



An exploration of children's Learner Identities
while experiencing Outdoor Learning in the Irish
primary school context

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Declaration

I hereby certify that this material, which I now submit for assessment on the programme of study leading to the award of Master of Arts by Research is entirely my own work, and that I have exercised reasonable care to ensure that the work is original, and does not to the best of my knowledge breach any law of copyright, and has not been taken from the work of others save and to the extent that such work has been cited and acknowledged within the text of my work.



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Abstract

The Exploration of children's Learner Identities while experiencing Outdoor Learning in the Irish primary school context

Rachel Rafferty, B.Ed.

The aim of the Irish primary school curriculum is to develop the child holistically (DES, 1999) in both the indoor and outdoor environments (NCCA, 2023). Outdoor Learning is a form of nature pedagogy. The benefits of Outdoor Learning align with the competencies needed for Learner Identity. Learner Identity can be described as how a child views themselves as a learner (Kolb & Kolb, 2012; Lawson, 2014). This research sought out to explore how Outdoor Learning develops Learner Identity competencies in children through the views of the child.

This research employed a qualitative methodological approach. Data collection methods aimed to capture the child's voice and were in keeping with everyday classroom activities. These included: children's reflections; focus group interviews; researcher fieldnotes and teacher reflections. I took on the role of teacher as researcher throughout the study. Data was analysed through thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2022).

The findings indicate that children showed development of Learner Identity competencies of self-esteem, self-awareness, confidence, relationship skills, motivation to learn and problem-solving skills during Outdoor Learning. Concluding that the benefits or competencies gained from Outdoor Learning occur because of the embodied learning, autonomous learning, relational learning and reflective learning that Outdoor Learning provides for learners.

Recommendations for research from this study include exploring and comparing children's Learner Identities in the indoor and outdoor learning environments; the longevity of Learner Identity; Outdoor Learning in the primary curriculum; and teacher's identities during Outdoor Learning.

Recommendations for policy includes the professional development of teachers in Outdoor Learning as the curriculum framework (NCCA, 2023) rolls out.

Finally, Recommendations for practice include introduction of thematic learning; time and space for learning; and the importance of listening and hearing the children we teach (Lundy, 2007).

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Chapter 1 Introduction

1.1 Introduction

Outdoor Learning can be defined as learning with (Ruck & Mannion, 2021), in (Kelly, 2022; Miller, 2017; Robertson, 2014) and about (Prince & Diggory, 2023) the outdoor environment. This study explores children's sense of Learner Identity when experiencing Outdoor Learning in the Irish primary school context. This study aims to explore how Outdoor Learning develops competencies for Learner Identity development in children. This chapter will introduce the study by first discussing the background of the study, followed by an overview of the research. The research aims, objectives and questions are presented. My positionality as teacher as researcher in this study is explored, followed by a rationale for this thesis. This chapter concludes with an overview of the thesis.

1.2 Background of the study

Outdoor Learning has been gaining popularity in the past number of years with education systems across the world beginning to implement the use of the outdoors into their curricula (Learning and Teaching Scotland et al., 2010; NCCA, 2023; Prince & Diggory, 2023). Outdoor Learning allows for a deeper and connected use of the Outdoor Learning environment for educational purposes and is currently an area growing in research in Ireland. Given the lack of research around Outdoor Learning in Ireland at present, time spent Outdoor Learning in Irish primary schools is unknown. Score-driven schooling and curriculum demands in recent years have put emphasis on academic achievement over social and personal development (Devine, 2020). Learner Identity can be described as how one views themselves as a learner (A. Y. Kolb & Kolb, 2012; Lawson, 2014; Reay, 2010). If score-driven schooling has placed social and personal learning to the backseat, it can be said that the competencies for developing a Learner Identity may have been

overlooked due to curricular demands in Irish primary schools. It is known that children act differently in the Outdoor Learning environment (Lee et al., 2022; Murray & O'Brien, 2005). The competencies needed for Learner Identity development align with the benefits of Outdoor Learning. The Learner Identity development constructs include choice, responsibility, teamwork, leadership, challenge and reflection (Bernstein and Solomon, 1999). Many of these elements occur in the Outdoor Learning environment (Harris, 2018; Vigane & Dyrstad, 2022; Waite, 2010, 2011) and have been specifically planned for in this study.

1.3 Overview of Research

Although the benefits of Outdoor Learning are well evidenced (Lambert et al., 2020), many of these benefits for children are told and observed by adults. The majority of Outdoor Learning research turns to the teacher or practitioner for their views on how Outdoor Learning benefits children. Oftentimes Outdoor Learning literature documents the ingredients or elements needed for successful Outdoor Learning implementation (Meighan & Rubenstein, 2018; Prince, 2019). While more times Outdoor Learning research reports the implementation barriers (Aadland et al., 2009; Harris, 2021; Marchant et al., 2019; Meighan & Rubenstein, 2018). What is currently lacking in Outdoor Learning research is the inputs or elements of Outdoor Learning that cause these benefits in learners (Meighan & Rubenstein, 2018).

This study highlights the links between the benefits of Outdoor Learning and the competencies needed for Learner Identity development. Learner Identity research has defined the competencies needed to develop a Learner Identity (Bridgeland et al., 2013; McGuinness, 2018). However, the majority of Learner Identity research is on adolescents and adults, overlooking the primary school child. For a person to develop a sense of

Learner Identity they need the competencies of self-esteem, self-awareness, confidence, relationship skills, motivation to learn and problem-solving skills (Bridgeland et al., 2013; McGuinness, 2018). Given that the primary school curriculum aims to develop the child holistically (DES, 1999) it is important that children's Learner Identities in primary school are made a priority. Bernstein & Solomon's (1999) definition of Learner Identity; what I am, where, with whom and when, may provide links between Outdoor Learning and Learner Identity suggesting that Outdoor Learning may be an avenue for development of Learner Identity in primary school children.

1.4 Purpose and aim

The purpose of this research was to explore children's sense of Learner Identity while experiencing Outdoor Learning in the Irish primary school context through their voice to gain an understanding of the aspects of Outdoor Learning that allow children to feel this way about themselves. The following research questions were designed to frame the study.

1.4.1 Research Questions

1. How do children feel¹ about their Learner Identity when experiencing Outdoor Learning?
2. In what ways does Outdoor Learning develop competencies for Learner Identity?

The first question explores children's thoughts on themselves during Outdoor Learning. The second question looks at the specific components provided by or in Outdoor Learning that develop the competencies needed for Learner Identity development.

¹ The word 'feel' in this context includes emotions (for example, excited, nervous, or angry) and embodied experiences.

1.4.2 Objectives

To realise the aim of the research I have identified three objectives for the research which have guided the design and analysis of the study.

1. Design and implement an Outdoor Learning programme with a focus on Learner Identity development.
2. Record and gather children's thoughts, ideas and perspectives of Outdoor Learning and their Learner Identities through their own words.
3. Identify the ways in which Outdoor Learning may develop children's sense of Learner Identity.

1.5 Positionality

The outdoors has been part of my life for as long as I can remember. My interest in outdoor sports led me to become a Canadian canoe instructor and work as an outdoor activity in Outdoor and Adventure centres around Ireland for many seasons. Having studied a Bachelor of Education in primary teaching with a specialism in physical education and having studied Friluftsliv (outdoor living) in Norway as part of an Erasmus experience, Outdoor Learning became a weekly and often daily part of my teaching practice on qualifying. As the class teacher, I noticed a difference in how my pupils were learning and expressing themselves during Outdoor Learning. I undertook this research study to better understand how my pupils feel about themselves as learners in the Outdoor Learning environment and what characteristics of Outdoor Learning allowed children to feel this way about themselves. My love of the outdoors alongside my Friluftsliv experience and my experience working as an outdoor activities instructor gives me a confidence and awareness in the outdoor environment that many primary teachers may not

have. Therefore, other teachers may not design and implement an Outdoor Learning programme like the one I have designed for this study.

I took on the role of teacher as researcher for this study as I implemented and experienced the Outdoor Learning programme as the teacher but researched and analysed it as the researcher. Teacher as a researcher is a form of insider research. Being an insider researcher allowed me easy access to participants which were my own 3rd class boys (n=24). Due to the relationship and understanding of my pupils I was able to analyse the findings of this research and communicate intimate knowledge that would be difficult or impossible for an outside to access (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2005; Labaree, 2002). This relationship between teacher/researcher and pupils allowed for a data collection experience that did not veer far from the everyday activities of the classroom. This allowed children to relax into the data collection period and share their thoughts and perspectives in a safe and trusted environment (Irwin & Johnson, 2006, as cited in Leigh, 2020, p. 11).

1.6 Research design

The Outdoor Learning programme was designed to cover the content of the Primary School Curriculum (DES,1999) while it's thematic frame and lessons took inspiration from the draft curriculum framework (NCCA, 2020). This programme included the Learner Identity development constructs of choice, teamwork, leadership, challenge, reflection. The Outdoor Learning programme was taught to one mainstream 3rd class (all boys) over an 8-week period. This research aimed to gain an insight into children's sense of Learner Identity in Outdoor Learning through their reflective journals, focus group interviews, teacher reflections, researcher observations and field notes. To ensure that all children participating in this research could articulate their experiences effectively

considerable research into child communication was conducted when designing the data collection tools (Lundy, 2007; MacDonald, 2009). Careful consideration was given to data collection methods to include activities that did not differ greatly from the everyday classroom activities. It was thought that this would provide a more authentic experience for both children and teacher and result in authentic data surrounding the child's experiences. Like adults, children have preferred ways of communicating (Freeman & Mathison, 2009). In keeping with classroom activities, children communicated their thoughts and experiences through writing, drawing and verbally in focus group interviews. Like all research, this study design has limitations which minimise its generalisability. Due to this study focusing on one class of 9/10 year old boys, it limits the ability of the research to make broad statements about children in primary schools across Ireland. The length of the data collection period was short, a longer data collection period may provide a greater understanding of Learner Identity and Outdoor Learning. This school in this study has an extensive Outdoor Learning space and a forest within a 20-minute walk from the school which are both used for Outdoor Learning. I am aware that not every school has access to such facilities and this prevents the generalisability of the findings.

1.7 Rationale

A wide variety of research has been conducted around Learner Identity however, most of this research focuses on early childhood, adolescents and university students with a lack of Learner Identity research on primary school children. The skills and competencies needed to develop Learner Identity are well evidenced (Brennan, 2020; Bridgeland et al., 2013; McGuinness, 2018) and we see many programmes implemented in schools to develop these competencies in children (C. Brown & Donnelly, 2022; Emery, 2016). However, children express themselves differently during Outdoor Learning (Ruck &

Mannion, 2021) and the competencies needed for Learner Identity align with the benefits of experiencing Outdoor Learning. Although there is a wide variety of research surrounding Outdoor Learning, there is a lack of research that focuses on the use of Outdoor Learning to teach the primary school curriculum and more importantly its value for holistic development in schools. Given that, for the first time, the outdoors as learning environment has been written into curriculum framework across all subjects as an environment for learning (NCCA, 2023), it is important to explore how the outdoors can be used to teach the curriculum and what benefits it can offer children's Learner Identities. With the majority of Outdoor Learning research reporting the benefits of Outdoor Learning (Meighan & Rubenstein, 2018) and others reporting strategies for effective implementation (Meighan & Rubenstein, 2018; Prince, 2019), this study seeks to explore how Outdoor Learning provides these benefits or competencies for Learner Identity development in children.

The findings of this research will share the children's thoughts, feelings and perceptions of Outdoor Learning and their Learner Identities which have been gathered following Lundy's (2007) framework for children's voices. It is hoped that his research will contribute to the current and growing body of knowledge on Outdoor Learning but will also contribute to research around children's Learner Identities. This research hopes to inform practitioners of the value and potential Outdoor Learning has for the development of a child's Learner Identity while still facilitating the curricular content required.

1.8 Overview of thesis

This thesis is presented in six chapters. The first chapter, the introduction, provides the background of this research followed by an overview of research. It presents the aims, objectives and research questions addressed in the study. My positionality and the role of

the researcher as the teacher as a researcher is briefly presented as a form of insider research. An overview of the research design is presented followed by a rationale for the study. Chapter two, the literature review, reviews literature surrounding Outdoor Learning and Learner Identity. The history, benefits, barriers and Outdoor Learning practice nationally and internationally are examined. This is followed by an exploration of Learner Identity with particular focus on defining it, the characteristics and examining Learner Identity development. Links are made between the benefits of Outdoor Learning and the competencies needed for Learner Identity development using Bernstein & Solomon's (1999) definition of Learner Identity, what am I, with whom, where and when. The link between Outdoor Learning and Learner Identity is discussed and presented in the conceptual framework along with the underpinnings of the research. The third chapter, the methodology, describes the research methodology as well as detailing the data collection methods. This chapter indicates the analysis techniques applied to the data and the procedures used to ensure trustworthiness and transparency. This chapter concludes with a detailed explanation of and rationale for the presentation of the findings as composite narratives. Chapter four presents the findings that developed from the data through thematic analysis. The findings in this chapter are presented in the form of composite narratives documenting thoughts and experiences through direct quotations from the data. Chapter five discusses the findings in relation to literature surrounding Outdoor Learning and Learner Identity. Chapter six presents the conclusion from this research study and indicates contributions made. The limitations of the research are discussed, and recommendations are made for policy, teachers implementing Outdoor Learning and the wider academic community in Outdoor Learning and Learner Identity.

1.9 Conclusion

This chapter has provided the background of the main elements of this study, Outdoor Learning and Learner Identity. It has outlined the aims and objectives of the research accompanied by the main research questions. A rationale for this research was provided highlighting the lack of children's Learner Identity research and the current gap in research surrounding Outdoor Learning. The next chapter will focus on reviewing literature around Outdoor Learning and Learner Identity.

Chapter 2 - A review of Literature

2.1 Introduction

This literature review examines research articles, relevant theory and contemporary policies pertaining to my research questions: ‘How do children feel about their Learner Identity when experiencing Outdoor Learning?’ and ‘In what ways does Outdoor Learning develop competencies for Learner Identity?’. This literature review required extensive research of a range of topics that linked with the research questions. Initially, searches included Outdoor and Adventure Activities, Outdoor Learning, Outdoor Adventure Education and Learner Identity, with a publish date ranging from 2010 – present. Some references present in the literature review have an earlier publish date due to reviewing the reference lists of these initial searches and further investigating earlier papers. The databases used included the library catalogues (Online Public Access Catalogues – OPACs), biographical databases (Educational Resources Information Centre – ERIC, EBSCOhost) and internet search engines (Google Scholar); Cochrane, EBSCO, ERIC, Scopus, and Web of Science. A range of international research studies were retrieved and reference lists from these articles were screened for further relevant sources. Policy sources were accessed from national and international governmental education and outdoor organisations and websites. Theoretical perspectives were gathered from library book collections as well as relevant websites. To effectively carry out this research, I explored the literature surrounding Outdoor Learning and Learner Identity to gain an understanding of the connections and links between them in the Irish primary school context.

The literature reviewed will be presented in five sections: 1) Outdoor Learning, 2) Current primary school context, 3) Learner Identity, 4) Outdoor Learning and Learner Identity, 5) The Conceptual Framework. The chapter concludes with a summary of the main points of interest. The first section will explore Outdoor Learning.

2.2 Outdoor Learning

This section begins by presenting the history and the philosophical underpinnings of Outdoor Learning. Outdoor Learning and its benefits are then explored followed by a review of Outdoor Learning in practice and its barriers. Outdoor Learning internationally is then explored at the end of this section. A definition of Outdoor Learning is derived from the literature for the purpose of this study.

2.2.1 History and philosophical underpinnings of Outdoor Learning

Nature “has been portrayed as a healing force and as a primal setting that is good for us since the time of the romantic poets and artists” (Leather & Gibson, 2019, p. 80). We see elements of nature and the importance of the garden in the beliefs of many of the great educational philosophers and theologians such as Comenius, Pestalozzi, Froebel, Dewey, McMillan, Steiner, Montessori (Pound & Hughes, 2005). Comenius directly links his principles of teaching with nature (Thatcher, 1907). He compares the progression in teaching and learning to nature when he states that “nature advances from what is easy to what is more difficult” (Thatcher, 1907). Pestalozzi states that education must be “according to nature” and that all children must have an equal right to education (Pound & Hughes, 2005). Froebel also saw the importance of the outdoors in the use of the garden and the language he used in his philosophy with the word *kindergarten* meaning “children’s garden” (Fröbel, 1887). The hands-on aspect of Outdoor Learning is reflected

in Dewey's learn by doing approach where he believed that education should be based on real life situations linking with the real-life experience of being in the outdoors (Bates, 2016). Margaret McMillan believed that learning in the outdoors is embedded in action and aimed to improve children's health and wellbeing. She placed the garden as an integral part of a child's learning along with time and space. She set up an open air camp to nurture disadvantaged children with the aim of fostering skills to enable them to take their place in society (Pound & Hughes, 2005). Outdoor Learning is one of the pillars of Outdoor Education which came to the fore in the 1960s due to the emergence of Environmental Education (An Taisce, 2021). Historically, Outdoor Learning was associated with informal education settings such as summer camps and field trips. Now it is more often used in formal education settings as an alternative approach to traditional classroom teaching (Miller, 2017). The next section defines Outdoor Learning and its benefits.

2.2.2 Defining Outdoor Learning and its Benefits.

Outdoor Learning is linked to nature pedagogies. For Warden (2019), "nature pedagogy for me is a relational way of teaching that embraces the art of being with nature inside, outside, and beyond" (p. 8). Nature pedagogy is an approach to learning that is highly participatory, supports the agency of the child while the adult usually takes a step back to allow for independent learning (Cree & Robb, 2021). According to Ruck & Mannion (2021), children experience a 'lived curricula' when the learning environment is open to contingent moments. Learning in outdoor environments engages our sensory system because "our bodies have co-evolved in nature, which provides a regulating sensory environment where our natural operating system is most likely to relax" (Cree & Robb, 2021, p. 90). Nature pedagogies recognise that humans are part of the natural world with relationships to the living and non-living elements of it (Warden, 2019).

Outdoor Learning draws on a variety of educational theories such as place-based, expedition and experiential learning (Miller, 2017). According to Marchant et al. (2019) Outdoor Learning “is a pedagogical approach used to enrich learning, enhance school engagement and improve pupil health and wellbeing” (p. 1). While Robertson (2014) describes Outdoor Learning as “an umbrella term which covers every type of learning experience which happens outdoors” (p. 2). According to the Institute of Outdoor Learning (IOL) “Outdoor Learning essentially is an experiential approach that includes learning about and connecting with nature (including the school grounds) through play, adventure and environmental education activities ideally with additional opportunities for educational visits and residential (overnight) experiences” (Prince and Diggory, 2023, p. 1). For Miller (2017), “Outdoor learning can be defined as learning in an outdoor context based on experiences and interactions with physical and cultural phenomena” (p. 3). While Kelly (2022) describes Outdoor Learning “as learning that takes place not just outside the classroom but outdoors, under the open sky” (p. 187).

Outdoor Education and Outdoor Adventure Education focus on outdoor adventure, challenge and skills (Smith & Walsh, 2019). While Outdoor Learning encompasses these, it goes beyond this to include discovery, experimentation (Meighan & Rubenstein, 2018), learning about and connecting to the natural world, and engaging in environmental and adventure activities (Learning and Teaching Scotland et al., 2010). Learning in the outdoors offers children a hands on direct experience of an environment (Ruck & Mannion, 2021). Outdoor Learning also involves the transformation of knowledge, skills, attitudes and behaviours through direct engagement with the outdoor environment for the personal and social benefit of individuals, families, society and the planet (Natural England, 2016; Fiennes et al., 2015).

The benefits of Outdoor Learning are evidenced, acknowledged and accepted (Lambert et al., 2020). “By tapping into the various funds of knowledge inherent in settings outside the classroom, the learning opportunities are multitudinous (Miller, 2017, p. 3). Bringing learning beyond the physical landscape of the classroom and into the outdoors provides children with freedom in learning as the open environment offers space for children to think using all their senses (Harris, 2018). According to Ruck and Mannion (2021), providing children with the opportunity to have a direct experience with the outdoor environment allowed them to come “to know in embodied, non-rational ways” (p.1511). This freedom in Outdoor Learning benefits all learners as it supports children of all abilities in reaching learning outcomes and develop skills such as problem-solving (Marchant et al., 2019; Waite, 2010). Experiencing Outdoor Learning can have a positive impact on children’s self-confidence, self-esteem and self-control (Cree & Robb, 2021 ; Barron, 2014) as they learn alongside their classmates in a relaxed, therapeutic outdoor environment. Outdoor Learning can give children the opportunity to try new things and feel more mature and independent (Humberstone & Stan, 2011). In addition, we see Outdoor Learning improving children’s social and communication skills (Barfod et al., 2016) as they learn together in a different physical and social environment. This experience can help children make more friends and learn how to work with others as a team (Humberstone & Stan, 2011). As stated by Gauntlett & Holzwarth (2006), “modern individuals don’t necessarily feel that they have one identity or place of belonging – they are more likely to have a few, even if they are all seen as interconnected and part of one whole” (p. 89). Therefore, offering children alternative learning contexts like the Outdoor Learning environment provides children with an opportunity to unlock and discover more about themselves. We can see that Outdoor Learning benefits the child’s physical, affective and cognitive domains. The next section outlines Outdoor Learning in practice.

2.3 Outdoor Learning in Practice

Outdoor Learning practice includes “discovery, experimentation, learning about and connecting to the natural world, and engaging in outdoor sports and adventure activities” (IOL, 2018, as cited in Prince, 2019, p. 329). It is important to note that Outdoor Learning is not a replacement for learning that happens inside the classroom but an extension to that learning by creating a seamless link between the indoor and outdoor classrooms (Miller, 2017). Once learning is moved beyond these classroom walls, the quality of the outdoor space is not important, what matters is that “the quality of the experience is the best it can be and is authentic, meaningful and relevant for the children involved” (Robertson, 2014, p. 2). A forest or a specifically designed outdoor space is not necessary, but simply moving outside is all it takes in making Outdoor Learning accessible to all schools. According to Leather and Gibson (2019), many children’s experience with nature is ‘hyperreal’, meaning that in our modern world nature is “groomed, managed, policed and tailored to the needs of humans” (p. 80). In England, Outdoor Learning often occurs in “school gardens, vegetable plots, forest school gardens, allotments, beach schools and museums/galleries” (Prince, 2019, p. 332). Although, just like indoor lessons, Outdoor Learning lessons must be effectively planned, taught and reflected upon to ensure quality learning is taking place (Benefield, 2006; Dillon et al., 2006). Despite Outdoor Learning providing for easy integration across curricular subjects, it often times is linked with Science, Geography and Physical Education (Kelly, 2022; Prince, 2019).

The wide variety of Outdoor Learning lessons and programmes make it difficult to list clear characteristics of Outdoor Learning for schools (Meighan & Rubenstein, 2018). According to Dennis et al. (2014) the most successful Outdoor Learning experiences for development include maximised choice and provision of many child- sized distinct spaces within the environment. In their synthesis of literature surrounding Outdoor Learning in

schools, Meighan and Rubenstein (2018) state that the majority of literature available focuses on the benefits of Outdoor Learning, and lacks in documenting the inputs or characteristics of Outdoor Learning. Meighan and Rubenstein (2018) call on educators to expose children to the outdoors regularly, explore the outdoors with all the senses, create experiences that provide context and application of material presented, and provide pre- and post-activities to reinforce gains made while Outdoor Learning.

Prince (2019) states that the ‘ingredients’ for good Outdoor Learning practice include “the values and beliefs of teachers; an open approach to curriculum interpretation; a suitable location; a culture of risk benefit; and, initiatives.” (p.339). While Meighan and Rubenstein (2018) list the factors influencing the use of Outdoor Learning in schools as being financially self-sufficient, an outdoor space physically isolated from the school, teachers visibly active in the school, outdoor spaces supported and sponsored by the local community and other organisations.

