen area.

The purpose of this study is to carry out analysis of trees planted in Susan's Trail and other areas of the school grounds in order to compare the biodiversity of the different areas. Data from each area will be collected and compared. Conclusions can then be drawn as to the effect of biodiversity planning, development and maintenance on the plant species present in each area.

Length of time for introduction – if any: 50 minutes

Length of time for main outdoor activity: 50 minutes including results. Can be repeated in different seasons

Describe the main outdoor activity:

Students record tree species found in different areas of the school grounds, one of which is a protected area- Susan's Trail. Pupils divide the school grounds into distinct areas then fill in the tree identification chart for each area and compare the tree biodiversity of the different areas.

Suggested equipment list for this outdoor activity:

- Tree identification recording sheets
- Clipboards
- Different areas including Susan's Trail (Biodiversity Trail)

Describe any plenary to activity completed in class after to going outdoors – if any:

- Students analyse the data collected to compare the tree biodiversity for the different areas.
- They can evaluate the success of Susan's Trail in increasing the biodiversity of the area looking at the Mid Ulster Biodiversity Action Plan 2014-17 with specific interest in the Woodlands and Hedgerow section, Pg. 18 out of 30.

The aim of the Mid Ulster Biodiversity Action Plan is three fold;

1. To conserve and enhance the rich biodiversity of the Mid Ulster area for both current and future generations;
2. Educate and raise awareness of the importance and variety of biodiversity found within the Mid Ulster area; and,
3. Encourage local ownership/guardianship of the Mid Ulster area's biodiversity.

Students could then research the impact of SACs in Northern Ireland, particularly those close to them.

Length of time for classroom plenary – if any: 2 x 50 minutes

1. Collating results and comparing biodiversity for different areas- plot graphs/charts of results.
2. Review the –Mid Ulster Biodiversity Action Plan 2014-17, paying particular attention to the section on 'Woodlands and hedgerow', Pg 18
3. Research local SACs

Follow on/homework task - if any:

Write a newspaper report on the impact Susan's trail has made on the biodiversity of the local area and how this contributes to Mid-Ulster Biodiversity Action Plan 2014-17.

Length of time for follow on/homework – if any: 1-2 hours for research and write-up.

List any reading or resource links you think would help a teacher deliver this activity:

- Linking Susan’s trail to Mid-Ulster Biodiversity Action Planning 2014-17.
<http://biodiversityni.com/publication/view/mid-ulster-biodiversity-action-plan-4>
- Researching SACs in NI:
http://jncc.defra.gov.uk/ProtectedSites/SACselection/SAC_list.asp?Country=NI



Other resource links

Check out the Education for Sustainable Development Forum’s (ESDF) extensive list of [member organisations](#) who can help with all manner of educational resources, advice and visits in Northern Ireland.

Below are some useful links to resources supporting Outdoor Learning. This is just the tip of the iceberg there are a huge variety of resources available online and it is worth having a look to find something specific to your needs. Of course the best ideas are often your own but perhaps you can find some inspiration here.

| Organisation | URL | Description |
|-------------------------------|---|---|
| RSPB | https://www.rspb.org.uk/kids-and-schools/kids-at-school/for-teachers/ | Whether you want to carry out your own Big Schools Bird Watch, get busy with a Wildlife Challenge or download learning and teaching resources this is the place to be. |
| RSPB | https://ww2.rspb.org.uk/about-the-rspb/at-home-and-abroad/northern-ireland/educationinnorthernireland/ | For details of school visits and outreach opportunities in Northern Ireland visit this page. |
| NI Forest Schools Association | http://nifsa.org.uk/ | Have a look at the NIFSA website for ideas on lessons and information on teacher training opportunities. |
| Ulster Wildlife | http://www.ulsterwildlife.org/discoverandlearn | Book workshops or download Park Life resources to use in lessons. Why not try to get families involved in exploring nature near them with one of the Saturday Clubs in Belfast City Council parks |