2.3.1 Outdoor Learning Internationally – exploring the curricula and frameworks.

A greater understanding of Outdoor Learning in schools can be gained by examining how other countries around the world have incorporated the outdoors into their curricula and frameworks. As stated by Beames et al. (2009) “‘outdoor education’ and ‘outdoor learning’ are often used interchangeably” (p.33). Due to the large variety of definitions of Outdoor Learning and the lack of specific Outdoor Learning curricula, this section will explore curricula that include the use of the outdoors as a learning environment to gain a greater understanding of the use of the outdoor environment for learning in schools. The inclusion of Outdoor Learning or Outdoor Education in international curricula leads to varying entitlement of Outdoor Learning experiences globally as many countries, including Ireland, do not have Outdoor Learning incorporated into their curricula (Dillon et al., 2006; Prince & Diggory, 2023).

Countries such as Norway, New Zealand and Canada, are renowned for their engagement with the outdoors. However, in schools, Outdoor Learning is not prominent across all subjects. In Norway, a country that follows the ‘friluftsliv’ (*outdoor life*) way of life, 81.9% of its teachers participate in outdoor activities on a regular basis (Aadland et al., 2009) and it is likely that Outdoor Learning is occurring in the lives of young children both in school and outside school due to the positive attitude towards the outdoors and lifestyle of this country.

New Zealand has Outdoor Education as one of seven key elements in the Health and PE Curriculum (Ministry of Education, 1999). Whereas in Canada, we see provinces offering Outdoor Education as an elective subject in PE in high school for personal and social development, fundamental core skills, environmental awareness and sustainability and wellness. The Outdoor Education curriculum for New Brunswick gives clear curricular aims and outcomes along with assessment templates. Within this curriculum, links to external websites, handbooks and resources are provided to assist teachers with the implementation (Government of New Brunswick, 2014). This supportive approach to curriculum design may encourage teachers to effectively teach Outdoor Education.

In 2004 Scotland launched the ‘Curriculum for Excellence’ (Learning and Teaching Scotland et al., 2010) through Outdoor Learning. This curriculum recognises and supports the principle that Outdoor Learning exists in all curricular areas. Beames et al. (2012) created a practical guide for Outdoor Learning with ideas and support for teachers and practitioners in Scotland. It was created to assist educators in providing quality Outdoor Learning experiences. Gillis (2016) found this to be a success in schools with the addition of an assigned Outdoor Educator on site who supported teachers and helped develop curriculum resources. Without preservice training in Outdoor Learning, resources and continuing professional development may be beneficial for teachers to successfully

implement any curricular advancements and progression. Instead of outdoor experiences being limited to PE like in Canada and New Zealand, Scotland has adopted Outdoor Learning as an underlying concept within all curricular areas, resulting in more regular and relevant Outdoor Learning opportunities taking place. Teaching using this pedagogical model has been going from strength to strength in recent years (Beames et al., 2012). Due to this strong policy support for Outdoor Learning in Scotland, there is now a higher proportion of Outdoor Learning reported in schools (Prince & Diggory, 2023).

Perhaps it is not just curricular change that will change a teaching perspective on using the outdoors for teaching and learning, but professional development of those already teaching and ensuring that pre-service teachers experience Outdoor Learning during their pre-service training. Although these countries are leading and developing further in the areas of Outdoor Learning, they too experience obstacles and difficulties making curricular aims and outcomes a reality in schools. Outdoor Learning is not straightforward but effort in making it happen is necessary. The next section discusses challenges to Outdoor Learning provision in schools.

2.3.2 Challenges in providing Outdoor Learning

Challenges associated with practicing Outdoor Learning are well evidenced (Aadland et al., 2009; Harris, 2021; Marchant et al., 2019; Meighan & Rubenstein, 2018). It is important to note that individual teachers perceive different challenges when teaching in natural areas and report obstacles such as transportation, teacher ability, funding, state testing, planning time, safety/liability and access. (Harris, 2021; Meighan & Rubenstein, 2018).

Despite Norway's teachers having experience in personal outdoor pursuits, 64.4% of them said that they did not feel confident in delivering friluftsliv and that they required extra

training in friluftsliv for school (Aadland et al., 2009). Like Norway, a study conducted in 2002 and 2003 around the teaching of Outdoor Education in New Zealand found it to differ nationwide. It emerged that there were multiple ways in which Outdoor Education was understood, thus leading to discrepancy in teaching it (Zink & Boyes, 2006). Again, despite the advancements of adding the outdoors as a learning environment to the curriculum in a country where regular engagement with the outdoors is the norm, issues arise around facilitating Outdoor Education. Cost of implementation, crowded curricular demands, paper work involved, demands on personal time, staffing relief, lack of suitable venues for teaching Outdoor Education and inflexible timetables all featured as barriers for New Zealand's teachers (Zink & Boyes, 2006). In comparison, Waite (2020) surveyed international expert commentators on Outdoor Learning, which revealed that Scotland still sees primary and secondary school Outdoor Learning implementation fall well below that in early years education. On closer inspection, despite the arrival of the Curriculum of Excellence, initial teacher training (ITE) programmes in Scotland do not feature an Outdoor Learning module (University of Strathclyde, n.d.), meaning newly qualified teachers leave university with no experience of providing Outdoor Learning. As stated by Kelly, (2022), "without opportunities to put into practice the theory and experience from their ITE programmes, alternative pedagogies can fall by the way-side in light of pressures on newly qualified teachers" (189). In Ireland, it has been reported that the lack of Outdoor Learning occurring is due to the cultural resistance among teachers (Waite, 2020). However, inclusion of Outdoor Learning into curricular documents in Scotland has increased Outdoor Learning provision. Given that the curriculum framework (NCCA, 2023) in Ireland has introduced the use of the outdoors across the curriculum, it is possible that Ireland will see similar changes to the provision of Outdoor Learning in the future.

The next section will explore the learning environment and current teacher practice in the Irish primary school context along with Outdoor Learning in Ireland.

2.4 Current Irish Primary School Context

This section explores the learning environment provided to and experienced by children in Irish primary schools, focusing on curricular aims and teacher practice. The curriculum aims to develop the child as a social being (DES, 1999) through living and cooperating with others. However, score-driven schooling (Devine, 2020) has shifted this focus to the development of the cognitive and psychomotor domains resulting in affective learning and development taking a back seat. This shift towards intense engagement with numeracy and literacy came as Ireland clambered to keep up with international academic rankings at primary level. The Irish Learning Support Association (ILSA) expressed their concerns around standardised testing in literacy and numeracy being the sole measure of achievement levels (ARTI & ILSA, 2013). They put forward “multiple intelligence theory as a critique of the values of our schools and of our culture” (ARTI & ISLA, 2013, p.7) voicing their opinions on the importance of learning in other areas like the arts, physical education and nature while also mentioning the importance of feelings, thoughts, and ideas among pupils. In 2013 ILSA flagged nature, wellbeing, and subjects other than numeracy and literacy as important for children learning in Irish primary schools yet according to the Irish National Teachers’ Organisation (INTO) (2015), most primary teachers in Ireland trade time with other subject areas to meet the curriculum demands of numeracy and literacy. Similarly in England, Rea and Waite (2009) state that engagement in the use of outdoors in primary schools reduced due to the demands of the rigid school curriculum.

Curricular linkage with the outdoors does not feature across all subject areas at primary level (DES, 1999). Linkage with the outdoors is limited to Social Environmental and

Scientific Education and Physical Education and although explicitly mentioned in the curriculum, it is not always experienced by pupils (Woods et al., 2018). According to French (2019) “the richest environments to support very young children’s learning and development are those that promote positive interactions and relationships in low stress environments” (p.18) both indoors and outdoors. NCCA (2016), in the proposal for changes in time allocation in schools state that “how a curriculum is organised and how guidance on the use of time within it is expressed, impact significantly on teaching and learning in classrooms” (p.4). Our view on learning is somewhat restricted to the classroom where we see children sitting and learning with a focus on cognitive development (Macedonia, 2019) resulting in the personal and social development of the child being overlooked.

Children in Ireland from the age of 3-18 years old experience three curricula or frameworks in the education system. From 0-5 years old they experience the early childhood framework, Aistear (NCCA, 2009). From ages 5-12 they experience the Irish primary curriculum (NCCA, 1999) and from ages 12-18 they experience post-primary curriculum which is split into the junior cycle (DES, 2015) and the senior cycle. From the examination of the curricula and frameworks from early years education to post primary education it is noted there is a lack in continuity in development and learning (McGuinness, 2018). The themes of identity and communication as well as exploring and thinking which are of particular focus of the Aistear framework (NCCA, 2009), are absent in primary school and then reappear as a ‘key skill’ in post primary school (DES, 2015). Although Aistear and the Junior cycle curricula have been developed more recently than the current primary curriculum, it highlights the break in progression between curricula (McGuinness, 2018).

2.4.1 Outdoor Learning in Ireland

Similar to Canada, New Zealand and Norway, children in Ireland experience learning in the outdoors mainly through their PE curriculum. Outdoor and adventure activities (O&AA) is a strand on the Irish primary PE curriculum. In the primary school curriculum, the strand includes the following strand units; Walking, cycling and camping activities, Orienteering, Outdoor challenges, Water-based activities and Understanding and Appreciation of Outdoor and Adventure Activities (DES, 1999). Use of the outdoors as a learning environment has a prominent role in both early years and post primary education in Ireland with Aistear (NCCA, 2009) listing well-being, identity and belonging, communicating, exploring and thinking as their interconnected themes that underpin the framework while the post primary PE curriculum states that “adventure activities at junior cycle provide students with the opportunity to develop personally, socially, and physically in a safe and challenging environment.” (Department for Education, 2021, p. 17). This is similar to England’s Early Years framework where we see Outdoor Learning feature in the framework (Prince and Diggory, 2023). In this framework early years educators must “ensure that outdoor activities are planned and taken on a daily basis” (Department for Education, 2021, p.36). Other areas of the Irish primary curriculum encourage the use of outdoors in teaching subjects such as geography, history and science in which the exploration of the local natural and physical environment is noted as an objective (DES, 1999). For students to experience regular Outdoor Learning it must become a foundational part of the curriculum that features across all curricular subjects.

Although teacher expertise in Outdoor Learning in England had decreased by 2017 (Prince, 2019), there was a rise in the uptake and practice of learning outdoors in Irish primary schools as a result of Covid-19 due to the need for social distancing and risk of virus transmission in classrooms. This is evident from webinar attendances on Outdoor

Learning for teachers broadcast by the NCCA in November and December 2020

(Assessment (NCCA), n.d.). At present it is unknown how much time is spent learning outside the classroom in Irish primary schools. The lack of curriculum linkage with the outdoors possibly adds support for the idea of the outdoors not being a place to support academic development (Nicolopoulou, 2010) and that this “natural” mode of learning is more suited outside formal educational settings during field trips or summer camps (Geary, 2008). However, research states a strong link between the outdoors and academic learning as it triggers the senses in a myriad of ways with the many textures, colours and smells on offer while also providing developmental opportunities for exploration, observation, labelling, description, comparing, and classifying skills (Kemple et al., 2016). These skills when practiced lend themselves to the curriculum and are a feature of many curricula subjects (DES, 1999).

In recent years Forest Schools have become more popular in Ireland with a total of 43 schools mapped across the country (Map of Forest Schools, 2018). Forest Schools are providing children with experiences learning in the outdoors. Forest School “is an opportunity for the same group of learners and leaders to spend a sustained period outdoors, once a week, in a wooded environment, ideally year round” (IFSA, 2021). Murphy’s (2018) research on forest school in Ireland states that children achieved social and emotional skills in the areas of resilience, responsibility, independence, happiness in achievement and in the child’s awareness of the surroundings. However, not all children will get this experience as forest schools are independent from and not supported by the Department of Education and Skills in Ireland. Therefore, emphasising the importance of incorporating Outdoor Learning into our curricula for more regular Outdoor Learning experiences for our children.

As stated in this Outdoor Learning section of the literature review, we know children act differently in the Outdoor Learning environment (Lee et al., 2022; Murray & O'Brien, 2005). The next section delves into the Learner Identity of the child to gain a deeper understanding about how this is developed.

2.5 Learner Identity

Identity is a legal concept established from birth (UN, 1989). Personal identity refers to the way children feel about themselves in comparison to others, their sense of uniqueness and individuality (Brooker & Woodhead, 2008). The development of identity is a never ending process that is constantly under construction throughout a person's entire life (Dewey and Tufts, 1932, Ahn, 2011). However the vital groundwork of identity construction is laid in the early years and this foundation is built upon throughout our lives (Ahn, 2011).

Defining identities is a tricky task, however it is evident that modern understanding of identity goes beyond previous categorising of identities with many identities being experienced and developed in schools at once (Reay, 2010). According to Lawson (2014) "a 'learner identity' can be broadly defined as how an individual feels about himself/herself as a learner and the extent to which he/she describes himself/herself as a 'learner'" (p. 343). Kolb and Kolb (2012) state that "people with a learning identity see themselves as learners, seek and engage life experiences with a learning attitude and believe in their ability to learn" (p. 1). Reay (2010) states that "Learner identities refer specifically to the conceptualizations children have of themselves as learners... and pupils construct themselves and are constructed by others as particular types of learners in relation to both other pupils and their teachers" (p. 3). The Centre for Learner Identity Studies (CLIS) suggest that socio-cultural aspects of individuals' experiences such as gender, generation, place, social class, ethnicity and spirituality/religion are the bases that

affect one's experience of being a learner (CLIS, 2014). Falsafi (2010) disagrees with this and argues that the CLIS definition described social identities rather than Learner Identity. He uses Bernstein and Solomon's (1999) definition as the starting point for defining Learner Identity: '... resources for constructing belonging, recognition of self and others, and context management (what I am, where, with whom and when)' (p. 272). Speaking about educational reforms, Bernstein states that changes in education have consequences for identity construction as "all drastically affect ways of being, of becoming, of feeling, thinking and relating" (Bernstein & Solomon, 1999, p. 266). CLIS's definition may be a fair statement of Learner Identity on the broader sense and since most research around Learner Identity is focused on teenagers and adults, this might be an effective way to define it. However, for primary school pupils and their Learner Identity, the who, what, with whom, when and why of Learner Identity is an effective way to define it, it is accessible for children to understand and grasp, and accessible for teacher assessment and observation as according to Bernstein, identities "are constructed, distributed, embedded, disembedded, shifted in relation to the nature of and changes in pedagogic modalities" (Bernstein & Solomon, 1999, p. 270).

Schaffer (2006) states that identities are acquired and constructed in different ways in different societies and that there is unlikely to be a universal model for this process. As stated previously, a common theme within personal identity development is that this occurs in young children (Ahn, 2011). Therefore, early childhood education and primary school are the optimum time for personal identity development (Kaufman & Killen, 2022; Warin, 2010). Despite this Falsafi (2010) states that "at present time this recognition of oneself as a learner is practically neglected or unheard-of, both among professional, policy makers and the learning individuals" (p.2). The dearth of research on primary children's Learner Identity is perplexing given that having ownership and understanding of one's

own learning and who they see themselves as a learner are elements of many curricula worldwide as they strive to develop the child holistically (DES, 1999). This may be because Learner Identity is currently overshadowed by identity research in areas of interest such as gender and ethnic belonging (Falsafi, 2010).

2.5.1 Learner Identity Development

According to Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL), competencies and skills associated with identity development in schools include self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, responsible decision making, motivation to learn (Bridgeland et al., 2013). Links can be made between Bridgeland et al. (2013) skills and competencies associated with identity development in school and McGuinness (2018) key competencies for 21st century education. McGuinness (2018) put forward cognitive, interpersonal and intrapersonal competencies as important for a redeveloped Irish curriculum. The cognitive competency includes problem solving skills, decision making, critical thinking, open-mindedness, persistence, curiosity and seeking challenge. The interpersonal competency includes socio-emotional skills, teamwork, listening and communication skills. Finally the intrapersonal competency includes self-awareness, meta cognition, self-recognition of strengths and weaknesses, self-regulation, persistence, autonomy, self-agency and personal identity construction (McGuinness, 2018). While Singal & Swann (2011) believe significant Learner Identity competencies include perceived learning capability, self-regard, preparedness for learning and learner confidence.

In order to understand the phenomena of identity development, and with the idea that identity is developed during childhood, we must look at what supports identity development in the learning context (Collett, 2020). There is a “complex and mutually informing relationship between identity and learning in learning settings” (Nasir & Cooks,

2009, p. 58). According to Singal & Swann (2011) these competencies are fostered when children are supported in their learning, able to cope with challenges, are cared for, helped and establish friendships through learning. Brennan (2020) interviewed children to gain a greater understanding of children's Learner Identities in Irish primary schools. In her study, factors pupils attributed to the development of their Learner Identity were peer influence where they would receive praise from their peers, teacher praise about learning, and hidden acts of recognition where children preferred receiving recognition from their teacher rather than peers highlighting the superior role the teacher holds in the classroom. Their experience of learning was effective in learner identity development, the experience desired being high scores in tests, working independently and positive feedback. Finally Brennan (2020) highlighted the desire for stable identities where pupils would look for recognition about their identity they want to keep, for example, a pupil who sees themselves as good at maths looking for praise in this subject.

According to Collett, (2020) and Nasir & Cooks (2009) there are three common elements in learning which support the development of identity. Firstly, the physical environment in which learning takes place provides scope for identity development as over time the individual becomes more comfortable and familiar with the environment, promoting further identity development as their ideas, perceptions and relationship with others and the material objects in the environment advances (Collett, 2020; Nasir & Cooks, 2009; Singal & Swann, 2011). Secondly, "identity construction is a social and interactive process" (Gauntlett & Holzwarth, 2006, p.89) where one's position across a variety of interactions proves to be important when developing identity as the learner experiences and responds to a different status within the group learning dynamic (Collett, 2020; Nasir & Cooks, 2009). "Positive relationship with others in the context can increase connection to the practice" (Nasir & Cooks, 2009, p. 47). Finally, one's self and relationship with the

learning context proves to be important in developing identity in the way that the learner takes ownership or initiative over their own learning (Collett, 2020; Nasir & Cooks, 2009). Offering children an alternative learning context will provide them with another context to connect with and offer more opportunities for self-connection. Something that Nasir & Cooks (2009) fail to mention is the importance of time and space for reflection after learning has taken place (Collett, 2020; O'Connor, 2019). After the learning, the learner reflects on the environment, the relationships and interactions during the learning and the decisions they made during learning. Leaving time for reflection after learning is a common element of all curricular subjects and is frequently mentioned in research surrounding Outdoor Learning (Dismore and Bailey, 2005) which often includes links to experiential learning (Kolb, 1984). The three elements in learning which support the development of identity as outlined by Nasir & Cooks (2009) can also be transferred to primary school and Outdoor Learning where we see the importance of a good learning environment and strong relationships with peers and self. As stated by Reay (2010) Learner Identity development is shaped by the constructs of the school and peer relationships within this context.

2.5.2 Learner Identity in School

Children and adolescents spend a minimum of 15 years in classrooms in schools and therefore “no other public institution is as crucial for the development of the identities children and young people will carry into adulthood” (Reay, 2010, p. 1). In fact, children are forced to develop their Learner Identities along with other identities in the school context;

Perhaps it is the singular nature of the modernist school, where people of the same age are forced into a common arena, that compels individuals and groups to find a place and identity within a single complex matrix. No matter how

heterogeneous their backgrounds or how differently their cultural destinies would have been played out without the unnatural social atmosphere of the school, it is within the constraints of this institution that young people negotiate their identities.

(Willis, 2008, pp. 407–408)

Therefore, it is crucial that effort is made by teachers to gain a greater understanding of the ways to facilitate Learner Identity development in schools.

Despite children now having more virtual relationships, the COVID-19 pandemic re-emphasized the importance of relationships and connectiveness to others (Brown & Donnelly, 2022). Societal pressures have placed ‘soft skills’ or ‘21st century skills’ as growing in importance in education (Brown & Donnelly, 2022; McGuinness, 2018). As stated previously, these ‘soft skills’ or ‘21st century skills’ are very similar to the competencies needed for Learner Identity development (Brennan, 2020). Now, “schools are conceived of as an ideal intervention point for longer-term public health and social goals” (Brown & Donnelly, 2022, p. 616). Microsoft, Facebook and Amazon are among the funding partners for prominent social and emotional leaders such as CASEL (Bryan, 2021). We now see many children experiencing programmes to develop these ‘soft skills’ or social and emotional skills in schools (Emery, 2016). There is currently an abundance of these short term, one-size fits all programmes in schools (Brown & Donnelly, 2022), contradicting Bourdieu’s view that identity is all about difference (Reay, 2010). This idea is supported by Reay’s (2010) description of identities being fluid in nature. It is difficult to imagine that an identity can be taught given the fluidity of identities. The next section will explore the voice of the child to understand how children might communicate their Learner Identities.

2.6 Child's voice

Education research has constantly highlighted the importance of tapping into the 'student voice' and the potential contribution it has for school improvement and policy development (Flutter & Rudduck, 2004; Smyth et al., 2011). It is not surprising that communicating one's sense of identity is difficult. As children have different thoughts and experiences to those of adults, gaining children's insights of their Learner Identity makes for a challenging task (Inhelder & Piaget, 1958). Given that Learner Identity is an evolving topic in education research (Brennan, 2020) and children are experts on their own lives (Dockett & Perry, 2005), as adults, we cannot assume a child's experience or thoughts. The only way adults can gain a greater understanding of children's thoughts and experiences is if they communicate these experiences and thoughts to us. "Only in this way will teachers be enabled to develop new strategies based on a deeper knowledge and firmer understanding of the complex processes of teaching and learning" (Flutter & Rudduck, 2004, p. 2).

Lundy (2007) goes beyond pupil voice for education reform and discusses the views of the child as documented in Article 12 of the United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child. She emphasises the child's voice as a right in their education. She puts forward a student voice framework which includes space, voice, audience and influence.

According to Lundy (2007) creating a space in which children are encouraged to express their views is important. The voice element of the framework explains that children express and formulate their views in different ways and at different levels. "Children's right to express their views is not dependent upon their capacity to express a mature view; it is dependent only on their ability to form a view, mature or not" (Lundy, 2007, p. 936).

The audience element of the framework states that children have a right to have their views heard and more importantly listened to by those in the decision-making process.

Finally, the framework explains the importance of influence of the child's voice meaning that children's views, when listened to are given due weight in decision making processes.

Adding to Lundy's (2007) framework, the voice of the child can be shown in many different mediums and "opportunities for students to share their experiences should never be limited to one source of information" (MacDonald, 2009, p. 49). Therefore, to obtain a deep understanding of children's experiences in Outdoor Learning and sense of Learner Identity, it is important that the variety of ways in which children articulate their experiences is explored in this research. Just like adults, children have their preferred method of communication (Freeman & Mathison, 2009) and therefore it is important that these communication methods are catered for in this study. Given the complexity of this area, it is vital that in depth planning and implementation occur to allow for a quality experience for the children. Given that both Outdoor Learning and Learner Identity are relatively new research areas in Ireland, it is important that children communicate their experiences in these areas to gain a greater understanding of these areas in the Irish primary context.

2.7 Outdoor Learning and Learner Identity

Bernstein & Solomon (1999) state that "pedagogic acts where the information is specifically recontextualised by the giver, expressly to meet the needs of the requester" (p. 267) are influential for Learner Identity development. As Outdoor Learning is a recontextualisation of learning that occurs indoors through the curriculum, it seems an appropriate avenue for Learner Identity development. As stated previously learning in the unique context of the outdoor environment can develop skills such as self-esteem, self-awareness, independence, confidence, relationship skills, motivation to learn and problem-solving skills (Barfod et al., 2016; Cree & Robb, 2021; Humberstone & Stan, 2011; Marchant et al., 2019; Waite, 2010). These are the key skills and competencies needed for

Learner Identity development (Bridgeland et al., 2013; McGuinness, 2018). From my reading of literature Bernstein & Solomon's (1999) definition of what am I, where, with whom and when seems to be an informed way to bring Outdoor Learning and Learner Identity together. Firstly, the 'What am I' as a learner comes as children are given control and ownership over their learning (Bernstein & Solomon, 1999; McGuinness, 2018). For this to happen they must be given choice and have responsibility over their learning which, over time, will lead to a growth in confidence and the learning environment which is a key factor of Outdoor Learning (Dennis et al., 2014; Waite, 2011). Leadership in the outdoor environment gives a person responsibility (Vigane & Dyrstad, 2022). Choice during learning promotes intrinsic motivation in children (Patall et al., 2010). For children to have freedom of choice during learning, the learning environment must provide the resources and the educator must trust the children with their own learning fostering independence in children (Cerino, 2021).

Challenge and problem solving are a common feature of Outdoor Learning (Waite, 2010) Overcoming challenge and building resilience has an impact on children's social development and academic successes (Dubow & Tisak, 1989; McGuinness, 2018; Walker & Henderson, 2012; Yoon et al., 2022). Enabling children to cope with challenges in effective ways is also proven to strengthen elements of children's Learner Identity such as independence, self-understanding, interpersonal skills, perseverance, leadership, self-confidence and responsible decision making (McGuinness, 2018; Murphy, 2018; Orson et al., 2020). The 'what am I' is also constructed from being supported and cared for during learning (Bernstein & Solomon, 1999; Singal & Swann, 2011). The 'what am I' constructs of responsibility, choice, challenge and care are needed to support Learner Identity competencies in Outdoor Learning.

The 'where' of Bernstein and Solomon's (1999) definition can be successfully linked to Outdoor Learning. One's relationship with the learning context is important in providing a connection with the place (Nasir & Cooks, 2009). The space provided by the Outdoor Learning environment offers children opportunities for learning using their whole body (Novak & Schwan, 2021) through movement and with all their senses (Harris, 2018). This often does not feature in the indoor classroom (Macedonia, 2019; Sherry et al., 2019). The change of learning environment that Outdoor Learning provides allows children to expand their learning environment and offers opportunity to connect or create an association with the outdoors for learning (Miller, 2017).

The 'with whom' signifies the relationships that are created in a learning context.

Teamwork and collaboration are at the forefront of Outdoor Learning (Waite, 2011) and a key feature of Learner Identity development (Collett, 2020; McGuinness, 2018; Nasir & Cooks, 2009). Through Outdoor Learning, children work and learn alongside their peers in an environment outside the classroom. The outdoor environment allows children to express themselves in ways in which they may not be able to indoors (Lee et al., 2022). As children have the opportunity to express themselves differently outdoors, they may also make new connections with different peers in the outdoors (Harris, 2018). Building relationships with self, others and the environment promotes social and personal development of the child (Lee et al., 2022; Molyneux et al., 2022). Outdoor Learning has been proven to build trusting relationships among pupils and teachers (Sharpe, 2014; Murray & O'Brien, 2005). Children are motivated to learn when strong relationships are formed (McKay & Macomber, 2021).

Finally, the 'when' of Learner Identity development suggests that all the above must occur on a regular basis. Ruck and Mannion (2021) state the importance of regular engagement with the same place in order to build a connection with that place. It has been proven that

longer or more regular Outdoor Learning interventions produced longer positive effects in participants while shorter or minimal Outdoor Learning produced fewer benefits which are soon lost by participants (Harris, 2021; O'Brien & Lomas, 2017). This, and topics discussed in this literature review have informed the conceptual framework for this study.

2.8 Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework (figure 1) of this research is underpinned by Dewey's (1963, as cited in Bates, 2016) educational theory that individuals learn and grow as a result of their experiences and interactions with the world. Some of the key principles of Dewey's learning theory and driven by experiential learning include: teacher's use of learner's experience as a teaching tool; providing learners with quality experiences to improve growth and creativity; an education system that restricts learner's freedom of thought and movement will inhibit the development; it is the teachers duty to provide guidance to the learner and select experiences that have promise and potential to exercise the learner's intelligence (Bates, 2016). In using Dewey's principles, it is vital to have thinking and reflection underpinning the teaching to allow the teacher to get to know the learners better and to benefit the overall learning experience.

Similarities between Dewey's experience and learning theory can be seen in nature pedagogies where learning is highly participatory and offers hands on experiences (Cree & Robb, 2021). As stated previously, Outdoor Learning is a form of nature pedagogy which allows for the ease of integration of curricular subjects. This is where I make the connection between the two key areas of my research, Outdoor Learning and Learner Identity as the benefits of experiencing Outdoor Learning align with the competencies for Learner Identity development. Focusing on Bernstein and Solomon's (1999) definition of Learner Identity; what I am, where, with whom and when, many links can be made between Outdoor Learning and Learner Identity that suggest that Outdoor Learning may

be an avenue for development of Learner Identity in primary school children. From exploring Outdoor Learning and Learner Identity alongside each other through Bernstein and Solomon's (1999) definition, it emerged that including the constructs of choice, challenge, responsibility, leadership, teamwork and reflection in Outdoor Learning may help develop Learner Identity competencies in children. As stated by Kelly (2022) "at a deeper level, it can be described as a pedagogy which supports children's learning and development across a range of domains" (p.188).

I adopted Lundy's (2007) framework for the child's views including the elements of space, voice, audience and influence to allow for authentic experiences to be communicated, understood and acted upon. Details of the research design and data collection tools used in this research will be detailed in the following chapter.

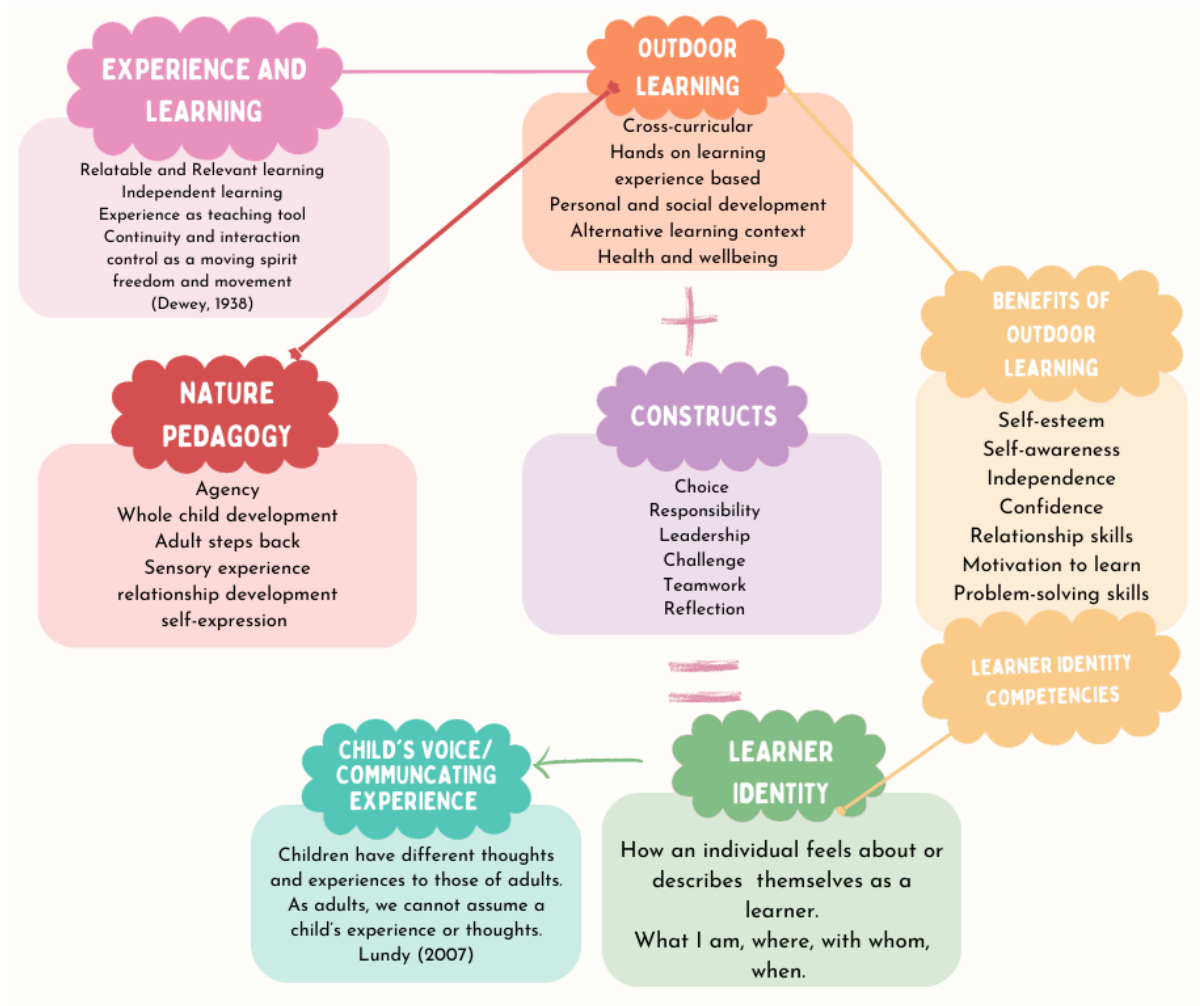


Figure 1: The conceptual framework

2.9 Summary of chapter

To conclude, the benefits of Outdoor Learning align with the key competencies needed for Learner Identity development. Bernstein and Solomon's (1999) definition of Learner Identity, what I am, where, with whom and when can be naturally woven into Outdoor Learning in providing opportunity for Learner Identity development in primary school children. To take license with Marx's dictum 'we make ourselves but in conditions that are strongly influenced by more powerful others' (Reay, 2010), emphasising the important role the teacher and school have on Learner Identity development in children.

The next chapter describes and documents the research methodology undertaken as part of this thesis.

Chapter 3 Methodology

3.1 Introduction

The focus of this study is to explore children's Learner Identities while experiencing Outdoor Learning in the Irish primary school context. The work reported in this chapter includes the research paradigm and approach, ethical considerations of the study, research design, the design of the Outdoor Learning programme, data collection methods, data analysis and methodological considerations. In order to gain a greater understanding of children's sense of Learner Identity while experiencing Outdoor Learning, a variety of methodological approaches were used which include children's reflective journals, drawings by the children and focus group interviews with the children, observations by the researcher and reflections by the teacher.

3.2 Research Paradigm and Research Approach

The paradigm or world view underpinning this study is that of interpretivism, the belief that there are multiple realities which are socially constructed through language, shared meanings, instruments and context (Abdul Rehman & Alharthi, 2016). This differs to positivism which follows the belief that there is only one true reality independent of humans. As this study explores children's Learner Identity while experiencing Outdoor Learning, interpretivism is appropriate as we cannot assume children's experience and sense of Learner Identity given that Learner Identity is all about difference (Reay, 2010) and children see things differently to adults (Dockett & Perry, 2005; Inhelder & Piaget, 1958). Interpretivism is suited to this research as it seeks to gain an understanding of the elements of Outdoor Learning that provide these benefits or competencies for Learner Identity development in children (Bhattacharjee, 2012). In this study children's Learner Identity is created or explored through their Outdoor Learning experience which is of

interpretivism as people construct meaning in a variety of ways depending on experiences (Crotty, 2014). An emic approach to this study means that the participants perspective is explored, in this case, the child's sense of Learner Identity while experiencing Outdoor Learning. This approach is vital for researchers to understand participant's views and experiences of the context (Given, 2008). The interpretivist epistemologically requires socially constructed knowledge (Sprake & Palmer, 2022). The importance of understanding the children's perspectives in this study forms the methodology to understand the social phenomena of Learner Identity in the context of Outdoor Learning experiences and collecting qualitative data (Abdul Rehman & Alharthi, 2016; Sprake & Palmer, 2022).

3.3 Ethical Considerations

This research received full ethical approval from DCU Research Ethics Committee (REC Reference: DCUREC/2020/124) (See appendix A). The research involved vulnerable individuals as I worked with children, my own 3rd class pupils aged 9-10. Having read 'Children First' legislation and having completed the 'introduction to children first' e-learning programme, I was aware and informed of my responsibilities as an investigator researching with children. Children with Special Educational Needs were always accompanied by their Special Needs Assistant during the research. Prospective children and their parents/guardians were fully informed of what was involved in participating. Plain Language statements were given to the parents and children outlining the research (Appendix B & C). Informed consent was obtained from the children's parents/guardians, together with assent from children themselves, before any research was conducted (Appendix D & E). Permission to use the school was granted by the Board of Management. They were provided with informed consent and plain language statements prior to data collection period (Appendix F & G). Trips to the local forest were covered

under the school's school tour/excursion policy. Assurance was given that participation was voluntary, and withdrawal was possible at any time and for any reason, together with guarantees of confidentiality and anonymity (Cohen et al., 2000).

In so far as is possible the anonymity of the individual children was respected. The school, teachers or children were assigned pseudonyms for reporting purposes. Where a photograph or piece of children's writing was presented all identification (including school crests which can be pixelated/blurred in any photo where this may occur) evidence was removed. All data was stored on an encrypted DCU drive which will be destroyed 5 years after publication.

3.4 Positionality - Teacher as the Researcher

In this study, I am the researcher but also the teacher. The close relationship a teacher has with their pupils may influence findings. However, the relationship a teacher has with their pupils will also provide for richer observations. According to DCU Research Ethics Committee guidelines on insider research (2017), researchers must be "open, authentic, honest, deeply interested in the experience of one's research participants, and committed to accurately and adequately representing their experience" (p. 3-4).

Teacher as a researcher can also be known as insider research where the researcher is a member of the group, organisation or community where they are conducting the research (Labaree, 2002). There are varying thoughts on insider research however ways to carry out this type of research are well documented. According to Brinkmann & Kvale (2005) consideration of ethical implications is important due to the ease of access an insider researcher has to their participants. Kvale (2006) highlights the power of asymmetries in interviews conducted by an insider researcher and that this interaction be made transparent by the researcher. As the teacher of the children in this study I was very aware of my role

and how the children viewed me. During focus group interviews I was aware of the power-dynamic that can occur between teacher and children (Flynn, 2017). For this reason I adopted Lareau's (2021) principle of taking “the lowest status seat” (p.144) during observations and interviews. This meant that during focus group interviews I provided the children with a question or prompt and allowed the group of children talk about this question or topic freely amongst themselves. Having this ‘trusted adult’ status from being the teacher “allowed the children to explore the work and express themselves freely, maybe more so than they would with an ‘unknown adult’” (Irwin & Johnson, 2006, as cited in Leigh, 2020, p. 11).

As I was the teacher, during Outdoor Learning lessons I gave initial instructions as the teacher. During this time, I was not taking field notes as it was my duty to be the teacher for these children during instructional time. When this part of the lesson was over, independent or group work would often feature next. This is when I took on the researcher role and completely stood back to observe the children working together independent of the teacher. During this time, I did not involve myself in what the children were doing. Although I will always be the teacher in these children’s eyes, this clear distinction and separation between teacher and researcher allowed me to take on each role independently. The clear separation between teacher and researcher was important for this research as it ensured quality of implementation of the Outdoor Learning programme. During this time, I only focused on teaching as the teacher. Once teaching time had finished and I was happy for children to begin their independent work, I stood into my researcher role. Doing this allowed me to take in depth observations during the lesson which made for rich fieldnotes which I wrote up after the lesson. Bias and positionality on listening to and analysing the child’s voice is discussed in the section on trustworthiness which follows later in this chapter.

3.5 Research Design

The purpose of this research was to explore children's sense of Learner Identity while experiencing Outdoor Learning in the Irish primary school context through their voice to gain an understanding of the aspects of Outdoor Learning that allow children to feel this way about themselves. The objectives of this research are to design and implement an Outdoor Learning programme with a focus on Learner Identity development, record and gather children's thoughts, ideas and perspectives of Outdoor Learner and their Learner Identities through their own words and to identify the ways in which Outdoor Learning may develop children's sense of Learner Identity. Unlike quantitative research, where surveys, numbers and rigid data collections feature, the primary school setting is far more complex and therefore requires a flexible, qualitative research method (Mills et al., 2010). "The methodological stance to qualitative research is underpinned by an interpretivist" paradigm/approach? (Sprake & Palmer, 2022, p. 56). Qualitative researchers follows the interpretive tradition of research, meaning that they see the situation through the eyes of the participants (Cohen et al., 2000; Sprake & Palmer, 2022). This relates to this research as it aims to gain a greater understanding children's sense of Learner Identity while experiencing Outdoor Learning. and the ways Outdoor Learning provides Learner Identity competencies in children.

3.5.1 Outdoor Learning Programme Design

As the research involved the implementation of an Outdoor Learning programme (Appendix H) with a class who experience Outdoor Learning quite regularly, being outdoors was not new for these children but the lessons in this study included Learner Identity elements and this was new for children. The data collection occurred over nine weeks with pupils experiencing a 2-hour (sometimes longer) block of Outdoor Learning per week for eight of the nine weeks. The reason for having eight weeks of data collection

on the Outdoor Learning programme is supported by as Outdoor Learning research stating that longer Outdoor Learning implementation has greater, longer lasting benefits for participants (Dillon et al., 2006; Harris, 2021; O'Brien & Lomas, 2017).

The weekly Outdoor Learning lessons were thematically based, in line with the draft curriculum framework (NCCA,2020), and integrated a range of curricular subjects such as maths, literacy, history, geography, science, drama and art. Each Outdoor Learning lesson included constructs that support the development of Learner Identity such as choice, responsibility, teamwork (Waite, 2011), challenge (Orson et al., 2020), and reflection (Collett, 2020; O'Connor, 2019) to develop competencies such as self-esteem, confidence, relationship skills, problem solving skills, motivation to learn, and self-awareness (Bridgeland et al., 2013; McGuinness, 2018) (the full programme in the appendix H-P). Although many of these constructs occur during Outdoor Learning (Harris, 2018; Vigane & Dyrstad, 2022; Waite, 2010, 2011), they were specifically planned for in the Outdoor Learning lessons to further explore Learner Identity during Outdoor Learning. These Learner Identity sections outlined how the lesson will provide opportunity for the development of these competencies (Appendix I-P).

The theme of the Outdoor Learning programme in this study was Ancient Ireland. The programme featured four weeks on the topic of the Stone Age and four weeks on the topic of the Vikings. Designing a programme that shows progression in weekly units ensured the study has continuity as the programme aimed to develop children's sense of Learner Identity through Outdoor Learning. The data collection methods chosen occurred during and after the lessons in the form of observations, reflections, drawings and interviews (see figure 2).

3.5.2 Participants and setting.

Participants included the children in my class. All children (24 boys) from 3rd class (ages 8 and 9) in an all-boys urban primary school were invited to participate. The profile of the mainstream class, like the majority of classrooms in Ireland, was one that included a variety of abilities and needs. There were children with Special Needs Assistant access in the class and the Special Needs Assistant was present for all lessons. The school has an extensive garden and access to a nearby forest which are both used for Outdoor Learning purposes. The Outdoor Learning programme took place in the local forest within a short walk from the school and/or the school garden/outdoor space. All lessons were derived from the Irish Primary Curriculum and involved activities that primary school teachers should be able to undertake with their classes. It was anticipated that children may need extra care and attention as they may not have engaged in some of these activities previously.

3.5.3 Data Collection

As the child's voice was central to the research it was important that each child could effectively articulate their experience of and thoughts on Outdoor Learning and their identity as a learner when participating in Outdoor Learning. Therefore, these were the considerations made when choosing data collection methods for this study. When exploring research methods and how best to undertake data collection I wanted to ensure that the methods did not interfere with the teaching and learning components of the lessons therefore methods were chosen that mirrored activities undertaken by teachers in their normal teaching day such as observing the children while learning and making notes on the lesson and their learning behaviours. These data collection methods are in keeping with the everyday classroom activities that the children are familiar with.

To allow for the collection of data surrounding the child's experience, it was vital that children had an opportunity to express their experiences visually (through drawing pictures) (Cox, 2005; Freeman & Mathison, 2009; McDonnell et al., 2000; Soto & Garza, 2011), through writing (reflective journals) (Cappello, 2006; Freeman & Mathison, 2009; Grainger et al., 2003; Lundy, 2007) and orally (in the focus group interviews) (Cappello, 2006; Freeman & Mathison, 2009; Nicholson et al., 2015). Along with these methods of data collection, teacher planning and observations were reflected upon to improve practice and implementation of the programme but also to assist the researcher understanding participants' narratives of experiences throughout and beyond the data collection period.

To do justice to the child's voice in this study, all children's data followed Lundy's (2007) framework including space, voice, audience and influence. Space was given to the children after the Outdoor Learning lessons where there was dedicated time for children's reflections. This created a space where children could express their views on their experience. The voice was supported in the study by providing children with multiple reflection methods (reflective journal, drawing and verbal) (MacDonald, 2009). The children were given an audience for their views to be heard as I actively listened to and read their thoughts and perspectives after Outdoor Learning each week. Their voice was given influence as having listened to their views, thoughts and perspectives each week, I altered and edited lessons accordingly.

Data collection occurred over 9 weeks. 8 weeks during the Outdoor Learning programme and one week where the focus group interviews took place at the end of the Outdoor Learning programme (see figure 2 below). During Outdoor Learning lessons I taught the Outdoor Learning lesson as designed in the plan while also making notes on observed activity (as the researcher) which were then written up as fieldnotes after the lesson. After the Outdoor Learning lesson, children completed a reflective activity in which they

recorded their experience through words and by drawing pictures. I carefully designed the reflective journal templates in an effort to encourage effective expression of experience and identity (Cappello, 2006). After the lesson, I used the observations and fieldnotes I collected and wrote as the researcher to aid my teacher reflection process. My teacher reflections also informed the lessons and interview schedule for this study. Focus group interviews took place in groups of five after the completion of the Outdoor Learning programme (N=5). The focus groups further acknowledged the child's voice and their experience of Outdoor Learning, giving them the opportunity to express themselves and their experience more deeply verbally. (Nicholson et al., 2015). The next section provides a rationale for the use of the above data collection tools to effectively answer the research aims and questions attached to this study.

OUTDOOR LEARNING PROGRAMME - ANCIENT IRELAND
DATA COLLECTION TIMELINE



Figure 2: Data collection timeline

3.6 Data Collection Methods

3.6.1 Observations

For teachers, observation is a tool used throughout every school day. Observation can have an impact on altering the social environment of the classroom (Khanam, 2002) and improve student achievement (Shaha et al., 2015). Therefore, it only is fitting that observations feature in this research. Teacher observations inform future learning as they enlighten areas to change or alter for the teacher in the future to create a better teaching and learning experience. In good practice, teacher observation happens daily as short notes are made that inform the teacher about past, current and future teaching and learning in the class and/or with for an individual child (Khanam, 2002; Shaha et al., 2015).

Observations are an attractive form of data collection as they enable the researcher to gather live data from live situations (Cohen et al., 2000). This is particularly beneficial in the school setting as the live situations between children can be so rich in data. Given that observations are carried out on a daily basis (Khanam, 2002; Shaha et al., 2015), it was fitting to use them as a research method for this study so not to veer too far from everyday school activities. Behaviours can be context specific (Cohen et al., 2000) and this validates the importance of observation in this research. As the understanding of the child's experience and sense of self during Outdoor Learning is paramount to this study, the observations of the children were used to form field notes and, also acted as a research link between the child's articulation of the experience and the lived experience where possible. This means that when an observation of an event during Outdoor Learning was made by the researcher and the same event was articulated by the child, the fieldnotes recorded from the observation allowed the researcher deeper understanding of that event having witnessed it.

The observations were guided by the conceptual framework (Lareau, 2021; LeCompte, 2003) meaning during Outdoor Learning sessions the researcher was looking out for events linked to the Learner Identity development constructs of choice, challenge, responsibility, teamwork, leadership and reflection (see appendix Q). The systematic recording of fieldnotes during the Outdoor Learning lessons allowed for focused observations. This was particularly important for this research as the researcher was not taking observation notes for the whole lesson due to the teacher element that was required. The observations were recorded systematically which included descriptions, direct quotations and observer comments (Merriam, 1998). Although the observations were themed for efficacy purposes, it was envisaged that themes would arise as the study moved through the data collection process. The structured observations allowed for swift analysis (Cohen et al., 2000), again lending itself to the everyday hustle and bustle of primary school teaching.