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| | | (http://www.belfastcity.gov.uk/leisure/parks-openspaces/parklife-saturday-clubs.aspx?E_EventGroup=ParkLife). |
| Jilly Dougan Edible Gardens | http://eco-schoolsni.org/eco-schoolsni/documents/006883.pdf | Read Jilly's beautifully presented and comprehensive guide to school gardening including simple recipes, what to grow and planting planners. (PDF 4MB) |
| Growing for the Future | www.ccea.org.uk/growing | This brilliant series of information on growing your vegetables in school is broken down by month. An essential guide for any would be gardener with KS1 and KS2 resources included. |
| Woodland Trust | http://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/naturedetectives/schools-and-groups/ | Help get your pupils learning outdoors with activity ideas, school curriculum resources, information on the Green Tree Schools Award and more! |
| The Woodland Trust Scotland | http://www.outdoor-learning.org/Default.aspx?tabid=322 | The Woodland Trust Scotland has this great Outdoor Learning Pack available to download. |
| OPAL | https://www.opalexploration.org/surveys | A list of all of the surveys you can complete, with information and resources for each one (surveys include Biodiversity, Bug Hunt, Water, Air, Soil, Tree). |
| OPAL | https://www.opalexploration.org/learning | Find lesson plans, education packs and lots of great information on how you can get more hands-on with nature. |
| Field Studies Council | http://www.field-studies-council.org/centres/northern-ireland/derrygonnelly/outdoorclassroom/course-resources.aspx | A great range of course resources from the Field Studies Council at Derrygonnelly, from KS3 to AQA as well as useful species information and Leave No Trace guidance for Leaders/Teachers. |
| International School Grounds | http://www.schooloutdoorlearning.com/opt/ | A collection of ideas on Outdoor Learning from around the world to inspire you. (PDF 7MB) |
| Colin Glen Trust | http://www.colinglen.org/schools/ | Schools can visit the outdoor classroom at Colin Glen, Belfast, and link activities to the curriculum, with Environmental Education options from £3pp. |
| Institute for Outdoor Learning | http://www.outdoor-learning.org/Default.aspx?tabid=322 http://www.countrysideclassroom.org.uk/ | The Institute for Outdoor Learning has lots of great learning and links to other's resources including Countryside Classroom which has a wealth of great teaching resources. |

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| Eden Project | http://www.edenproject.com/learn | A collection of resources including lesson plans, tips on growing flowers and vegetables, how to build insect homes and lots more. |
| Eden Project | http://www.edenproject.com/learn/schools/seven-easy-steps-to-introduce-outdoor-learning-in-your-school | A handy step by step guide to introduce Outdoor Learning. |
| Wildlife Watch | http://www.wildlifewatch.org.uk/activity-sheets | A great collection of worksheets to download to complement your Outdoor Learning |
| Creative Star Learning Ltd | http://creativestarning.co.uk/support/outdoor-learning-research/ | This website has a great collection of advice, research, support and resources on a lot of aspects of outdoor learning and play. |
| Solar Dome | http://www.solardome.co.uk/education/outdoor-learning/resources/ | A comprehensive collection of links to external agencies associated with growing your own food; nature and wildlife; food and health; and environmental classroom resources |

Further reading

‘Nature’s Voice – Every Child Outdoors’ – RSPB, 2010.

https://www.rspb.org.uk/Images/everychildoutdoors_tcm9-259689.pdf

‘Impact of Urban Nature on Executive Functioning in Early and Middle Childhood’ – Schutte et al, 2015. <http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1677&context=psychfacpub>

‘*Last Child in the Woods*’ - Richard Louv, Algonquin Books, 2008.

Funding suggestions

- [DAERA](#) - The Challenge Funds are released annually and have been generated from the single use carrier bag levy.
- [Live Here Love Here](#) - offer Small Grants for environmentally themed community projects.
- [Big Lottery Northern Ireland](#) - Awards for All is a quick and easy way to get small Lottery grants of between £500 and £10,000 for projects that last for a year at most (they can be shorter).
- [Grow Wild](#) - have funded community projects and distributed free wild flower seeds. To stay up to date with what they have to offer sign up for their newsletter.

Contacting local business, garden centers and supermarket chains has proved useful to schools in the past as they are often able to provide a little sponsorship or materials to help you develop your school grounds.

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