3.6.2 Field Notes

After the Outdoor Learning lesson the observations were expanded upon using Lareau (2021) “WRITE” frame for writing fieldnotes to ensure the writing up of high quality fieldnotes. “Fieldnotes freeze and preserve your observations” (Lareau, 2021, p. 163). The fieldnotes were then used to assist the teacher in the reflection of the Outdoor Learning lesson, children’s reflection journals and focus group interview planning. “Participant observation is often combined with other forms of data collection that, together, elicit participant’s definitions of the situation and their organizing constructs in accounting for situations and behaviour” (Cohen et al., 2000, p. 311). It was hoped that this would add to the teacher reflection process and understanding of children’s experiences.

3.6.3 Teacher Reflection

Teacher reflection is an important tool for the continuous professional development of teachers (Boud, 1985; Prieto et al., 2019). Reflexivity is also seen in qualitative research as the researcher describes and addresses the relationships between participants and themselves (Cohen et al., 2000; Dodgson, 2019). Initially, the teacher reflection was structured with questions to answer. However after reflecting on lesson one I realised that the questions were limiting the reflection process. For this reason, the reflection was changed to a blank page reflection where I, as the teacher, recorded my thoughts in a free writing style.

Interestingly, as I was the teacher and also the researcher, the teacher reflections provided a multi purpose for the research. Firstly, the teacher reflection provided me with a space to reflect on my experience as a teacher during the Outdoor Learning programme where I documented my thoughts and feelings on each lesson. Secondly, these teacher reflections informed the future lessons, meaning that lessons were changed or altered based on both the teacher reflection and the children's reflections. The reflections assisted with editing the children's reflection journal prompts which altered slightly each week depending on the lesson content. The reflections also assisted in the design of prompt questions during the focus group interviews. As the data collection period was underway, I gained a greater understanding of what I would like to ask the children in the focus group interviews as I reflected on each lesson. The focus group interviews will be discussed in later paragraphs. The multi-use of reflection in this study aimed to deepen both the teacher and researcher's understanding of Outdoor Learning and Learner Identity while exhibiting the practical teaching day for a primary teacher.

3.6.4 Children's Reflection Journal

In this study reflection holds a dual role for children as it is used as a data collection tool but it is also a common element of Outdoor experiences (Dismore & Bailey, 2005) and a Learner Identity development element (Collett, 2020; O'Connor, 2019). A wealth of research suggests that writing is one effective way for children to articulate their experiences, views and thoughts (Cappello, 2006; Freeman & Mathison, 2009; Grainger et al., 2003). Children's writing can offer an insight into their experiences (Freeman & Mathison, 2009). The reflective journals in this study were entitled 'My Outdoor Learning Log' (Appendix R). With this Outdoor Learning Log children recorded their reflections. The reflections included lesson specific sentence starters and questions each week (Appendix S).

The focus of the child's voice throughout this study brings meaning and importance to the child's narrative. Instead of thinking of writing as something separate to speech with its own characteristics, Elbow (1985) suggests that writing can be improved or altered by introducing elements of speech, using them simultaneously. Hence the use of written (Outdoor Learning Logs), verbal (Focus group interviews) and drawing (Outdoor Learning Logs) methods of reflection. Writing gives the participant time to organise their thoughts while usually having the reader in mind (Farrell, 1978), providing time and space for the participant to get their point clearly across to the reader. It was hoped that the reflective journals for this study gave the children an opportunity at articulating and recounting their experiences before taking part in the focus group interviews which will be discussed later in the chapter.

Writing as a data collection tool in children's research is used as it is a predominantly independent activity (Freeman & Mathison, 2009). This fits into the everyday activities of the classroom, children are familiar with writing every day. Grainger et al. (2003)

acknowledges the importance of pupil's perceptions and how important the child's voice is for their learning. In Grainger et al's (2003) study children voiced their opinions on writing in the classroom. These opinions differed between age groups cementing the fact that as adults we cannot assume a child's experience until they communicate it to the adult. As Cappello (2006) states "voice is viewed as dynamic, changing as it develops and appropriated language, and as an expression accumulated through experiences" (p.483). In her study, Cappello (2006) looked at young writer's expression of voice in a primary school. She noticed that "the students' appropriation of language and their writing informed and displayed identity" (Cappello, 2006, p. 490).

The written reflections in this study aimed to give the participant time and space (Lundy, 2007) to clarify their thoughts, views and experiences. I gathered the journals each day after the reflections had been written, to analyse the journals to inform the focus group interview schedule, to inform future lessons and also to ascertain if adaptations to the reflection questions in the journal were required.

3.6.5 Drawings

Given the diverse nature of modern primary classrooms, there are children in all classes at all levels of reading, writing and oral language development. Some of the children in this study struggled to construct and write down their thoughts, experiences and views in their reflection journal. The teacher conferenced with these children during writing time and wrote their words out on a mini whiteboard for them to record into their diaries. In some cases, the teacher wrote their words into the child's reflection journal. To further include these children, week 5's reflection journal asked the children to draw pictures instead of writing sentences in response to the prompts. According to MacDonald (2009) drawings are a non-threatening child- friendly research method. The use of pictures and writing allowed the children to depict their understanding of their real-world issues, issues an

adult would assume a child does not understand (Soto & Garza, 2011). Images focus on more subjective and visual methodologies as a research tool have gained popularity in social science in recent years (Freeman & Mathison, 2009). Drawings are a useful tool for gaining insight into a child's experience (Cox, 2005; Freeman & Mathison, 2009; McNiff, 1982).

It is important to note that drawings by children were not analysed as part of this research. They were used as an alternative reflection method for children in this study. The drawings were used as a method of articulation of experience. As children can often discuss their drawings in depth (MacDonald, 2009), some of their drawings were used as prompts in the focus group interviews to provide an inclusive and comfortable experience for the children. "Drawing can cut through the levels of pretense, posing, and edited self-presentation" (Schatz & Walker, 1995, p. 80) that "often accompany verbal responses" (Freeman & Mathison, 2009, p. 113). In her study MacDonald (2009) focusses on Wright's (2007) process of 'drawing-telling' which combines the two individual data gathering tools, visual and verbal to gain a more holistic research approach. The findings of this study show that the 'drawing-telling' process is effective in gaining a greater understanding of children's experiences.

3.6.6 Focus Group Interviews

Interviewing is a relationship between researcher and participant in which a story or meaning is co-constructed (Adler et al., 2019; Freeman & Mathison, 2009; Morgan, 2001). "Interviews reveal story fragments, narrative representations of social experiences, and the meanings they might have to the speaker" (Freeman & Mathison, 2009, p. 88).

Individual and group interviews can be seen across social research, however, for the purpose of this study focus group interviews were used due to their practical nature for the teacher as a researcher role and they provide a more comfortable and child friendly

atmosphere in which to gather data (Freeman & Mathison, 2009). The flexibility and wide ranging method of focus group interviews gives the researcher a variety of options for conducting the interviews (Adler et al., 2019; Morgan, 2001).

The group aspect of focus group interviews mimics the classroom environment where whole class discussions and circle time are a common element of day-to-day teaching. Given the familiarity of such environments or situations, it was hoped that this would allow for comfortable, familiar space for the children to share and co-construct their meaning, views and thoughts around the Outdoor Learning lessons. Focus group interviews are valuable as another data collection tool for the children in the class who tend to need assistance from others in constructing views and also for those who would not be able to articulate their views and experiences through writing for a myriad of reasons, such is the situation in many primary classrooms.

With individual interviews one can gather much deeper understanding of the participant and their experience while, in focus group interviews the attention is taken off the researcher or adult and allows the children to speak more freely with their peers (Freeman & Mathison, 2009). The reason for using focus group interviews here is similar to the reason for using reflective journals, to mirror everyday activities while also provided a safe and comfortable space to articulate experience. Nicholson et al. (2015) investigates children's use of discourse in describing themselves or their experiences with play. Nicholson et al. (2015) mentions that the discourse about the children's play used by the adults did not match with the discourse used by children. The results of this study show that children's opinions must be taken seriously as their thoughts and views can broaden adult's perspectives. Therefore, the child's story is essential for an adult's understanding of their experience, and we must listen.

Focus group interviews allowed the researcher to gain a deeper understanding of the children's experiences by asking questions specifically designed to answer the research questions (Appendix T). From brief examination of the reflective journals, the researcher was able to ask children to expand on what they had written in their reflective journals that is of interest and has the potential to deepen the understanding and potentially provide answers to some/all of the research questions. As stated by Hammarberg et al. (2016) "when researchers invite people to talk about their reflections on experience, they can sometimes learn more than they set out to discover" (p. 499).

These methods complement each other when used collectively in allowing children to articulate their experiences (Cappello, 2006). Using more than one medium or method or way of experience sharing allows all learners to present their personal experiences and perspectives in a deeper manner and one in which is insightful to the researcher.

3.7 Data Analysis

Data analysed included lesson plans, teacher reflections, researcher observations/field notes, reflective journal entries (Outdoor Learning Logs) and focus group interviews. Data was analysed thematically and followed Braun and Clarke's (2022) version of reflexive thematic analysis. This form of analysis is fitting for this study as it features an organic approach to coding and theme development, supports the active role of the researcher and gives greater flexibility to the qualitative researcher (Clarke & Braun, 2017).

3.7.1 Phase one: familiarisation with the data

I familiarised myself with the data by reading and re-reading the entire data-set. I manually transcribed the focus group interviews with the help of Otter.ai software. The software was a good starting point however, due to the accents, quiet voices and children talking over each other during the focus group interviews I had to edit sections of the

transcriptions where the software failed to discern voices. Although time consuming, this greatly assisted with my familiarisation as I took casual notes of initial trends and interesting features throughout the transcription process (Byrne, 2022). Having examined the children's Outdoor Learning Logs on a weekly basis and altered lesson plans and focus group interview questions based on these diaries, this further helped with the familiarisation of the data set. Taking observations during the Outdoor Learning lessons and writing them up as field notes in the evenings allowed for further familiarisation. Finally, having written the teacher reflections myself also informed the Outdoor Learning lessons and contributed to the familiarisation process.

3.7.2 Phase two: generating initial codes

To generate initial codes I read through the entire data set creating codes and placing these codes into a table. The initial codes were organised under the data they originated from (See Figure 3 below). At this stage I did not focus on commonalities between codes in data sets. According to Lareau (2021) "you cannot focus too early, but you need to "live with it" for a while until you get a sense of what is going on" (p.153).

Teacher Reflections	Fieldnotes	Lesson Plans	Outdoor Learning Logs	Focus Group Interviews
Allowing for independence	Leadership roles gave ownership, independence	Pair Work	Working with friends	OL is easy
No behavioural correction	Problem solving	Group Work	Happy	Inside is work
Natural conflict resolution	Helping each other	Inquiry based learning	Choice	Capabilities
Engagement Levels high	Conflict resolution	Experiential learning	Fostering awareness of self-ability	Responsibility
Outdoor environment absorbs noise and allows for authentic conversations and collaboration	Taking the lead	Problem Solving	Teamwork worked well because of being in a group with friends	Feeling mature
Organised challenge not the only challenge that occurs	Self risk assessment	Skills learning	Fresh air	Working with friends
Resource heavy environment	Awareness of own safety	Fostering independence	Space	Learn better outdoors
	High engagement levels from children you would not expect	Responsibility	Fun	Experiential learning
	Teamwork seems easier for pupils who struggle indoors	Leadership	Proud	Learning for the future
	Chatting while working – very	Choice	Awakening of ability	Feeling competent
		Reflection	Freedom	Feeling confident
		Resources from nature	Choosing own leadership roles	Connection building
		Independent work	Leadership roles	More vocal
			In control	Easier to solve problems outside

Figure 3: Initial codes

Once I had all the codes recorded, I then looked for commonalities across the data set. I colour coded these commonalities and began to generate categories from the initial codes (see figure 4 and 5 below)

Teacher Reflections	Fieldnotes	Lesson Plans	Outdoor Learning Logs	Focus Group Interviews
Category creation				
Relationality				
Self				
Learning Environment				
Freedom/space				
Leadership				
OL impact on future and reflection				
What Teacher gained from OL				

Figure 4: Category creation 1

Teacher Reflections	Fieldnotes	Lesson Plans	Outdoor Learning Logs	Focus Group Interviews
<p>Allowing for independence</p> <p>No behavioural correction</p> <p>Natural conflict resolution</p> <p>Engagement Levels high</p> <p>Outdoor environment absorbs noise and allows for authentic conversations and collaboration</p> <p>Organised challenge not the only challenge that occurs</p> <p>Resource heavy environment (natural resources in the</p>	<p>Leadership roles gave ownership, independence</p> <p>Problem solving</p> <p>Helping eachother</p> <p>Conflict resolution</p> <p>Taking the lead</p> <p>Self risk assessment</p> <p>Awareness of own safety (child)</p> <p>High engagement levels from children you would not expect</p> <p>Teamwork seems easier for pupils who struggle indoors</p> <p>Chatting while working – very</p>	<p>Pair Work</p> <p>Group Work</p> <p>Inquiry based learning</p> <p>Experiential learning</p> <p>Problem Solving</p> <p>Skills learning</p> <p>Fostering independence</p> <p>Responsibility</p> <p>Leadership</p> <p>Choice</p> <p>Reflection</p> <p>Resources from nature</p> <p>Independent work</p>	<p>Working with friends</p> <p>Happy</p> <p>Choice</p> <p>Knowing I can do something</p> <p>Teamwork worked well because of being in a group with friends</p> <p>Fresh air</p> <p>Space</p> <p>Fun</p> <p>Proud</p> <p>Freedom</p> <p>Choosing own leadership roles</p> <p>Leadership roles</p> <p>In control</p> <p>Feel sometimes their decisions are better than teacher's</p>	<p>OL is easy</p> <p>Inside is work</p> <p>Know what I am capable of</p> <p>Responsibility</p> <p>Feeling mature</p> <p>Working with friends</p> <p>Learn better outdoors</p> <p>Experiential learning</p> <p>Learning for the future</p> <p>Feeling competent</p> <p>Feeling confident</p> <p>Connection building</p> <p>More vocal</p> <p>Easier to solve problems outside</p>

Figure 5: Category creation 2

3.7.3 Phase three: generating themes

I assembled the colour commonalities in the initial codes generating potential distinctive categories/themes (see figure 6 below).

Relationality	Self	Learning Environment	Freedom/Space	Leadership	Choice / Decision Making / problem solving	OL impact on future and reflection (for children)	What teacher gained from OL
Helping each other	Allowing for independence	Outdoor environment absorbs noise and allows for authentic conversations and collaboration	Fresh air	Nervous in leadership roles	Choice	Enjoyed writing reflections (child)	No behavioural correction
Pair work	Engagement Levels high	Resource heavy environment (natural resources in the outdoor learning context)	Space	Feeling nervous in leadership	Natural conflict resolution	By week 5 of regular OL the 'novelty' had worn off and behaviour changed (positive)	Stepping back as the researcher had benefits for teacher
Group work	Leadership roles gave ownership, independence		More vocal	Social challenge between Michal and Dominik over leadership roles	Organised challenge not the only challenge that occurs		Initially difficult for teacher to let go of all control
Conflict Resolution	Self risk assessment		Giving lots of time for activities - positive	When a leader I made sure everything was fair	Easier to solve problems outside	Regularity of OL	Teacher must intervene if something is very dangerous
Working with friends	Awareness of own safety (child)	Resources from nature	Children more vocal	Taking the lead	Choosing materials better than being told what to use	Rian reflecting on his teamwork positively	Children who miss a lesson are less experienced with the outdoor environment – seen in their
Teamwork worked well because of being in a group with friends	High engagement levels from children you would not expect	Outside is simpler	Free from the indoors	Sharing roles	Likes choosing where we worked Like choosing leadership roles	I didn't know I could make really cool things with just a potato peeler	
Teamwork seems easier for pupils who struggle indoors	Fostering independence	Importance of log circle initially	No walls	Was designer but also gathered	Imaginary play happens		
Chatting while working – very engaged while chatting	Independent work	Inside work is harder/ we	Movement				
Fun working in a group			Indoors we are stuck to a desk				
			Better when you have a				

Figure 6: Category Organisation

Having reorganised the initial codes into initial themes/categories I began to further refine these categories and the codes within the categories. I listed the potential themes in one column and listed the adjoining main codes of the theme in the column adjacent to the theme (see figure 7 below).

Relationality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Talking with friends • Getting to know others • Fun with friends • Helping others • Collaboration • Understanding abilities • Problem solving • Social awareness • Teamwork skills • Working alone • 	Leadership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Being a good leader • Out of comfort zone • Awareness of own abilities • Awareness of the abilities of others • Learning for the future • Needing/ wanting to be a leader / understanding leadership • Sharing leadership roles • Engagement in leadership role • Taking the lead • Choosing own leadership roles •
Self	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Independence • Confidence • Responsibility • Maturity • Pride (self-esteem) • In control/in charge • Ability • Self-expression • Being normal • Creativity • Trust • Superpower • Motivation 	Choices/decision making/ problem solving	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Choices and decisions • Social challenges • Problem solving in activities • Not giving up, trying and trying again • Challenges for teacher • Physical challenges • Teacher intervention •
Learning Environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Resources • Fresh air • Space to move • Risk assessment • Outdoor Learning vs Indoor learning • Perception of Outdoor Learning / Nature Connection • Woods vs School grounds • Out of comfort zone • 	OL impact on future and reflection (for children)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reflection during Outdoor Learning lesson • Reflection after Outdoor Learning lesson • Teacher Reflection • Skills for life • Knowledge for the future
Freedom/Space	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Freedom from classroom • Freedom to express myself • Physical freedom (space) • Verbal/vocal freedom • Time 	Teacher	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Classroom management • Stepping back • Teacher intervention • Teacher identity • Particular pupils • Teacher feelings (relaxed) • Value of observation • Teaching practice • Time • Engagement levels • Connection with pupils

Table 1

Figure 7: Refining categories

3.7.4 Phase four: reviewing potential themes

Having decided upon potential themes I then extracted quotes from the data to support each theme and code within each theme (see figure 8 below). This resulted in over 160 pages of quotes linked to the themes and codes. However, this proved important for the process of defining themes.

Categories and Codes

Teacher Reflections
Fieldnotes
Lesson Plans
Outdoor Learning Logs
Focus Group Interviews

Table 1

Relationality: This category encompasses any time the boys worked in groups, what happened within groups, their thoughts on group work and what the teacher observed during group work		
Codes	Quotation	Reference
Talking with friends	"It felt fun working with someone to like talk to and work together"	Tomas 1.1
	"When I was working it made me feel good because I was with all my friends and we worked good together and we all got to talk to each other"	Matthew 7.1
	You get to like, bake and stuff and it's just really fun to do that with your friends while you can talk.	FG 2 03:00
	I feel like happy that I could learn in the outdoors and learn more stuff in the outdoors. So you can talk and learn at the same time	FG 2
	Rachel Rafferty 08:14 Okay, and what about working in groups outside?	FG2
Tomas 08:19 yeah, I think it's fun to talk to your friends and stuff and like, do it with them. And I think it's really fun.		

Self-Awareness: This category encompasses the child's thought of self during this experience and what the teacher observed in the children individually.		
Codes	Quotation	Reference
Confidence	"it made me have more confidence on doing the huts and teacher let us have total control over what was going on"	Matthew 2.2
	Colm, Ruan, Marcus and Jakob were working very well together during the trade stand building activity. They had set up shop between two large trees. The trees were about a meter apart which allowed them to place a stick between the two for a table. All members of the group were very proud of themselves and impressed with what they had done. Colm piped up with confidence and pride saying "lads, do ye think that looks done?" The boys agreed. Often Colm would sit back in an activity like this but as the weeks have gone on Colm has become more confident and assertive.	FN 7
	Fionn 28:48 I feel way more confident and prepared for like camping.	FG2
	Rachel Rafferty 28:53 Okay.	
	Fionn 28:55 So like it would be just way easier to do stuff because I know how to do them.	
	"My group were excellent because I was Bob the Builder and it was fun building with Senan and Kaiden"	Miles 6.1
	Rachel Rafferty 03:35 The same, okay. So, boys, when you are outdoor learning, okay, and how does outdoor learning make you feel as a learner? Like, are you do you feel... Ruan 03:50 I feel better at learning Ronan 03:51 I feel better at learning	FG3

Figure 8: Aligning quotes within categories and codes

3.7.5 Phase five: defining and naming themes

I then began to define themes and refine these definitions (See figure 9 below). The decision to remove the teacher as a theme came through as the child's voice took prominence in this study. Although I, as the teacher, had provided and facilitated this Outdoor Learning programme for the children in which they experienced Learner Identity development, to share my views on this would take away from the child's authentic voice. However, the data from the teacher reflections, researcher observations and fieldnotes played an integral part the implementation of the Outdoor Learning plan, design of children's reflection journals and design of focus group interviews. This data combined was important in understanding children's views in this study.

Final Themes

Initial Themes	Refined Themes
Learning Environment	Embodied Learning
Freedom/Space	
Relationality	Relationality
Leadership	
Self	Autonomous Learning
Choices/decision making/problem solving	
Outdoor Learning - reflection and impact on future	Reflection
Teacher	

Figure 9: Refining themes

Themes were merged and refined to four themes; Embodied Learning, Relationality, Autonomous Learning and Reflection. The theme of Embodied Learning was derived from the emergence of the physical aspect of the Outdoor Learning environment and how it provided children with a sense of freedom. The theme of Relationality was derived from the emergence of relationships, teamwork and the prominence of leadership in the children’s experiences. The theme of Autonomous Learning includes the child’s idea of self and how the choices, decisions and problem solving that occurred in this study influenced the child’s sense of self. Finally, the theme of reflection emerged from the prevalence of reflection on past, present and future for the children in this study. I then extracted quotes to support these themes (see figure 10 below).

Physical freedom (space)	"I felt happy during outdoor learning today because we were out in the fresh air and not in a full classroom and we had loads of room to run around"	Jakob 1.1
	Fionn 04:39 Well because like, you can kind of have... it can be really cool when you're outside because like there's loads of space. So like you can run around and stuff but then in the classroom, you can actually just sit down.	FG 2
	Rachel Rafferty 17:01 in what way? Can you tell me a bit about that? Space? What's this thing about space that helps you express yourself?	FG2
	Matthew 17:09 You're kind of just like, you get to like kind of...	
	Fionn 17:13 you're able to go wherever you want	
	Matthew 17:14 You feel more free	
	Fionn 17:15 Yeah.	
	Jayden 17:15 Yes	
	Matthew 17:17 Like rather, you're in a classroom, you're sat in your chair and...	
	"I felt really happy cause it is easier and faster working in a group and it is more funner because we can talk and run around and play and mess around"	Daniel 4.1
Colm 05:34 ehm it makes me feel free because we're not stuck in like, a little classroom Where we have no room to like, go around.	FG3	
Rhys 05:44		

Figure 10: Highlighting quotes for composite narrative construction

3.7.6 Phase six: producing the report

The themes are presented in the form of composite narratives. Quotes from the data set were used to construct the composite narratives. The composite narratives frame the

findings chapter of this thesis. Finally the themes are discussed in which the final analysis is related back to the research question and literature review (Braun & Clarke, 2022).

3.8 Composite Narratives

Due to the volume of data created by the children in this study, it proved challenging to tell their story while including the experience and voice of every child. The aim of this research was not to distinguish between children but to explore how a group of children feel about their Learner Identities when experiencing Outdoor Learning and to understand how Outdoor Learning provides these feelings for children. Given that the child's voice is a valued and instrumental part of this study, I did not want to choose three of four children only and report on what they had said. I feel it would have been unjust to exclude the majority of children as every child in this study shared their thoughts and feelings of their identity and these deserve to be heard, no matter how small the input. This is in keeping with Lundy's (2007) idea that views from all children should be heard regardless of ability to form a mature and well-articulated view. This is also in keeping with the interpretivist paradigm of this study allowing "the researcher to recognise and narrate the meanings associated with human experience" (Fossey et al., 2002 as cited in Sprake & Palmer, 2022, p. 51) Like Willis (2019) I felt "a need for a method that allows the complexities of an individual's position to be presented and explored" (p.476).

Therefore, I have created composite narratives to illustrate the findings and effectively tell the story (Willis, 2019). Creating these composites allowed me to write narratives which, together, tell a story (Willis, 2019). "Narratives allow research to be presented in a way which acknowledges the complexities of the individual's motivations and outlooks, whilst drawing out more generalized learning and understanding" (Willis, 2019, p. 476).

Johnston et al. (2023) construct their composite narratives by initially creating a narrative thread where they identify the quotes that could be used for the narrative and place these together to form a story line. Then they identify quotes and add these to the narrative thread. The final composite narrative features a narrative piece using the direct quotes

from the data, written in the first person. In slight contrast Willis (2019) uses direct quotes from the data but the composite narratives are written in the third person and using link sentences and paraphrasing to enhance the flow of the story.

When writing my composite narratives, I took the same approach as Willis (2019) where I used a mixture of direct quotes and paraphrasing. Like Johnston et al. (2023), I have included a variety of children in every composite narrative. This means that one child's quotes may appear in more than one composite narrative. This is due to the children mentioning elements from many or all the themes identified during thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke 2022). I did not academically assess or rank the children during this study and therefore Johnston et al. (2023) method of including many children in each composite narratives fits well for my study. The composite narratives include: Ryan: The Embodied Learner; David: The Autonomous Learner; Liam: The Relational Learner; and Theo; The Reflective Learner.

3.9 Building Trustworthiness

The trustworthiness of this study was ensured following Lincoln & Guba's (1985) criteria and strategies for ensuring trustworthiness in qualitative research (Lincoln and Guba, 1985 as cited in Korstjens & Moser, 2018). Credibility was ensured through the prolonged engagement I had with the children and context and also the prolonged engagement the children had with Outdoor Learning prior to data collection. The novelty factor of Outdoor Learning did not effect this study because the children in this class experience Outdoor Learning on a regular basis. Although data collection occurred over 9 weeks, I was the class teacher of this class for eight months prior data collection. Being a teacher in this school meant that I was familiar with the setting. Being the teacher of these children meant that we had a strong and trusting relationship prior and during implementation. This familiarity and relationship allowed for a deep understanding of data as I knew each child

on a deep level as their teacher. Credibility was also ensured through persistent observation. Identifying the Learner Identity development constructs as topics for observations meant that the observations taken during Outdoor Learning lessons were the most relevant to the focus of the study and provided the researcher with a deeper understanding when analysing children's reflections. The generation of composite narratives using only quotes from the children themselves aimed to give a deeper understanding of their experiences and context.

Dependability and confirmability was ensured through a rigorous audit trail describing the research steps. Clear outline and description of the phases of Braun & Clarke's (2022) reflexive thematic analysis in this study ensures consistency in this study which is essential for dependability (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). Confirmability was ensured through the use of direct quotes from children in the construction of the composite narratives showing that the findings are grounded in the data. The use of direct quotes from the children in the formulating of the composite narratives also prevented bias when listening to the child's voice. While reflexivity was ensured through the reflective journal kept, where I examined my own conceptual lens as teacher and also researcher as the data collection period was underway. Reflexivity continued through the data analysis process as notes were kept during interview transcription and throughout the phases of thematic analysis.

This study aims to provide exemplary knowledge on children's sense of Learner Identity while experiencing Outdoor Learning in a single Irish primary school. While generalisability may be seen as a shortcoming, "to seek generalisable knowledge in whatever form – everyday or special - is to miss the point about what may be offered by certain kinds of knowledge which is exemplary knowledge" (Thomas, 2011, p. 33). According to Thomas (2011), the phronesis or wisdom of the researcher effects the

articulation of this exemplary knowledge as it is the “phronesis that enables the construction of the good case study” (p.33). The exemplification of knowledge provided in this study is supported by my own phronesis from being an outdoor instructor, teacher, and educational researcher.

3.10 Limitations and Methodological Considerations

Due to taking on the dual role of teacher as researcher, and as the single researcher in the Outdoor Learning space, while taking observations I would focus on one child or a group of children at a time. This means that I could have been missing an interesting event occurring among other pupils during this time. Therefore, the observations and fieldnotes recorded from these observations can only speak to these specific events that I observed as the researcher. The teacher as the researcher underpinned the data collection process and allowed for effective and trustworthy data collection. The teacher reflections were used as a data collection method while the researcher notes were informal notes to record the process of critical self-reflection about oneself and the research being undertaken. Both reflections and notes reduced researcher bias as I moved between teacher and researcher. This movement between teacher and researcher allowed for clear separation between my two identities in this study.

Recording the children during their Outdoor Learning experience would have been beneficial to explore the lessons in detail and ensure I had missed nothing. However, this unrealistic data collection method as it would have meant placing small mic on each child and having a camera that could access every part of the wooded area we worked in. Using a notepad and paper for this was more favourable than audio recording the observations. Audio recording observations may have distracted the children as it is something that they are not familiar with, and I feared that this would affect the children’s authentic experience and their ability to express themselves in this environment. Recording children

would also not have been effective due to the noise level and different elements in the Outdoor Learning space.

3.11 Summary of the chapter

This chapter has explained the methodology of this research. In this chapter, the research paradigm was presented along with the ethical considerations of this study. My positionality as teacher as researcher was documented where the advantages and disadvantages of insider research for this study have been explained. The design of the research was outlined explaining the Outdoor Learning programme, the context of the primary school class and setting. The individual data collection methods used have been described and a rationale for each has been provided in relation to the aim of the research. The use of reflexive thematic analysis for the treatment of the data was explained through the six phases identified by Braun and Clark (2022). A detailed description of the construction of composite narratives was provided. Methodological considerations were discussed. Researcher bias was addressed and its contribution to trustworthiness is discussed. The next chapter will document the findings from the data analysis in the form of composite narratives.

Chapter 4 – Findings

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter I present the findings of this research on how Outdoor Learning has promoted Learner Identity development for the children in this study. The findings are derived from the data sets which include children's Outdoor Learning logs, focus group interviews, teacher reflections, observations and fieldnotes. Reflexive thematic analysis of the data (Braun and Clarke, 2022) has led to the creation of four themes. These themes are embodied learning; autonomous learning; relationality; and reflection. These themes are presented in the following composite narratives; Ryan, the embodied learner, Liam the autonomous learner, David the relational learner and Theo the reflective learner.

4.2 The Embodied Learner – Ryan

'Ryan' is a composite of the children who spoke to embodied learning during their Outdoor Learning experiences. Learning with both the body and mind is known as embodied learning (Bailey, 2019; K. Lambert et al., 2022; Macedonia, 2019; Skulmowski & Rey, 2018). This composite narrative takes us through the Ryan's thoughts on the physical space of the Outdoor Learning environment and how that space and its surrounding contents supported his learning. The variety of space, smells, textures and colours appealed to Ryan in different ways, demonstrating that different aspects of the Outdoor Learning environment supported embodied learning. The body was an active agent in the learning that happened in the outdoors as Ryan immersed himself in, and connected with, the outdoor environment physically while learning.

Ryan experienced embodied learning through the physical space of the Outdoor Learning environment through bodily movement which is not present in the indoor classroom

environment. The contrast between the indoor and outdoor learning environment was stark. “It can be really cool when you're outside because like there's loads of space. So like you can run around and stuff but then in the classroom, you can actually just sit down”. Sometimes the difference between the indoor and outdoor learning context was so different that when experiencing Outdoor Learning Ryan “felt like I was free from the inside because I got to do whatever I want and I got to walk 800 miles and got dirty”. Ryan preferred Outdoor Learning because “it's just the way that we eh like learn, that you can run around places and still learn at the same time and having fun and all that. it's just like a different way in the classroom where you just have to sit in the seat and learn off the board, it's just not that fun”.

When Outdoor Learning Ryan felt that he could talk louder and freely. For Ryan the “outdoors is much easier, because I think indoors, maybe like with you're solving a problem, maybe you might raise like you might need your like, it'd be much easier to like talk outdoors, because you can talk louder, so then more people can like hear what you're saying. But in the class you have to like whisper and all that, like or just talk normally, but some people might be across the table and all that. So I think it's much easier to do outside because then you can solve the problem and all that much easier”.

Ryan was aware of the impact noise has on his learning experience and felt that “indoors, we can't really like talk that much, because it would just be so noisy but outdoors it's not that noisy if we just like, we're not screaming outdoors but we are talking. And it's just not that noisy and it's just way better than the indoors”. He continued to explain “when you're inside you kind of need silence to kinda concentrate”, however when he was outdoors he felt “like a different person” “and starts to talk” and this made him feel “like a different learner”.

Ryan also experienced embodied learning through sensory stimulation in the Outdoor Learning environment. Ryan said that he “felt really good because I liked the fresh air and the tool making and the leaves crunching and snapping under my feet”. The colour of the Outdoor Learning environment was noted by Ryan, further engaging his senses, as he “got lots of fresh air and lots of blue bells and flowers and especially the trees and the green, red, brown, yellow leafs on the ground and I can’t forget about the sun and the clouds”. Initially Ryan “felt nervous of getting dirty and my mum being angry with me getting dirty... So that's why I was actually afraid of going to the woods”. The fear of getting “dirty actually went away at lesson three, stone age farming, because we had to actually plant the seeds. And when I planted the seeds, I remembered my dad told me it's, it's okay, getting dirty”. In fact, Ryan says “I really love dirt... I also like it, but I don’t like the bugs in it”. Physically engaging with the environment and working with the natural resources of sticks, rocks and moss made him feel “happy because I think it’s so much more fun than learning indoors because we can’t gather rocks or sticks”. He believed using the natural resources in the Outdoor Learning environment “would boost someone’s confidence so yeah if you think about in a life way and being trusted way so in that point of view that was a great responsibility for most of the pupils in the class”. The embodied learning experienced by Ryan during Outdoor Learning sparked self-awareness, independence and motivation to learn. These are some of the competencies of Learner Identity.

4.3 The Autonomous Learner – Liam

Liam’s composite narrative comprises of a number of children who spoke about autonomy and self. Autonomous learning is the ability to act independently and make decisions during learning without being influenced by external factors (Dickinson, 1993; Kenny, 1993). Autonomous learning occurred when Liam felt in control of his own learning.

Although choice, being one of the Learner Identity development constructs, was specifically planned for in the Outdoor Learning lessons for this study, Liam made choices and decisions beyond these during Outdoor Learning. Liam enjoyed making his own choices and felt in control. Liam also experienced social problems and physical challenges and found that dealing with these problems and challenges was better or easier in groups and in the outdoor environment.

Liam experienced autonomous learning through choice and decision making during Outdoor Learning. Liam enjoyed making decisions, particularly decisions about who he worked with, “we got to pick our groups. I think that is one of the best things that teacher does for our Outdoor Learning so far and I just really enjoyed today”. Initially Liam “felt surprised when we were able to choose who I worked with today because normally we can’t do that”. He also found it “fun to choose the materials with your group because it’s more fun to choose them by yourself or with your group because it’s not as fun if like the teacher or if someone said just use these materials only”. Through choice, Liam felt happy and glad “because when I pick the materials it can actually work for me”.

Liam experienced social challenges during Outdoor Learning. Sometimes Liam preferred “working on my own because sometimes, if you're working in a group, some people might disagree with you, even though you know, your answer is right but they're like no that's wrong. So you have to put it to this or else you'll get it wrong even though the answer that you picked is right. And it's kind of annoying sometimes”. Liam independently recognised and solved a social situation that was putting him under pressure when he “felt challenged because everyone was surrounding us and it was hard because of all the people were shouting so we put them in a line so it was one at a time”.

Sometimes problem solving caused stress for Liam. When making huts “at the end it literally fell and we were so stressed. We were like Oh my god now what? So then me and all of us had to like go up quick and make it and it wasn't as good as normal. Like it didn't fall, didn't get wet but...” However when Liam solved a problem or challenge in Outdoor Learning he was able to clearly recount and articulate his memory of the event. “I felt a bit challenged when the two big trees were like, nearly right beside each other. We had big long sticks, and we couldn't get one underneath. And then we just put it down like on front of them and then then we put down the two sticks on the stick across and then it then it just fell and then we did it again. So we went over to a different place where the big... when you come in like on the right there's like this place and then we start building there and then it eventually worked”.

Liam did not give up on the tasks at hand demonstrating resilience when presented with problems or challenges. Liam sometimes used observation of others to help him solve his own challenges like “when the boys commenced whittling their sticks Liam was using his potato peeler incorrectly. He turned to Fionn who was sitting next to him and observed how Fionn was doing it.... he even double checked his own work by taking a quick look at Fionn's after he had grasped the method”. Liam also demonstrated resilience when he did not give up trying to make fire using flint and steel. He “learned that from a challenge when it gets very tricky. And it takes like a little, it takes a little while to scrape to get the fire”. One time his “shelter kept failing. How we fixed it, we rebuilt it over and over again” and from this Liam realised the benefits of problem solving as he said “it was hard at the start but we did it in the end”. When Liam fell or got hurt “I sat out a bit and I decided to be the counter because it's easier”. When Liam overcame challenges or solved problems he felt a great sense of joy, pride and achievement. He “felt happy because the flint and steel is fun because seeing how many attempts it takes and when it does work

everyone in our group cheers”. Liam showed growth in self-esteem as he praised himself with phrases such as “I did it” when he solved a problem.

Liam said that he preferred solving problems in the Outdoor Learning environment.

“There's actually a difference between this because in outdoors. I mean in indoors, you will take very long time, because you don't get to observe everything because you're inside, but when you're outdoors, you get to observe and see and an idea pops into your mind and you can use it. But it's your.... it's your mind to accept”.

Experiencing choice, problem solving and challenge during the Outdoor Learning lessons allowed Liam to grow in self-awareness. Liam liked the independence and autonomy he experienced because “it made me have more confidence on doing the huts and teacher let us have total control over what was going on”. Despite often working in groups, Liam felt autonomy in the decisions he made and the way he communicated in the group. He “felt really, how do I put this? In charge of myself to be able to choose who I worked with today”. Also, he “felt very in charge of myself because our teacher told us that we could get what we wanted”. Liam shared that autonomy during Outdoor Learning came because he “felt more trusted by a teacher/adult and felt like I could do anything and I could control anything”.

Trust was also important for Liam’s autonomy during Outdoor Learning. Liam “felt more mature when I was trusted to use pretty risky/dangerous resources but I was really, really careful about it because I knew there were dangerous and risky things for this project that I had to use”. Using tools, working with the natural resources and making fire made Liam feel “good that we were trusted that we were old enough to do dangerous things”.

Sometimes Liam couldn't believe the level of independence and trust he experienced during Outdoor Learning and how this made him feel. This “made me feel so very proud

of myself because you can die from fire and it is so so very dangerous so I don't know why teacher let me use to make fire... like why?". Experiencing this level of risk in school was unfamiliar for Liam. He "felt really surprised because I didn't think teacher will trust us with sharp rocks but my friend let me choose materials for the stone age tools. I picked out rocks, sticks and feathers". Experiencing and dealing with risk during Outdoor Learning made Liam "feel I was trusted by my teacher, not many people in the world are trusted by their own school teacher. I just felt happy that I was trusted by my teacher". Being "trusted by an adult made me feel a bit of independence and good about myself that it actually turned out so good".

Sometimes this level of autonomy made Liam "feel like I had the responsibility of telling the whole group what to do. It put a lot of pressure on me if I did something wrong and it ruined the whole tool for the team". However, overcoming these pressure situations had a positive effect on his self-confidence and self-esteem as it made Liam feel "proud in Outdoor Learning today because afterwards everyone said that ours was the most successful because we had like 5 customers at one time". On overcoming a stressful situation Liam would sometimes praise himself with phrases such as "Yay, I have achieved something".

Liam showed growth in self-awareness as overcoming these challenges independently meant that he discovered new abilities in himself. "Outdoor Learning has taught us a lot about ourselves and what we are capable of". Liam "never really like knew that I could like I could like cook like the bread. I never knew like the use of a flint and steel ... And I never knew I could... I never knew I could make any of the huts. Ehm.. but.. I decided I'd give it a try. So that's what I did. And I've learned so much that I'm able to do it. And it's it's great craic as well". These experiences made Liam "feel like you don't have a limit to what you're able to do. Like you're able to actually do something that you think you're

able to do”. This realisation of having no limit to his abilities came from the autonomy he experienced during Outdoor Learning. This autonomy may have led to increase in self-esteem and motivation to learn for Liam “you're allowed to make your own decisions on like when, let's say, if you were doing that at home, and your mom didn't want you to do that, or something they would be like No, no do that you can hurt yourself. But then when you do it in school, and you know, I'm able to do that. Why can't I do it at home. So when you're in school and doing it feels way better?”.

The autonomous learning provided by Outdoor Learning may have allowed Liam to become aware of his learning style, strengths and weaknesses. Liam “became much of a better learner... Because,... now I know, like, learning outside is much more easier and it's better for me... since I get to actually express myself”. This growth in confidence allowed Liam to express himself the way he wanted to express himself. He “could like express yourself more outside in Outdoor Learning because you have more space, and you have more like room to run around and play with your friends and stuff”. The freedom of expression provided by the Outdoor Learning environment allowed Liam “to just.... Be normal”. Liam describes the difference between the indoor and outdoor classroom. “like your normal in the classroom Yeah. Like, your brain isn't different when you're outside” because “you're like, you're scared inside because what if you get in trouble from talking”. However when Outdoor Learning Liam felt he had much more control over his learning as he could “actually talk way more with your friends because like, you just have to want to talk to them if you have something going on that you want talk about, something that you did on yard that was an accident, or something that you want to do with him outside, like helping the teacher, helping Ellen (SNA), helping anybody that is around you”. For Liam this method of learning is “way more free”.

Having control over himself and his learning in the Outdoor Learning environment made Liam “feel good just like, I have a superpower. I was the manager I think like, I could like do stuff that I didn't know I could do in the outdoors and that we actually brought it indoors”. This autonomy “made me feel nice that everyone had a responsibility like every superhero in the avengers for the example, it made me felt like I had power of a leader today of the group in the forest”. The autonomous learning experienced in the Outdoor Learning environment allowed children to grow in self-awareness, self-esteem, confidence, independence, problem solving skills and motivation to learn. These are competencies of Learner Identity.

4.4 The Relational Learner – David

David is a composite of children who discussed working in groups, what happened within the groups and their thoughts on group work. Through Outdoor Learning, David demonstrated and experienced working in groups. This composite also explores David's awareness of what makes a good leader and how he constructed this knowledge from experience and observation. The element of choice in leadership and autonomously sharing leadership roles with peers occurred naturally for David in the outdoor learning environment. Finally, David frequently mentioned that experiencing leadership in the outdoors prepared him for teenage and adult life when he will have a job and career.

David enjoyed working with his friends during Outdoor Learning. David was comfortable in this learning environment. He “felt really happy that I could be with my friends and it is funner working so you have some fun and laugh around”. David enjoyed working “in groups of two. But then sometimes we're in groups of five, so we can talk to more people”. David preferred groupwork in Outdoor Learning because “during the work is like, you can also have another chat and you can't even realise you're doing work because

you're so into the chat". Outdoor Learning allowed David to do "the things that we needed to do but kinda staying a bit beside each other. So we could still talk about Sonic".

Groupwork in the Outdoor Learning context allowed David to get to know other people in his class. David thought that "group work is actually really fun. Because you get to talk to people, and you get to learn more about the people that work in a group with you".

Groupwork during Outdoor Learning meant that David could "try and make more friends and you can talk to other people". Outdoor Learning allowed David to "talk to new people that you don't know".

From getting to know others in the class through Outdoor Learning, David became aware of who he worked well with. "I really never worked with him. And I wanted to. And he didn't have a partner yet. So I wanted to be his partner. And I never realised how fun it was to be in a group work with him". Sometimes the decision of who to work with during Outdoor Learning was challenging for David because "I wasn't sure if I should pick maybe someone it would be more fun with, or maybe somebody that I'd work better with. because like if I picked somebody that it'd be more fun with, then I'd have a more fun time. But if I pick somebody I'd work better with, then it'd be more successful". David's social awareness and learning came with experience "from maybe the previous lessons, where I would be working with certain people, so I'd remember if I worked well with them or not". David defined and understood who he worked well with as he preferred to "choose people that like they concentrate and help you with stuff. And like you can talk to them and like stuff like that".

Groupwork in the Outdoor Learning environment caused David to learn about himself, "I felt good working in a group cause you learn how to play a team game because you communicate and just acknowledge that it's not only about you it was fun and it was just

good to do as a group”. Sometimes David needed the support of the group in his learning and problem solving “because people could help you”. Working together in groups during Outdoor Learning created a supportive learning environment for David. He said, “if you're stuck on something like you might not know it but then your friends will help you and you'd have like a laugh while doing it and stuff”. For David, experiencing groupwork during outdoor learning “helps us to like work with other people even inside. But like, yeah, just help you to work with other people better”, demonstrating how the skills learned in the outdoor environment could transfer to the indoor classroom.

David was provided with opportunities to experience being a leader during the Outdoor Learning lessons. Being a leader made David “feel happy and challenged”. He was aware that being a leader “is a pretty important job because I had to gather all the materials which meant if I didn't collect any materials we wouldn't be able to make the base”. For David, the responsibility of leadership “made me feel a bit nervous because I never really do anything like this” and he “was a bit nervous to be the leader of my group because what if I messed up and everything goes horribly wrong it would be my fault and my responsibility and my business”. Other times David knew his friends were relying on him and “if I mess up I'll just mess the whole thing up... and then my friends will be like, Oh, no, what happened?”.

Although David's feelings around leadership were uneasy initially, he grew to like the role of being a leader, it “made me feel good being the gatherer because they relied on me and the same thing for me”. From experiencing leadership on a regular basis (every week) David began to show an understanding of leadership and the qualities of a good leader, specifically he commented that he “learned that you can do more than just boss people around”. David was also comfortable when other children were leaders “because like other people don't really boss you around”. When David was the leader he “made sure that

everything was fair, and that if someone... if someone didn't really like what they were doing, I would switch over to next person. I was be like, Hey, could you get this? Because he doesn't want to do it anymore. And I'll switch them up for something else. So everything was fair”.

Fairness was important for David when he was a leader and he made sure that “if you were the leader last time, they got a turn this time”. He also showed empathy towards others as knew that he had “to sometimes let them... have a chance”. Although David was in a leadership position he showed teamwork skills as he would “still help them and they can also learn that sometimes it might be better to be just like a builder or something ... because being a builder might be funner than just saying, Oh, you get this, you get that.” David gained a deeper understanding of leadership as it “also means to make other people happy with their decisions and choices”. His democratic and empathetic approach to leadership involved “first of all, I will ask them to talk about their choices, and then I will decide that they’re good or not, but not. But if I think they're very bad. I will say, I would say it's kind of bad, but do not worry we could make... that might come in useful in some sort. And if it was good to say good, I would mostly say good job, good job let's use that idea”. David believed that all children should experience leadership because “if they get the chance of being the leader they could actually learn about the emotions of other people and how people work like” demonstrating how learning about relationships and roles can impact on children’s experiences and learning.

Although David was aware of the importance of leadership, he understands that it can come with compromise and disappointment. One time David felt “disappointed because I wanted to be the digger but so did Colm so I decided to let Colm be the digger”. Another time David was disappointed about getting the measurer leadership role but having experienced it and on reflection “being the measurer wasn’t too bad because it was a

pretty important job”, it “was fun after all. So you know now that I think about it, I actually enjoyed myself without even one argument so it was good”. For David experiencing leadership influences his views, thoughts and emotions sometimes he preferred “being the leader and sometimes don't”. David’s view on the other children as leaders was dependent on “if I know the other person is going to try take control, I'm going to just say that I can be the leader”. He showed social awareness as he “learned from experience. So I let them be the leader to see what they act like as the leader, then I can... then in my brain, inside my head, I say they're not a really good leader if they're not doing much work, but if they are doing lots of work are in my head I say they're a really good leader”. As David and his peers became more confident with leadership they began sharing and changing leadership roles throughout the Outdoor Learning activities. David preferred this democratic approach because “you get the experience of everything”. One time David “and Martin kept swapping jobs a lot so we could both have turns with all the jobs and because of that I felt happy”. David appreciated this flexibility in use of leadership roles in Outdoor Learning as he “felt happy because instead of the regular leadership roles (I was getting bored of) we got to make our own”. This made David “feel free instead of sort of gatherer, designer and leader”. Allowing changes and autonomy in the assignment of roles allowed children to play to their strengths. This made David feel “glad that we were able to choose our own leadership roles because some people would be better at certain things than others so there could be multiple of a job”. The relational learning experienced by David during Outdoor Learning promoted self-awareness, self-esteem, confidence, relationship skills, problem solving skills and motivation to learn. These are competencies of Learner Identity.

4.5 The Reflective Learner – Theo

Theo is a composite of children's experiences of reflection during Outdoor Learning. As reflection is a common element of Outdoor Learning and Learner Identity development, Theo reflected after every Outdoor Learning lesson in his Outdoor Learning Log. The regular reflection increased the children's capacity to independently reflect during and after Outdoor Learning. This narrative explores how regular reflection supported Theo's sense of self in Outdoor Learning. Theo showed particular engagement with the idea that experiencing Outdoor Learning helped him develop life skills and knowledge for the future. This composite explores Theo's reflections on his Outdoor Learning experience and how these reflections formed his view of present and future self.

Reflection that occurred during Outdoor Learning would often show Theo positively assessing his progress in tasks and group work and often featured self-praise, compliments to others, support for peers and positive assessment. When building his hut with his group he said "I think we are doing good". While munching on his lunch in the log circle Theo said "this is the best Outdoor Learning lesson ever!". Even when Theo experienced challenge during his work he thought "we did good, we just didn't get it all done". Theo reflected on his group work by praising his team with phrases such as "ours is great!" and "ours is actually really good". Theo preferred the thematic frame of the lessons "because instead of lots of mini activities we did one really big activity".

Reflecting during the Outdoor Learning lesson occurred naturally for Theo. In the log circle with his friends Theo said "I just feel great today... because that was a very fun project". This feeling of joy coming through in Theo's reflections came from his belief that "ours was so successful". Theo's reflections during Outdoor Learning were honest and demonstrated critical thinking such as when time was almost up on a group activity, Theo reflected on and assessed their work as a team and came to the conclusion of "I think we wasted our time".

Reflection that occurred after the Outdoor Learning lesson included writing, drawing and talking and Theo “was really enjoying that”. Theo preferred writing about things he had experienced because “it's not just like talking about English or something like something that wouldn't be as, like fun. But like, when you're writing about something that you did that was really fun, I feel like that's much better”. Although sometimes Theo acknowledged that there may have been too many written reflections when he pointed out that they “made me remember some stuff, but it was kind of boring because we had to do a bunch of writing”. Theo alluded to the importance of having choice over which methods of reflection he could use when he stated that “I think I'm better at drawing than I am at writing and I explain better when I'm drawing”. While other times he “liked answering the questions, because I don't mind answering questions”.

Through reflection Theo believed that experiencing Outdoor Learning prepared him for his future life. Theo believed that he could be “the teacher” for the adults in his life in terms of the outdoors and going camping. “Once every year I normally go camping with my dad and you we have to bring like a lighter but now I can bring like flint and steel and Vaseline and stuff”. Theo values the skills he has learned during Outdoor Learning and knows that he now has a skill that he will “use at least once in your life. You will probably have to use it. It kind of makes me feel like that I'm more prepared”. Theo feels that he can now “survive” in the outdoor environment but shows self-awareness and honestly admits that only for “a little while...not for ages though”. Along with knowing his limits, Theo showed an awareness of risk management as now he knows “what will get you hurt and what won't get you hurt” from his experiences in the Outdoor environment.

Theo believes that the skills he has learned during Outdoor Learning can be easily replicated or practiced outside school time unlike other learning that happens during the school day indoors. “In the classroom like you write down that and you can't do it again...

Like at least when you're outside and you do stuff, but you can do it again. Because outside like you go outside nearly every single day. And you can do the same thing if it's fun, really fun. So in the classroom, we can't do that”.

For Theo, Outdoor Learning changed his perception of the outdoors. Before experiencing Outdoor Learning Theo “taught nature was a bit boring but now I think it's really cool. Because you got to make loads of stuff in the nature”. Theo “learned that everything is better when your outside and now I go outside more often”. He is now “more excited like because we can like show our families how.... how it's done”. For Theo Outdoor Learning has “made me feel happier outdoors and like I was the same as Donal.... I only played football and hurling outside I didn't do anything else. And now like I get over my fence and I'd jump over my fence”. He “learnt that I'm fully able to cook bread and make a nice cosy little fire so now if I go camping I can make a fire. So the wilderness is now fun”.

For Theo, experiencing Outdoor Learning was “the most fun thing in school” and “the best thing I've ever done”. “Since we finished Outdoor Learning I have been going outside more than inside”. Experiencing Outdoor Learning “made me go outside more and now I'm more active and I go to the woods that are near my house with my friends and we do like stuff like this that we build our little huts”. It also “made me get more fresh air and it gives you energy to play outside. It gives me energy to play outside”. The time and space given to reflection during Outdoor Learning has shown a potential to build self-awareness, self-esteem, confidence, independence and motivation to learn. These are competencies of Learner Identity.

4.6 Summary of chapter

This chapter has presented the findings of this study. The findings demonstrate that Outdoor Learning provided children with the opportunity for embodied, relational,

autonomous and reflective learning. Through experiencing embodied, relational, autonomous and reflective learning the children developed the competencies of self-esteem, self-awareness, independence, confidence, relationship skills, motivation to learn and problem-solving skills. All of these are also the competencies of Learner Identity. In the next chapter I will discuss these findings in relation to Outdoor Learning and Learner Identity literature and the research questions ‘How do children feel about their Learner Identity when experiencing Outdoor Learning?’ and ‘In what ways does Outdoor Learning develop competencies for Learner Identity?’

Chapter 5 – Discussion

5.1 Introduction

This research has provided an insight into children's sense of Learner Identity in Outdoor Learning in the Irish primary school context to gain a greater understanding of how Outdoor Learning provides children with these feelings about themselves. The research questions for this study were 'How do children feel about their Learner Identity when experiencing Outdoor Learning?' and 'In what ways does Outdoor Learning develop competencies for Learner Identity?'. As stated previously, the benefits of Outdoor Learning align with the competencies needed for a child to develop a Learner Identity. However, it is unclear from existing research how these benefits and competencies come about during Outdoor Learning experiences.

The local area, curriculum content and the pupils I taught guided the design of the programme. The design process further developed through researching Learner Identity and incorporating this into the programme. The teacher as researcher role taken during this study allowed me to step back as a teacher when taking observations during the Outdoor Learning lessons. This gave children a significant time to experience Outdoor Learning without the teacher's interruption. This idea of the teacher 'stepping back' from the teaching and letting the children experience Outdoor Learning independently may have had an influence on children's experience. This separation between teacher and researcher also allowed for reflexivity both as teacher and researcher.

This study exemplifies the potential Outdoor Learning in primary school has for the development of Learner Identities in children. The Outdoor Learning lessons experienced by children in this study were created using the current primary school curriculum (DES, 1999) and the draft curriculum framework (NCCA, 2020). Although the teacher in this

study had experience in Outdoor and Adventure activities on a personal level, the lessons were designed for the mainstream primary class. This means that this study may have implications for other mainstream primary teachers and schools across Ireland in the implementation of Outdoor Learning in their schools.

From the findings of this study, it has emerged that children showed development of Learner Identity competencies through the embodied, autonomous, relational and reflective learning they experienced during Outdoor Learning. This chapter aims to delve deep into the findings and relevant literature on Outdoor Learning and Learner Identity to form a discussion around embodied, autonomous, relational and reflective learning in the outdoors and how these elements of Outdoor Learning influenced the development of the Learner Identity competencies of self-esteem, self-awareness, confidence, problem solving skills, relationship skills and motivation to learn.

5.2 Embodied Learning

Embodied learning was experienced through movement, vocal freedom and sensory experiences provided by the Outdoor Learning environment. The Outdoor Learning environment played an important role in this study. Its close proximity to the school and having an outdoor space on the grounds made access to the outdoor environment easy for teacher and children. The familiarity the children had with these environments facilitated the implementation of the Outdoor Learning programme. The physical freedom of the outdoor learning environment meant that children felt they could run around with their friends and learn simultaneously. Movement supported by the Outdoor Learning environment is different from the indoor classroom where we still see children learning like their parents did, by reading and listening (Macedonia, 2019). Sherry et al. (2019) state that children are seated for over half of their time in school each day and this is also reflected in their sedentary time outside of school hours. With the knowledge that bodily

responses and cognition are directly linked, our classrooms are still very similar to the previous generation's classrooms where children sit at desks and 'learn' and where we see the "cultivation of autonomous, sedentary thinkers" (Bailey, 2019, p. 14). Modern researchers promote new teaching strategies to cultivate embodied learning (Skulmowski & Rey, 2018) however many of these strategies are subject focused or technology dependent. In contrast, during this Outdoor Learning experience, children's bodies, senses and minds were united in a thematic learning experience. The children equated a positive and fun learning environment with running around freely while learning at the same time. Mullender-Wijnsma et al. (2015) state that children's learning improves when they are physically active during their learning. The children showed self-awareness when they experienced embodied learning and how this kind of learning is fun which is, to no surprise, the way they prefer to learn. This would suggest why the children felt free in the Outdoor Learning environment. As stated by Cerino (2021), "freedom of movement is essential for children's learning and development" (p.3). Feeling this freedom supports connection to the learning space which is needed for Learner Identity development (Nasir & Cooks, 2009).

The children showed that they were aware of noise and the effect it has on their learning experience when they shared how the indoor environment can sometimes restrain their ability to communicate effectively. Interestingly they mentioned that noise has a negative effect on their learning in the indoor classroom but a positive effect on learning in the outdoors. This may be because "poor acoustics inside classrooms negatively affects the teaching and learning processes" (Astolfi et al., 2019, p.1). The children noticed the outdoors absorbing noise even though everyone was talking. The children spoke about having to concentrate on learning in the indoor environment and that this concentration only happens when surrounded by quietness. Despite the noise level in the Outdoor

Learning Environment, the children displayed a self-awareness and motivation to learn as they were able to communicate freely and the way they wanted to; and they felt that this communication improved their learning. The need to concentrate in the Outdoor Learning environment is not mentioned by the children. Instead, learning in the Outdoor Learning environment may promote a motivation to learn through an embodied experience.

The Outdoor Learning environment provided a sense of freedom so different from the indoor classroom that the children felt like different people and different learners. Their ability to talk freely in the Outdoor Learning environment may have allowed them to show their true selves (Murray and O'Brien, 2005).

Embodied Learning was also experienced by some children through sensory stimulation. The direct engagement with the outdoor environment (Ruck & Mannion, 2021) allowed for Dewey's use experience as a teaching tool (Bates, 2016). Initially this direct engagement with the Outdoor Learning environment was inhibited by children's fear of getting into trouble with their parents for getting dirty. This is relevant to research about how children's engagement with the Outdoors can be limited due to parental concerns surrounding weather, hygiene, and safety related to outdoor activities (Kandemir & Sevimli-Celik, 2021; Little & Wyver, 2008). However, after some time experiencing regular Outdoor Learning and support from their parents, children no longer had a fear of getting dirty, emphasising the importance of parental support in Outdoor Learning programmes in schools (Humberstone & Stan, 2011; O'Brien & Murray, 2007).

Children were aware of the sounds and details in the Outdoor Learning Environment. The texture of the forest floor or uneven ground under their feet was felt by the children. This suggests that children can feel a difference between the forest floor and the indoor classroom floors. The outdoor environment is very different from the environment of the

indoor classroom where everything is ‘child-friendly’, and children know where everything in the classroom is. This predictability may prevent adventure, exploration and surprise from occurring during learning. The tactile reference made by the children is unsurprising as humans evolutionarily acquire knowledge through physically exploring objects (Novak & Schwan, 2021). “While seeing, hearing, and smelling gather information from a distance, touching (and tasting) brings the body in direct contact with other beings, artifacts, or materials” (Novak & Schwan, 2021, p. 638). Outdoor Learning allowed this to happen for the children in this study. This highlights the importance of the whole body being active in the learning process promoting a motivation to learn and a further connection to the space (Nasir & Cooks, 2009; Novak & Schwan, 2021; Ruck & Mannion, 2021).

The children’s level of observation and ability to articulate the colours present in the environment around them shows the impact of the nature’s palette on their Outdoor Learning experience. This links to Kemple et al. (2016), who state that exploration, observation, labelling, description, comparing, and classifying skills are developed during play in natural environments. These colours are quite different to the bright and shiny primary colours that feature in the indoor classroom. Despite teachers investing a significant amount of time and money into creating colourful and engaging classrooms, the children appreciated the colours present in a classroom created by nature. This level of observation by the children shows their presence and embodiment in the Outdoor Learning experience as children learned using their senses (Harris, 2018).

Dewey’s belief that quality experience promotes growth and creativity among children was seen when many children linked the use of natural resources like sticks, stones, leaves and also tools with feelings of creativity and maturity (Bates, 2016). Engaging with the outdoor environment like this (using natural resources and tools for learning) made

children feel responsible and trusted which increased their self-esteem and confidence in their learning. As alluded to previously, the Outdoor Learning environment is constantly changing. The teacher placed trust in the children as they found and used resources in the environment.

The children enjoyed using natural resources in the outdoors. Despite the abundance of engaging resources we use in the indoor classroom such as iPads, interactive whiteboards and equipment used for different subjects such as books, copies, paints, markers, the children equated using natural resources and having to search for these resources with feelings of fun and enjoyment. This contrasts with Alexander et al. (1992) view of how the learning environment must be orderly and purposeful to encourage a high level of interest among children. The Outdoor Learning environment is not orderly, but it is purposeful as children equate it with feelings of joy, fun and motivation. Perhaps we are overcomplicating things and the route to embodied learning is just outside our school's front door. If schools are to support children's cognitive development and Learner Identities, they need to listen to the children and "the way we like to learn".

In summary, Outdoor Learning demonstrated a potential to develop Learner Identity competencies through the embodied learning experience provided in the outdoor environment.

5.3 Autonomous Learning

Through autonomous learning children showed a development in the competencies of independence, motivation to learn, self-awareness, relationship skills and problem-solving skills. Given that this maximised choice was "the best" thing in the lessons suggests that the children experienced motivation to learn through having choice in their learning (Patall et al., 2010; Dennis et al., 2014).

The children equated choice with feelings of joy which relates to research surrounding choice and independence in Outdoor Learning, where the best performing sites were those that maximized options, including choice about where to play, what to play with and whom” (Dennis et al., 2014, p. 45). The children articulated how they like when they are not limited in the materials they can use for a task, showing the importance of independent choice for autonomy in children. “For the child to act freely and have freedom of choice, we must also consider a prepared educational environment with many resources and activities that support the child’s developmental growth” (Cerino, 2021, p. 3). These natural resources, as alluded to in the Embodied Learning section, are for the most part, not readily available in the indoor classroom. By allowing the children the opportunity to choose their own materials they can independently choose what they will feel success and confidence in working with, giving them autonomy over their learning and promoting motivation to learn. Through choice children experience autonomy as they take control over elements of their learning which is important element of Learner Identity development (Bernstein & Solomon, 1999).

The children stated that getting to choose who they work with was something that did not happen regularly in school. Despite research promoting flexible or activity based seating in primary schools (Fernandes et al., 2011), almost 50% of teachers’ classroom seating arrangements are based on academic and classroom management reasons (Gremmen et al., 2016). Due to the children’s lived classroom experience it is not surprising that they did not expect to be choosing who they worked with when it is often managed by the teacher.

The children stated that this level of autonomy and choice in their learning was surprising initially. Making choices throughout the Outdoor Learning activities, when things went wrong, caused children to work together under pressure to make a decision. According to

Brown & Patton (2017), “Motivation cannot be seen but can be observed through a person’s actions and words” (p.3247).

Along with choices and decision making, children also encountered social challenges. Problem solving in a group dynamic outdoors offered challenging real-life social situations for children to navigate and overcome. Social problem-solving skills are important for the child’s social functioning and academic achievement (Dubow & Tisak, 1989; Walker & Henderson, 2012).

Solutions to social challenges in the outdoors seemed to come naturally. This does not suggest that the children felt comfortable navigating these social problems but rather suggests that the environment facilitated their ability to find a solution in a healthy manner. It is important to note here that the teacher did not intervene in any problem solving that occurred during this programme following Dewey’s view of teacher control being a moving spirit instead of an integral part of learning (Bates, 2016). The children, when given the opportunity, showed that they were capable of solving social issues independent of an adult. As a result of having no adult influence in social problem solving, social problems never escalated, children acted on their desires, instincts and needs for their own learning and development (Murray & O’Brien, 2005; Montessori, 1966).

It is important to note that although challenge was planned for in the Outdoor Learning lessons, other unplanned challenges also arose. Some children showed resilience when solving problems during Outdoor Learning, they did not give up, and interestingly rarely asked for assistance from the teacher or Special Needs Assistant (SNA). This shows the motivation that came with independence during Outdoor Learning. The Outdoor learning environment provided children with problems to solve and challenges to overcome.

Children met these problems with motivation which in turn allowed the children to be resilient in the Outdoor Learning environment (Murphy, 2018). Yoon et al. (2022) highlight the positive effect resilience building in young children has on children's academic success in primary school. Yoon et al. (2022) highlights the need for early resilience building interventions in schools and the Outdoor Learning environment may provide children with resilience building encounters.

It is hard to pinpoint why children did not look for comfort from the adults present in the Outdoor Learning space when they injured themselves. They were able to self-assess and conclude that they were fine to continue. Perhaps a mixture of engagement, enjoyment, motivation to continue with the task, independence and the open space affected their decision to self-soothe and stay on task. This is in contrast to Brennan's (2020) study where children in the classroom felt they needed teacher praise to stay motivated and feel success. This highlights a difference in how children portray or feel about themselves indoor and outdoor classroom. In this case the Outdoor Learning environment allowed children to take control of how they dealt with situations.

It was also apparent that when children successfully solved a problem or challenge in the outdoors, they were able to clearly recount and articulate this later in great detail. A link between learning and the positive effect of problem solving can be seen here as successful problem solving in Outdoor Learning cemented learning. For some children, who struggle to articulate themselves orally and also in writing, I was amazed at the level of detail they were able to give in recounting their problem solving and challenges. This relates to research that states that there is a strong correlation between problem solving and visual, verbal and long-term memory in children (Aydoğan & Özyürek, 2020). This links with research that states that problem solving in Outdoor Learning allows children of all abilities to meet learning outcomes (Marchant et al., 2019; Waite, 2010).

Positive feelings were associated with resilience-based challenges where repeated actions and something that took a long time to complete did not bore the children. In the indoor environment some children would often ‘give up’ on a task quite quickly. In fact, they sometimes would show low self-esteem with cognitive challenges. The Outdoor Learning environment provided these children with challenges and time to solve these problems at their own pace. As a result of this, these children grew in self-esteem, confidence and the ability to articulate their learning (O’Brien & Murray, 2007). The children agreed that it was easier to solve problems in the outdoor environment because “problem solving is developed in the greater freedom offered by the outside” (Waite, 2010, p. 119).

In this Outdoor Learning programme, the thematic frame of the programme allowed children time and space to think and make decisions independent of the teacher. The programme did not follow a subject-by-subject order, instead subjects merged during the learning allowing more time to be spent on a topic instead of a specific subject. This is in contrast to the subject-by-subject approach that occurs in the indoor classroom where time is of the essence in the race to complete the curriculum (Devine, 2020; Klassen & Chiu, 2010) leaving little time for getting deep into problem solving. The independence given to children during Outdoor Learning lessons instilled feelings of pride and confidence among the children (Prince & Diggory, 2023; Waite, 2010). The time and space seems to be vital in affording opportunities for independence in the Outdoor Learning environment (Murphy, 2018; Murray & O’Brien, 2005). Independence was often linked to the child being in control over what they were doing. The idea of being “in charge” of oneself is interesting as here, it comes from the feeling of being allowed to do whatever you like and make your own decisions in the Outdoor Learning environment. It appears children do not usually feel this way in school and therefore this feeling was a new or unfamiliar feeling for them. Perhaps feeling in charge or in control of a situation can only come when one

feels secure in that situation. As stated by Cerino (2021), “freedom cannot occur in the absence of independence, and therefore, a system of education that builds on liberty should assist the children in obtaining independence” (p.2). This security and independence may have been a result of the trust given to the children by the teacher in the Outdoor Learning environment.

Cerino (2021) states that independence is a way of developing trust in children. “Children who show a high degree of independence have higher confidence, self-esteem and motivation” (Cerino, 2021, p. 2). The children noted when the teacher trusted them to use risky or “dangerous” tools that they felt responsible and more mature. Although the “risky” activities in the lessons were assessed and managed by the teacher, some children still gained a feeling of responsibility from them. “When we restrict children’s risky play, as they get older they fear taking risks, which impacts having enough courage and self-trust to become increasingly independent (Cree & Robb, 2021, p. 124). The level of trust experienced by children in the Outdoor Learning environment was unexpected for them. The trusting relationship between teacher and child seemed to be amplified in the Outdoor Learning context as it featured more ‘dangerous’ activities. Many children had not experienced this level of responsibility and trust in the indoor classroom. Children’s perception of teacher-pupil relationship was changed due to the trust given to them during Outdoor Learning (Murray & O’Brien, 2005). Trust from the teacher in the Outdoor Learning environment allowed children to challenge themselves independently in ways they may not have experienced before.

The feeling of unease that came with sudden independence motivated children to do their best and not let their group down. Children were aware of the expectations of their group and wanted to do their best for their group. “We should not underestimate how impactful the outdoor experience was for many of the pupils who had never before taken on roles of

responsibility” (Sharpe, 2014, p. 205). The class in this study experience independent learning when indoors, however, independent learning in the outdoors seemed to amplify the feelings of pride, confidence, control and autonomy while also amplifying the feelings of being out of one’s comfort zone.

Having overcome challenges in the outdoor environment along with physical, social and personal challenges, children felt a great sense of pride. The feeling of pride came from a variety of experiences in the Outdoor Learning environment; working with friends, achieving something, learning something new, peer praise, peer validation or succeeding at a challenge. The children’s experience of Outdoor Learning had a positive effect on their self-confidence and self-esteem (Prince & Diggory, 2023; Barron, 2014; Murray & O’Brien, 2005). The level of self-awareness portrayed by some children often references their abilities, preferences, and achievements. Outdoor Learning provided children with the opportunity to learn more about their capabilities.

Learning about their capabilities made some children feel limitless because they could make their own decisions and do things they would not be able to do at home. This links with Kolb & Kolb (2012) view that someone with a Learner Identity believes in their ability to learn. The Outdoor Learning environment provided that feeling of self-awareness of one’s abilities and that these abilities did not have a limit. Although there are boundaries and limits in Outdoor Learning for safety reasons, these do not seem to impact children’s feeling of limitlessness in this environment (Dennis et al., 2014). This feeling of limitlessness comes from the independence they received in the Outdoor Learning environment. Being in the Outdoors allowed children to act on their thoughts and ideas, promoting autonomous learning (Murray and O’Brien, 2005).

Through experiencing Outdoor Learning many of the children became aware of their learning styles, strengths and weaknesses, while others simply found a new love for the outdoors. Giving children the opportunity to express themselves the way they want to lead to a realisation of what they were capable of. According to Murray & O'Brien (2005) in the Outdoor Learning environment "children act differently or show behaviour that has not been seen before (p.62). The space Outdoor Learning offers promotes self-expression different from that of the indoor environment (Lee et al., 2022) as children "express their potential, abilities and curiosity and perceive themselves as constructors of projects carried out in school while reinforcing their identities and autonomy" (Cerino, 2021, p. 8).

Outdoor Learning allowed some children to feel "normal", Children were aware that they are still the same person indoors and outdoors however the outdoors allows them to be the normal version of themselves. This feeling of normal came as children spoke loudly and moved their bodies to express themselves and communicate effectively. This mimics real-life encounters with peers outside school and therefore feels more 'normal' for the children (Murphy, 2018; Murray & O'Brien, 2005). When children spoke about feeling normal in the Outdoor Learning environment, they were simply describing being a child. The children showed an awareness of the social constructs required in the indoor classroom and are aware that some behaviour would not be suitable indoors. Interestingly, in the classroom they seem to be deprived of getting a chance to feel "normal". This raises questions for the indoor environment and what it is providing that is preventing children from feeling normal.

Realising what they were capable of was so empowering for the children that they felt like they had a superpower. Superheroes are a common feature in children's lives, usually a fantasy character with superpowers who does extraordinary things for good. Being a leader, helping their friends and solving problems sparked this feeling in children. Getting

the opportunity to take the lead was something that children did not experience often and as a result they felt extraordinary.

In summary, autonomous learning occurred when children were given independence in the choices, decisions, problem solving and challenges they encountered during Outdoor Learning.

5.4 Relational Learning

The feeling of happiness when working with friends suggests that the children were comfortable and content in the learning environment. Children are motivated to learn when strong relationships are formed (McKay & Macomber, 2021; Murphy & O'Brien, 2005). Children enjoyed working and learning with their friends as this meant that they got to talk to their friends while they worked together.

Due to Outdoor Learning offering an alternative and preferred communication environment for the children, they were able to get to know others in their class.

Relationships began to form and strengthen which would be unlikely to happen within the confines of who they sit beside indoors. Outdoor Learning programmes are shown to have the potential to build new social relationships among pupils (Sharpe, 2014; Murray & O'Brien, 2005). The idea of getting to know others raises questions on the social opportunities the indoor classroom provides these children. Children who were more reserved noted that they got to know other people in their class during Outdoor Learning. Perhaps it is the autonomy and self confidence that Outdoor Learning provides that has allowed these children to communicate the way they want to.

Children became aware of who they worked well with and who they were not so productive with. Self-awareness and friendship came from new pairings during learning. According to Sharpe (2014) "the forging of new friendships is supported through

problem-solving and critical-thinking activities which have their root in trusting relationships” (p.205).

Children represent Dewey’s beliefs when they showed their ability to reflect and analyse a previous social interaction that occurred during Outdoor Learning (Bates, 2016). They then made informed choices and decision based on their reflection. According to Molyneux et al., (2022), Outdoor Learning has the potential to develop social and emotional learning among children, one being “deciding who they collaborate with and how” (p.4). Although children learned about others, they also learned about themselves as they began to define and understand their own preferences, needs and desires (Molyneux et al., 2022).

Through groupwork during Outdoor Learning, many children noted the supportive atmosphere present. When faced with a problem children turned to their friends for help. This shows that Learner Identity competencies were being nurtured as according to Singal & Swann (2011), Learner Identity competencies are developed when children are cared for and helped by others in the learning environment. The mention of laughter while helping each other perhaps illustrates the motivation to learn and growing relationships due to the positive atmosphere created by friends helping each other in the Outdoor Environment. These elements suggest that cooperative learning is occurring where children work together during learning while supporting each other, sharing resources and celebrating success (Veldman et al., 2020). The relationships created in the learning environment are a key feature of Learner Identity development (Collett, 2020; Nasir & Cooks, 2009).

Through working together, children showed self-awareness as they felt they worked effectively. Children were able to make choices and decisions as a group to improve their

own learning experiences in the outdoors. This is like Murray & O'Brien's (2005) research on forest school in the UK where children "transferred some of the skills they have developed through their attendance and experience at Forest School to different settings such as the home and the classroom or at school in general" (p.67). This shows the potential transferability of Outdoor Learning to other aspects of school life.

Oftentimes we see leadership in the outdoors as a common trait of higher education Outdoor Education courses (Vigane & Dyrstad, 2022), meaning that leadership in the outdoors in childhood is uncharted territory at present. Leadership is a Learner Identity development construct outlined in this study and was therefore planned for in the outdoor learning lessons.

Some were aware of the importance of leadership roles in getting tasks completed. Roles of responsibility in the Outdoor Learning context had an impact on children in many ways (Sharpe, 2014). Initially children felt unsure about their leadership ability. Feelings of initial nervousness were evident in children for many different reasons. Delving into the unknown was quite daunting for some children. Although children felt nervous about doing something new, they did not let this stop them, showing resilience and a motivation to learn. Like adults, children predict that exploration can have consequences but are more likely to explore (Liquin & Gopnik, 2022).

Being a leader put children in a position where they had to lead elements of their groupwork. Children were aware that their peers were reliant on them for elements of groupwork which created nervous feelings among the children in leadership roles. Being a leader forced children to experience and overcome these feelings.

Although feelings surrounding leadership were initially uneasy, some children liked or grew to like the importance of being a leader. For particularly quiet children, who usually

take a back seat in group situations, having leadership roles during learning meant that they had to come to the fore and lead. Children had the confidence to speak out while in a leadership role, they also praised themselves. Children's experience with leadership roles compared to others speaks to the narrative that leadership is idiosyncratic across children (Chen, 2023). This means despite receiving the same leadership roles, each child's experience the roles differently. This links back to the interpretivist paradigm framing this research and the idea that people experience multiple realities which are socially constructed through language, shared meanings, instruments and context (Abdul Rehman & Alharthi, 2016).

For some children their perception of leadership changed. Interestingly children's perceived idea of leadership was like a dictatorship, where someone would control or "boss" you around. Despite being introduced to leadership and having the opportunity to be a leader, children did not exploit this new role but showed respect for their peers. Children were conscious of their positionality as leaders of the group. In leadership roles children showed their ability to influence people. This is one of Yukl's (2002) categories of leadership behaviour. Vigane & Dyrstad (2022) discuss these categories in relation to Outdoor Education in higher education, however these children demonstrated this skill during Outdoor Learning at just nine and ten years old.

Fairness was also evident when children were choosing or allocating leadership roles. This empathetic and understanding approach to leadership demonstrated by the children showed an awareness of the importance of relationships and an effort to keep and build upon these peer relationships by supporting each other through leadership. Masterson & Kersey (2013) speak about how the "value of empathy in eliminating the social causes that result in human unhappiness" (p.211). Building relationships is another key

leadership behaviour and a competency for Learner Identity development (Bernstein & Solomon, 1999; Yukl, 2002).

Helping others through leadership shows that the children were supporting, networking, managing conflict and showing teamwork skills which are all necessary components of building relationships during leadership (Vigane & Dyrstad, 2022). According to Vigane & Dyrstad (2022) and Yukl (2002) leaders must be able to influence people, give and seek information, make decisions and build relationships. The children showed that they were aware of personal conduct and professional ethics in a leadership position despite being a child.

The children were also aware that with leadership can come conflict and disappointment. They navigated these sensitive group decisions and problems with the feelings of others in mind. Sometimes children were disappointed with the leadership roles they received or chose. Although the children did not like these roles initially, they did in the end demonstrating that experience has an effect on our views, thoughts and emotions (Bates, 2016).

As children became comfortable with leadership they began sharing and changing roles between group members. This was an autonomous decision made by the groups. Children enjoyed changing roles and saw it as fun, cool and made them feel happy. Leadership styles may be conceptualized as bi-dimensional or multi-dimensional that can manifest in dynamic forms (Chen, 2023). This happened when children became confident with leadership roles, they began to adopt a more flexible approach. From children gaining regular leadership experiences in Outdoor Learning, they begin to understand what works best for them, their group, the task at hand and they begin to adapt.

All children preferred when they could create their own leadership roles within their groups. The understanding of their own abilities and the abilities of others is evident here when the children create their own leadership roles. After experiencing leadership over the weeks, children became aware of their strengths (Bates, 2016). When it came to creating their own leadership roles, they created roles that played to their strengths. This speaks to Reay (2010) belief that Learning Identities are all about difference as children made those leadership roles that would specifically suit their strengths.

In summary, the Outdoor Learning environment promoted a preferred communication style among children which promoted a motivation to learn. This motivation experienced during group work in Outdoor Learning meant that children had the confidence to get to know other children. From working with new people children became self-aware of who they work most effectively with. The supportive atmosphere experienced by children during cooperative learning in the outdoors demonstrated potential for improved relationship skills and motivation to learn.

5.5 Reflective Learning

The regular reflection inspired the capacity to independently reflect during and after Outdoor Learning. Children's reflections on their Outdoor Learning experience formed the child's view of present and future self.

Reflection that occurred during Outdoor Learning showed confidence, self-esteem and relationship skills as it often featured self-praise, compliments to others, support for peers and positive assessment. According to Boud (1985) reflection is needed "during the experience as a way of dealing with the vast array of inputs and coping with the feelings that are generated" (p.10). Interestingly, Brennan (2020) found that peer and teacher praise were two factors that the pupils mentioned attributing to their development of

Learner Identity. Peer praise featured during Outdoor Learning but children did not look for teacher praise in the Outdoor Learning environment in this study. Instead, children praised themselves. This suggests a strong sense of self in the Outdoor Learning environment as children did not need reassurance or praise from others. They were confident in themselves. In Brennan's (2020) study, children preferred receiving praise from the teacher over their peers and felt disappointed when they did not receive teacher praise. This is in contrast to this study on Outdoor Learning and Learner Identity where children felt the trust of the teacher in the Outdoor Learning environment and did not need praise to feel confident in themselves.

Although these nuggets of encouragement benefitted the group, it is more likely that they are as a result of the child enjoying the task. This is known as reflective activity (Dewey, 1933). This type of reflection seems to have occurred naturally as children worked together through tasks and challenges. "By reflecting on an experience, it is possible to affect change, by perceiving it differently and changing how we react to similar experiences" (Leigh, 2020, p. 3).

Although most reflections, observations or assessments demonstrated by the children were of a positive manner, some children produced honest, less positive, thoughts on their work. The children showed an awareness and confidence in understanding that it is ok not to finish a task perfectly. "Describing events can bring us to an awareness of the feelings that were present during the initial experience" (Boud, 1985, p. 29). This is in contrast to Brennan's (2020) study where children's high scores, positive feedback and prior knowledge effected children's sense of Learner Identity. Children acknowledged when their group did not work effectively or productively. They showed awareness of the group's ability and how they could have been more successful at tasks if they worked more effectively. This shows that in the Outdoor Learning environment motivation to

learn, or in this case motivation to learn in the next activity, seems to have occurred without the need for approval or high grades.

Reflection that occurred directly after the Outdoor Lesson featured writing, drawing and talking. The experience was essential for reflection hence why formal reflection occurred directly after the Outdoor Learning experience (Leigh, 2020). During the focus group interviews the children reflected on their experience verbally, in groups (Bates, 2016). Here “reflection was not a self-absorbed activity, but one that gained more meaning in context of the relationships of those around them” (Leigh, 2020, p. 15). In these verbal reflections children believed that experiencing Outdoor Learning had prepared them for their future lives. During and after the Outdoor Learning programme children followed Dewey’s reflective activity as they viewed each past or present experience from the perspective of how it can shape future actions (Bates, 2016). The reference to thinking about something “in a life way” suggests that the children were connecting what they were doing in the outdoor learning environment to their own lives beyond the classroom and the school. The learning seems to be more personal in this environment despite the prominence of groupwork and teamwork which was planned for.

Overall children felt that the learning that happened in the Outdoor Learning environment could be easily replicated outside school time unlike the learning that happens in the indoor classroom. “The children’s reflections through journaling, speaking, drawing and moving showed that they used their embodied self-awareness to make sense of what they were experiencing and feeling” (Leigh, 2020, pp. 15–16). This was because the outdoor environment is available to children outside school whereas the school grounds, classroom and its contents are not, making Outdoor Learning more relevant for children. This speaks to Ruck & Mannion (2021) on how children experience a lived curriculum when learning in the Outdoors. Children were able to relate to the learning that happened in the outdoor

environment, highlighting Miller's (2017) importance of creating the seamless link between the indoor and outdoor learning environments.

In summary reflections by children in this study were mostly of a positive nature, building self-esteem and confidence in themselves and other children. The skill of reflection also allowed the children to critically analyse their effort during Outdoor Learning and articulate these honest realisations openly. The different types of reflection offered to the children were writing, drawing and talking with each child preferring a different method of reflection. Regular reflection allowed children to see their future selves taking part in such Outdoor Learning activities due to Outdoor Learning teaching them what they are capable of.

5.6 Summary of chapter

The findings in this study have shown that Outdoor Learning developed Learner Identity competencies in the children through providing an embodied, relational, autonomous and reflective learning experience. The children demonstrated self-awareness, self-esteem, confidence, independence, relationship skills, motivation to learn and problem-solving skills in their articulation of Outdoor Learning experiences, supporting Bernstein & Solomon's (1999) view that "pedagogic modalities generated in the reconceptualised arena attempt to shape and distribute forms of consciousness, identity and desire" (p. 270).

Implementing the Learner Identity development elements into teaching indoors may also have the potential to build the competencies needed for Learner Identity development. However, the Outdoor Learning environment provided distinctive features that aided children with the development of these Learner Identity competencies. These features include space for movement and expression, availability of natural resources for learning, opportunity to experience risk and experiential learning for both curricular and social

learning. Along with the physical features that enables the impacts on Learner Identity, the inclusion of leadership, teamwork and reflection allowed children to develop socially while simultaneously developing self-esteem, confidence and self-awareness.

The next chapter will conclude this study drawing on the limitations of this research and implications for future research.

Chapter 6 – Conclusion

6.1 Introduction

This chapter will conclude the study by summarising the key research findings in the relation to the research aims and research questions, as well as the value and contribution of the study. It will also review the limitations of the study and propose opportunities for further research. I have explored children's sense of Learner Identity while experiencing Outdoor Learning in an Irish primary school context. My aim in this study was to gain a greater understanding of how children feel about themselves when they participate in Outdoor Learning during the school day and how Outdoor Learning makes children feel this way.

6.2 Answering my research question and addressing the research aims

This study aimed to explore how Outdoor Learning can develop Learner Identity in children through the design and implementation of a thematic Outdoor Learning programme that covers the curricular content of the Irish primary curriculum. The Outdoor learning programme was designed to provide a curricular-based Outdoor Learning experience for the children. The programme covered a variety of subjects, topics and content from the Irish primary curriculum for 3rd class (DES,1999). The thematic frame of the programme took inspiration from the curriculum framework (NCCA, 2020) and kept with the integrative nature of Outdoor Learning (Kelly, 2022; Prince, 2019). The reason for pulling both from the current curriculum and the curriculum framework was to develop a programme that works with both, further demonstrating the value of Outdoor Learning.

The thematic Outdoor Learning programme was implemented over eight weeks. Learner Identity development constructs of choice, teamwork, leadership, responsibility and

reflection were specifically planned for in every lesson despite Outdoor Learning providing many of these anyway. Data collection methods included observations, fieldnotes, children's reflections, teacher reflections and focus group interviews. It is important to revisit the prominence of the voice of the child as we conclude this study. The careful consideration of data collection methods meant that children in this study articulated their experience in the most authentic way for them. This further highlighted the importance of reflection in Outdoor Learning (Dismore & Bailey, 2005) as it is only from giving this time for reflection for data collection purposes that I realised the importance of allowing children to reflect as a teacher and more importantly listening and acting upon their views (Lundy, 2007). Without providing space, voice, audience and influence for the child's views (Lundy, 2007), I would not have gained the in depth understanding of their experiences of Outdoor Learning. As a researcher, rich data came from the multi-use of reflection, but as a teacher, I learned a lot more about my pupils on a personal and individual level. Following Dewey's experience and learning theory, "encouraging learners to share their thoughts will allow the teacher to get to know the learners better and benefit the overall learning experience of the class" (Bates, 2016, p. 19).

To answer my research questions of 'How do children feel about their Learner Identity when experiencing Outdoor Learning?' and 'In what ways does Outdoor Learning develop competencies needed for Learner Identity?', from experiencing the Outdoor Learning programme, children shared their feelings of becoming self-aware, growth in self-esteem and confidence, effective problem-solving skills and relationship skills and a motivation to learn. The findings suggest that these competencies were felt or developed by the children due to the embodied, relational, autonomous and reflective learning they experienced during the Outdoor Learning programme. Embodied learning was

experienced through the freedom and sensory aspects provided by the Outdoor Learning environment. Autonomous learning occurred when children were given independence in the choices, decisions, problem solving and challenges they encountered during the Outdoor Learning programme. Relational learning occurred as children worked together in groups to solve problems and overcome social and task-orientated challenges. Relational learning further occurred when children experienced leadership roles during learning. Finally, reflective learning happened organically throughout the Outdoor Learning lessons as children reflected on and assessed their own learning and group work. Reflective learning occurred after Outdoor Learning lessons in the form of written and drawn reflective Outdoor Learning Logs. Reflection also occurred orally at the end of the Outdoor Learning programme in the form of focus group interviews.

6.3 Contributions to the field

With the growth of interest in Outdoor Learning in the last few years (Waite, 2020), it is important for researchers to begin to refine definitions, characteristics and key elements of Outdoor Learning to ensure quality teaching and learning. Despite Outdoor Learning being aimed at school aged children, most research on Outdoor Learning focuses on adults, teacher's or practitioner's views and perspectives of Outdoor Learning.

Interestingly, when the aim of the research is to look for the benefits of Outdoor Learning, the findings often emerge from adult's, teacher's or practitioner's perception of how Outdoor Learning benefitted the child. There is a lack of the child's voice throughout Outdoor Learning literature.

Although the competencies demonstrated and communicated by the children in this study are in line with the benefits from previous studies, and also may fill the gaps of identity and communication competencies we see in Aistear (NCCA, 2009) and post primary

(DES, 2015) as highlighted by (McGuinness, 2018), this study highlights the child's feeling of self, keeping the whole child at the centre of the study.

Echoing Meighan & Rubenstein (2018) statements that the majority of Outdoor Learning research focuses on the outputs or benefits and their call for research to be conducted on the inputs or characteristics of Outdoor Learning programmes, this study has begun to answer this call by the emergence of embodied, autonomous, relational and reflective learning experience as characteristics of a successful Outdoor Learning.

Throughout the study children shared that Outdoor Learning was their preferred method of learning, highlighting the contrast with and the constraints of mainstream schooling.

The benefits of Outdoor Learning are well evidenced (Lambert et al., 2020), and it is known that Outdoor Learning allows for self-expression (Lee et al., 2022). However, the children in this study communicated the level of self-expression facilitated through Outdoor Learning experiences to be larger and more impactful than current studies.

Children in this research shared that Outdoor Learning provided a learning environment where they could be their true selves. From getting to experience learning as their authentic self, children discovered their own capabilities. The time given to children to work independently had a prominent role in the discovery of abilities.

Leadership is needed for Learner Identity. However, leadership often does not feature in Outdoor Learning for children, it often features in Outdoor Education programmes at third level (Vigane & Dyrstad, 2022). This study has demonstrated the benefits of experiencing leadership during Outdoor Learning for primary school children.

This study has further emphasised the suitability of Outdoor Learning to primary school and the easy and effective integration it allows for primary school subject areas debunking

ideas about Outdoor Learning being suited to less formal education settings (Geary, 2008; Nicolopoulou, 2010).

Returning to the NCCA's (2016) statement which suggests that the way a curriculum is organised has an impact on teaching and learning that occurs. Given the inclusion of the Outdoors as a learning environment in the curriculum framework (NCCA, 2023), it is hoped that this will have a positive impact on Outdoor Learning in Irish primary schools.

Overall, gaining children's view of Learner Identity in Outdoor Learning has not only highlighted the importance of providing regular Outdoor Learning to primary school children but also highlighted the importance of listening to children thoughts and perspectives on their learning. If the aim is to nurture children's Learner Identities in school, we must listen to the children we are teaching and act upon what we hear (Lundy, 2007).

6.4 Limitations of the study

There are many elements of this study that prevent the generalisability of the findings. Firstly, this research was undertaken with one primary school class in Ireland. Adding to this limitation, this class consisted of all boys and limits the generalisability of these findings as it is unknown how girls may feel about their Learner Identity during Outdoor Learning.

Although the class in this study experience Outdoor Learning on a regular basis, the data collection took place over an eight-week period. A longer data collection period would have improved the trustworthiness of the findings. This study's scope did not allow for an exploration of Learner Identity some time after they experienced Outdoor Learning. Therefore, it is not known whether children retained the Learner Identity competencies they gained through Outdoor Learning over time.

Given my love for the outdoors, my experience in friluftsliv and my experience as an outdoor instructor who has worked seasonally in Outdoor Education centres for many years, it is unknown how a teacher with little experience in the outdoors would implement and teach such an Outdoor Learning programme.

This school in this study has an extensive Outdoor Learning space on the school grounds and access to a forest which is a 20 minute walk from the school. I am aware that many schools are not privileged with these facilities and therefore the results of this study cannot be generalised for all schools in Ireland.

While the outdoor environment played a prominent role in this study, the parameters of this study did not allow for further exploration of how or if Learner Identity fits within place responsive pedagogies. As stated by Lynch and Mannion (2021) “more-than-human features of place can be thought of as co-ingredients in education in outdoor settings” (P.865). In this study I used nature and the local environment to teach elements of the primary school curriculum to my class. Therefore, the outdoor environment was used as an environment for learning. This study did not investigate the relationship or space for place and nature in Identity models however it is clear from this study that the outdoor learning environment possibly had a part to play in children’s sense of Learner Identity. Further research that focuses on the effects of place and the outdoors on children’s sense of learner identity would give clearer understanding of how place and nature may merge or fit into identity theories.

6.5 Recommendations for research

The comparison between the outdoor and indoor learning environments which unintentionally permeates this study raises questions for the social constructs of our classrooms. Children in this study felt normal, like a better learner and like they had a

superpower when experiencing Outdoor Learning. They felt they could express themselves both physically through movement and verbally through talking. It is evident that many children felt that they could be their true self in the Outdoor Learning environment. Research into comparing children's sense of Learner Identity indoors and outdoors may be needed to fully understand the Learner Identity development environments provided to children in the Irish primary school contexts.

As this research did not investigate the longevity of Learner Identities created during Outdoor Learning, it is fitting to suggest that research into the effect of experience Outdoor Learning has on a child's childhood and learning more generally as they grow older.

Having shared their developments in Learner Identity through Outdoor Learning, it raises questions about these one-size-fits-all social and emotional learning programmes discussed in the literature review. Are we complicating the fostering and development of these 'soft skills' or competencies by creating more programmes for teachers to implement on top of their already demanding schedules? Further research on how the primary school curriculum can be taught through Outdoor Learning would further highlight the potential of Outdoor Learning for the development of the child. Including the child's voice in this research would be important as this is the only way we can fully understand how children feel about their learning (Flutter & Rudduck, 2004).

Teacher reflections were a data collection tool used in this research. The teacher reflections influenced the design and implementation of the lessons each week. However, these teacher reflections also unveiled the transformative experience had by the teacher during this data collection period. From the analysis of my teacher reflections in this

study, I would like to conduct or see research conducted on teacher's identities while practicing Outdoor Learning with their class.

6.6 Recommendations for policy

With the inclusion of outdoors as an environment for teaching and learning now in the curriculum framework in Ireland (NCCA, 2023), it is important that this area is given importance in schools as this curriculum is rolled out. Inspiration can be taken from Scotland's Curriculum of Excellence (Learning and Teaching Scotland et al., 2010) where a document on Outdoor Learning though the curriculum is available for teachers. I believe continuous professional development in the area of Outdoor Learning for practicing teachers will be important as teachers step into this time of curriculum change. Given that the current curriculum has not been updated since 1999, support for teachers around this change will be needed.

6.7 Recommendations for practice

My recommendations for teachers practicing Outdoor Learning is to begin to include thematic learning into the Outdoor Learning lessons. Thematic learning allowed children space and time to deeply interrogate subject areas in the Outdoor Learning environment. Not only was thematic learning beneficial for the children but it provided a more meaningful learning experience for children.

The time and space mentioned in this study was due to the teacher taking on the role of teacher as researcher. In this role I was forced to step back as the teacher. Although difficult, it is a very rewarding experience. I would encourage teachers to step back more in their teaching to allow children to work independently and give them the space and time they need in their learning environments.

I would also encourage teachers to implement multiple methods of reflection for children into their teaching and follow Lundy's (2007) framework for children's voice. By doing this, children will have an active role in their learning and the teacher will gain a greater understanding of their pupils on an individual level allowing for deeper connections to form.

6.8 Summary of chapter

This chapter has summarised the key findings in relation to the research questions and aims. Contributions to the field have been presented, followed by the limitations of this research. This chapter has concluded with further recommendations for research, policy and practice around Outdoor Learning and children's Learner Identity.

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Appendix A: Research Ethics Committee Approval

Ollscoil Chathair Bhaile Átha Cliath
Dublin City University



Ms. Rachel Rafferty
School of Arts, Education and Movement

Dr. Maura Coulter
School of Arts, Education and Movement

16th July 2020

REC Reference: DCUREC/2020/124

Proposal Title: Examining how (a) learning through the Outdoor and Adventure Activity strand of the Irish physical education curriculum (NCCA,1999) can benefit a child's cognitive, affective and psychomotor domain and (b) exploring the integrated teaching of other curricular subjects with Outdoor and Adventure Activities through the experience of learning, in the outdoors.

Applicant(s): Ms. Rachel Rafferty and Dr. Maura Coulter

Dear Colleagues,

Further to full committee review, the DCU Research Ethics Committee approves this research proposal.

Materials used to recruit participants should note that ethical approval for this project has been obtained from the Dublin City University Research Ethics Committee.

Should substantial modifications to the research protocol be required at a later stage, a further amendment submission should be made to the REC.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads 'Geraldine Scanlon'.

Dr Geraldine Scanlon
Chairperson
DCU Research Ethics Committee



Taighde & Nuálaíocht Tacaíocht
Ollscoil Chathair Bhaile Átha Cliath,
Baile Átha Cliath, Éire

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Appendix B: Plain Language Statement (Parents)



Dear Parent/Guardian,

As you already know, my name is Rachel Rafferty. I am your child's teacher in third class this school year. I am currently undertaking a Masters by Research degree in Dublin City University Institute of Education. My Research Study is focused on Outdoor Learning and Learner Identity. I am undertaking this research because I am passionate about these areas in education and wish to extend my knowledge.

Please find attached the following:

- Two Plain Language Statements, one for you and one for your child. The Plain Language Statement will describe the research and what your child and I, the researcher, will be doing.
- An Informed Consent Form for you. The Informed Consent Form will require a signature and agreement to the activities your child will participate in during the research.
- An Informed Assent Form for your child. The Informed Assent Form is for your child to sign to agree to be a participant in this research.

I will go through the research with the boys in class. It would be helpful if you, the parent/guardian, would also read through the Plain Language Statement and the Informed Assent Form with your child so that he understands what he is being asked to do.

It would be greatly appreciated if you could return the signed Informed Consent Form and Informed Assent Form **before this Friday 8th April**. The research is due to commence after the Easter holidays.

With appreciation,
Rachel Rafferty

Plain Language Statement (Parents)

Research Title

An exploration of children's Learning Identities while experiencing Outdoor Learning in the Irish primary school context.

Details of what involvement the Research Study will require

I, Rachel Rafferty, your child's teacher, am undertaking a postgraduate thesis in the area of Outdoor Learning and Learner Identity. For my thesis I will be implementing an 8-week Outdoor Learning programme with the class both on the school grounds and off the school

grounds in a nearby forest. The children's activities may also be captured using digital imagery to enhance the quality of recorded observations. Children's identity will be protected at all times and where photographic images are used, all identifying features will be concealed for example the blurring or blocking of faces.

Children will:

- Keep a reflection journal where they will write about what they did, their thoughts and feelings during our Outdoor Learning session
- Draw pictures of their experiences during the outdoor session
- Join me along with other boys in the class to talk about our lessons. These conversations will be record and transcribed for analysis. Another adult will be present also.

Your child will be invited to share their journals, drawings and/or recorded conversations with me. I may use this work to help with my research Masters studies. All audio recordings will be transcribed for data analysis. Should you not wish for your child's picture to be taken, then I will ensure that they are not pictured during the lessons or their face will be blurred in group pictures. Your child will still take part in Outdoor Learning as usual and will not have to be excluded.

Please read this information and explain it to your child so that they are aware of the research project. It is both the parents' and child's decision whether the child can partake in the activities.

Potential risks to participants from involvement in the Research Study

There is no potential risk to participants envisaged outside those of everyday teaching. All lessons will be in keeping with the Irish primary curriculum. Some activities will be in a

nearby forest which the children are familiar with. I will carry out a risk-benefit analysis prior to the 8-week programme commencing.

Impact (direct or indirect) to participants from involvement in the Research Study.

Your child will be participating in lessons in school that will be interesting and educational to him, and that the information gathered will be used to provide much needed data regarding children's learning opportunities in the Outdoors. From my experience, the boys in Scoil X really enjoy Outdoor Learning and trips to the forest.

Advice as to arrangements to be made to protect confidentiality of data, including that confidentiality of information provided is subject to legal limitations.

Confidentiality of information provided can only be protected within the limitations of the law. It is possible for data to be subject to subpoena, freedom of information claim or mandated reporting by some professions.

However, should the parents/guardians and children not want to participate in the research or their parents/guardians not want their children to take part, their data will be excluded from the data analysis. The written activities will be part of normal literacy teaching and learning but in the case of the child who has not given consent for their work to be used as data this request will be honoured.

Your child's name will not be used in this research. To ensure that anonymity of children is kept, each child will be given a pseudonym in place of their name. The pseudonym will be linked to their learning and comments to track progression and development.

Pseudonyms will not be linked to photographs as these will only be for demonstration purposes and provide discussion prompt for their reflective diaries and focus group interviews. All necessary steps will be taken to ensure that any audio recordings produced are used solely for the purpose for which they are intended.

All data, both paper and electronic will be stored securely.

In keeping with the school's child safeguarding statement, any sensitive information regarding a child's safety offered in confidence will be reported to the school Designated Liaison Person (DLP). Everything possible will be done to protect and support the child

Advice as to whether or not data is to be destroyed after a minimum period.

All transcripts, field notes, reflections and reflective diaries, will be destroyed 5 years after publication.

Statement that involvement in the research study is voluntary

Participants may withdraw their consent and discontinue their participation at any time by contacting the researcher (Rachel Rafferty) through the school email or phone number.

There will be no penalty for withdrawing before all stages of the Research Study have been completed.

If participants have concerns about this study and wish to contact an independent person, please contact:

The Secretary, Dublin City University Research Ethics Committee, c/o Research and Innovation Support, Dublin City University, Dublin 9. Tel 01-7008000, e-mail rec@dcu.ie

Contact details:

Researcher:

Rachel Rafferty

Email:

Ph:

Appendix C: Plain Language Statement (child)



OUTDOOR LEARNING PROGRAMME – PLAIN LANGUAGE STATEMENT – CHILD

RESEARCH TITLE

An exploration of children's Learning Identities while experiencing Outdoor Learning in the Irish primary school context.

We will be doing a 2-hour Outdoor Learning session every week for 8 weeks during school time. I want to find out more about how 3rd class boys learn during Outdoor Learning.

We will continue to take part in Outdoor Learning as we normally do. However, I need you to help me carry out some research on the lessons. Research is when we investigate or study something deeply to explain or discover something new. I may ask you to:

- Join me in groups to talk about our lessons which I will record so that I don't forget anything you might say. There will be another adult present.
- Draw pictures of your thoughts and experiences of the lesson
- Keep a diary where we will write about how you felt and what you learned during our Outdoor Learning sessions

I will be taking pictures during our Outdoor Learning lessons. Your faces and school crests will be blurred out of these pictures.

You can take part in all these activities but if you don't want me to use your written work or the recordings of the conversations in my research then that is OK. For example - you may want to draw a picture of your favorite activity in one of the lessons along with everyone else in the class but you may not want me to use it in my research. If you do not want to share any work put an 'x' beside your work and I will not include it in the research. I will remind you about this during the lessons

Some of the pictures, recordings, diaries and interview notes will be used in a book that will be in Dublin City University Library, some will be used at big talks about

Outdoor Learning and others journals that other people may read. Your face will be blurred out from all photographs taken during the research.

If your Mammy, Daddy or Main Carer decide that they don't want you to appear in a picture, make a voice recording or to allow you me use your school work, then I will make sure that you are not recorded and you will not have to miss Outdoor Learning. If you would not like to be photographed you should tell me or your Mammy, Daddy or Main Carer and I will make sure that pictures or recordings of you are not included

IF PARTICIPANTS HAVE CONCERNS ABOUT THIS STUDY AND WISH TO CONTACT AN INDEPENDENT PERSON, PLEASE CONTACT:

The Secretary, Dublin City University Research Ethics Committee, c/o Research and Innovation Support, Dublin City University, Dublin 9. Tel 01-7008000, e-mail rec@dcu.ie

CONTACT DETAILS:

Researcher:

Rachel Rafferty

Email:

Ph:

Appendix D: Informed Consent Form (parents)



Informed Consent Form - Parents

Research Study Title

An exploration of children's Learner Identities while experiencing Outdoor Learning in the Irish primary school context.

Purpose of the Research

The purpose of this research is to gain insight into how children see themselves as learners when participating in Outdoor Learning. This study is part of my (Rachel Rafferty) postgraduate Masters by Research degree.

Requirements of Participation in Research Study

I will be teaching Outdoor Learning sessions over an 8-week period both on the school grounds and off the school grounds in a nearby forest. Your child will take part in the lesson as it will be a normal lesson carried out by the teacher as part of the 3rd class year.

For each session your child may be involved in the following activities:

- Keep a journal where he will write about what he did, his thoughts and feelings during our Outdoor Learning session
- Draw pictures of his experiences during the outdoor session
- Join me along with other boys in the class to talk about our lessons. These conversations will be recorded and transcribed for analysis. Another adult will be present also.

Your child will be invited to share his journal, drawing and/or recorded conversation with me. I may use this work to help with my research Masters studies. Your child's image and class activity may be photographed during lessons. Your child's identity will be protected at all times and where photographic images are used all identifying features will be concealed for example the blurring or blocking of faces. In order to maintain confidentiality, I will use alternative names or pseudonyms for the children when reporting my findings.

In keeping with the school's child safeguarding statement, any sensitive information regarding a child's safety offered in confidence will be reported to the school Designated Liaison Person (DLP). Everything possible will be done to protect and support the child.

I would like to formally ask for your consent for your child to participate in this research. The information shared with me as part of the study will remain confidential. Your child will not be named in any reports of the findings. Findings may be published in relevant journals. Participation in this research project is completely voluntary. You may withdraw your child from the study at any time.

Confirmation that involvement in the Research Study is voluntary.

I am aware that if I agree to my child being part of this study and his work is to be used as research data, I can withdraw his work from participation at any stage by contacting the researcher (Rachel Rafferty) through the school email or phone number. There will be no penalty for withdrawing before all stages of the Research Study have been completed.

I am aware that if I do not consent for my child's work to be used as research data, he will continue to take part in the Outdoor Learning sessions as normal. Rachel Rafferty will ensure that my child's image is not used, and should my child appear in any group photograph that my child's face will be blurred should the photograph be used in research.

Arrangements will be made to protect confidentiality of data, including when raw data will be destroyed, noting that confidentiality of information provided is subject to legal limitations.

Participant – Please complete the following (or an appropriately phrased variation)

(Circle Yes or No for each question).

- I have read or had read to me the Plain Language Statement Yes/No
- I understand the information provided Yes/No
- I had an opportunity to ask questions about and discuss this study Yes/No
- I am aware that my child will participate in an audio recorded focus group (conversation), write and draw about experiences in Outdoor Learning and be invited to share this with Rachel Rafferty Yes/No
- I am aware that my child may appear in photographs where all forms of identification will be protected i.e., the blurring of faces and school crests Yes/No
- I have received satisfactory answers to all my questions Yes/No
- I understand that my child may withdraw from the research study at any point Yes/No

Signature: _____

I have read and understood the information in this form. The researcher has answered my questions and concerns, and I have a copy of this consent form. Therefore, I consent for my child to take part in this research project

Parent's Signature: _____

Name in Block Capitals: _____

Witness: _____

Child's Name in block capitals: _____

Date: _____

If participants have concerns about this study and wish to contact an independent person, please contact:

*The Secretary, Dublin City University Research Ethics Committee, c/o Research and Innovation Support, Dublin City University, Dublin 9. Tel 01-7008000, e-mail **rec@dcu.ie***

Researcher:

Rachel Rafferty

Email:

Ph:

Appendix E: Informed Assent Form (child)

OUTDOOR LEARNING PROGRAMME – INFORMED ASSENT FORM

WHAT MS. RAFFERTY WANTS TO FIND OUT

I, Ms. Rafferty and the boys in 3rd class will be doing 8 weeks of Outdoor Learning. I want to find out more about how 3rd class boys learn in the outdoors for a project I am doing in university.

We will all continue to take part in lessons outside as we normally do. However, to help me do some research which is when we investigate or study something deeply to explain or discover something new.

I MAY ASK YOU TO:

- Write and draw in a diary about your experiences during Outdoor Learning time.
- Join Ms Rafferty in groups to talk about our Outdoor Lessons and diaries. Ms Rafferty will record these conversations and there will be another adult present.
- Ms Rafferty may take some photographs of us during outdoor lessons and the activities we do. She will make sure that our faces cannot be seen by blurring or blocking them.

You can take part in all these activities but if you don't want me to use your work in my research then that is OK. For example - you may want to draw a picture of your favourite activity in one of the lessons along with everyone else in the class but you may not want me to use it in my research. If you do not want to share any work put

an 'x' beside your work and I will not include it in the research. I will remind you of this during the lessons in case you forget.

Some of the photographs, drawings, recordings, diaries and interview notes will be used in a book that will be in Dublin City University Library, some will be used at big talks about Outdoor Learning and others in papers that other people may read. Your face will be blurred out from all photographs taken during the study.

TAKING PART:

I know that if I agree to take part in this research I can decide to stop and not be part of the research at any time. If your Mammy, Daddy or Main Carer decide that they don't want you to appear in a picture or voice recording, then Ms. Rafferty will make sure that you are not recorded or photographed. If you would not like to be photographed or recorded you should tell me or your Mammy, Daddy or Main Carer and I will make sure that pictures or recordings of you are not included.

PLEASE COMPLETE THE FOLLOWING (CIRCLE YES OR NO FOR EACH QUESTION)

Have you read or did someone read the Plain Language Statement to you? **Yes/No**

Do you understand what the form said? **Yes/No**

Were you able to ask questions about this study and what you would have to do? **Yes/No**

Did Ms Rafferty answer all your questions? **Yes/No**

Signature: _____

I have read and understood the information in this form. Ms Rafferty answered my questions, and I have kept a copy of this assent form. I assent (am happy) to take part in this research project

Participant's Signature: _____

Name in Block Capitals: _____

Witness: _____

Date: _____

If participants have concerns about this study and wish to contact an independent person, please contact:

The Secretary, Dublin City University Research Ethics Committee, c/o Research and Innovation Support, Dublin City University, Dublin 9. Tel 01-7008000, e-mail rec@dcu.ie

Researcher:

Rachel Rafferty

Email:

Ph:

Appendix F: Plain Language Statement (Board of Management)



Plain Language Statement (Board of Management)

Research Title

An exploration of children's Learning Identities while experiencing Outdoor Learning in the Irish primary school context.

Details of what involvement the Research Study will require

I, Rachel Rafferty, am a full-time mainstream teacher at Scoil X I currently teach 3rd class and have been implementing Outdoor Learning in the school over the past few years. I am currently undertaking a Masters by Research in the Institute of Education at Dublin City University in the topic of Outdoor Learning and Learner Identity.

An Outdoor Learning programme will be designed by me using the primary school curriculum (NCCA,1999). I will implement this programme with my third-class boys for a period of 8 weeks. It will include one 2-hour Outdoor Learning session per week during the school day. The research component of the study will involve collecting data through: reflective journals kept by the teacher and the children, focus group interviews with the children, children's images and class activities may be captured in photograph form, and children's voices will be recorded during focus group interviews.

Children will:

- Keep a reflection journal where they will write about what they did, their thoughts and feelings during our Outdoor Learning session
- Draw pictures of their experiences during the outdoor session
- Join me along with other boys in the class to talk about our lessons. These conversations will be record and transcribed for analysis. Another adult will be present also.

The boys will be invited to share their journals, drawings and/or recorded conversations with me. I may use this work to help with my research Masters studies.

I will

- Develop and implement Outdoor Learning sessions guided by the Irish primary school curriculum and other teaching resources
- Take field notes throughout the 8 weeks of the programme
- Take pictures during the lesson (all identification in the pictures like faces and school crests will be blurred).

- Complete reflections on each session I teach
- Carry out focus group interviews with my class which will be recorded. Another adult will be present also.
- Children's images and class activity may be captured during lessons
- Ensure that consent from parents and assent from the boys to take part in the research aspect of the programme is received

The children are from 3rd class, however, some may not have the ability to read the Plain Language Statement. Therefore, it is envisaged that both the parents and the teacher will read this information and explain it to the class so that they are aware of the research project. It is both the parents' and child's decision whether the child can partake in the activities.

Potential risks to participants from involvement in the Research Study

There is no potential risk to participants envisaged outside those of everyday teaching. As stated above, all lessons will be in keeping with the Irish primary curriculum. Some activities will be in a nearby forest which the children are familiar with and where we have carried out lessons previously. In keeping with best practice, a risk-benefit analysis of activities will be undertaken. Risk in this instance will be minimal and is part of learning.

Impact (direct or indirect) to participants from involvement in the Research Study.

Children will be participating in learning that will be interesting and educational to them. It is hoped that the results of this research will inform educational policy makers of the importance of Outdoor Learning.

Advice as to arrangements to be made to protect confidentiality of data, including that confidentiality of information provided is subject to legal limitations.

Confidentiality of information provided can only be protected within the limitations of the law. It is possible for data to be subject to subpoena, freedom of information claim or mandated reporting by some professions.

Taking part in audio recorded interviews may be a new experience for the children. Should any parent not consent or child not assent to taking part in the study whereby they do not consent to having their image or data used for the purposes of presentations, article publication etc the researcher will not use any data gathered from that child. Therefore, the child can still take part in all activities of the class. The activities and work the children will do during sessions will be part of everyday teaching and learning so each child will take part.

I will take all steps necessary to ensure that any digital images and recordings produced are used solely for the purpose for which they are intended. Some pictures, transcript and

reflective diary samples will be used in my thesis which will be kept in DCU library on completion. These data samples may also be used for conference presentations, articles and other publications. Children's identity will be protected at all times and where photographic images are used all identifying features will be concealed for example the blurring or blocking of faces.

In order to maintain confidentiality, I will use alternative names or pseudonyms for the children when reporting her findings.

All data, both paper and electronic will be stored securely. My supervisor and I are the only people who will have access to the information.

In keeping with the school's child safeguarding statement, any sensitive information regarding a child's safety offered in confidence will be reported to the school Designated Liaison Person (DLP). Everything possible will be done to protect and support the child.

Advice as to whether or not data is to be destroyed after a minimum period.

All recordings, transcripts, pictures, field notes, teacher reflections and reflective diaries will be destroyed 5 years after publication.

Statement that involvement in the Research Study is voluntary

Participants may withdraw their consent and discontinue their participation at any time. There will be no penalty for withdrawing before all stages of the Research Study have been completed.

If participants have concerns about this study and wish to contact an independent person, please contact:

The Secretary, Dublin City University Research Ethics Committee, c/o Research and Innovation Support, Dublin City University, Dublin 9. Tel 01-7008000, e-mail rec@dcu.ie

Contact details:

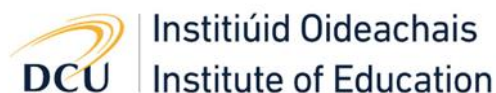
Researcher:

Rachel Rafferty

Email:

Ph:

Appendix G: Informed Consent Form (Board of Management)



Informed Consent Form – Board of Management

Research Study Title

An exploration of children's Learner Identities while experiencing Outdoor Learning in the Irish primary school context.

Purpose of the Research

The purpose of this research is to gain insight into how children see themselves as learners when participating in Outdoor Learning. This study is part of my (Rachel Rafferty) postgraduate Masters by Research degree.

Requirements of Participation in Research Study

I will be teaching Outdoor Learning sessions over an 8-week period both on the school grounds and off the school grounds in a nearby forest. Children are expected to take part in the lesson as it will be a normal lesson carried out by the teacher as part of the 3rd class year.

The research component of the study will involve collecting data through: reflective journals

kept by the teacher and the children, focus group interviews with the children, children's images and class activities may be captured in photograph form and children's voices will be recorded during focus group interviews.

I would like to formally ask for your consent for me, Rachel Rafferty, and my class (third class) to participate in this research. The information communicated to me as part of the study will remain confidential. The school and the boys' names will not be named in any reporting of the findings. Findings may be published in relevant journals.

Children will:

- Keep a reflection journal where they will write about what they did, their thoughts and feelings during our Outdoor Learning session
- Draw pictures of their experiences during the outdoor session
- Join Ms. Rafferty with other boys in the class to talk about the lessons. These conversations will be recorded and transcribed. There will also be another adult present.

The boys will be invited to share their journals, drawings and/or recorded conversations with me. I may use this work to help with my research Masters studies.

I will:

- Develop and implement an Outdoor Learning plan guided by the Irish primary curriculum and other teaching resources.
- Take field notes throughout the 8 weeks of the programme
- Take pictures during the lesson (all identification in the pictures like faces and school crests will be blurred).
- Complete reflections on each lesson I teach
- Carry out focus group interviews with my class which will be recorded
- Children’s images and class activity may be captured during lessons
- Ensure that consent from parents and assent from the boys to take part in the research aspect of the programme is received

Children’s identity will be protected at all times and where photographic images are used all

identifying features will be concealed for example the blurring or blocking of faces.

In order to maintain confidentiality, I will use alternative names or pseudonyms for the children when reporting my findings

In keeping with the school’s child safeguarding statement, any sensitive information regarding a child’s safety offered in confidence will be reported to the school Designated Liaison Person (DLP). Everything possible will be done to protect and support the child.

Confirmation that involvement in the Research Study is voluntary

I am aware that if I agree to Rachel Rafferty undertaking her Master’s Research in Scoil X, I can withdraw this permission at any stage. There will be no penalty for withdrawing before all stages of the Research Study have been completed.

Arrangements will be made to protect confidentiality of data, including when raw data will be destroyed, noting that confidentiality of information provided is subject to legal limitations.

Participant – Please complete the following (or an appropriately phrased variation)

(Circle Yes or No for each question).

- I have read or had read to me the Plain Language Statement Yes/No
- I understand the information provided Yes/No
- I had an opportunity to ask questions and discuss this study Yes/No
- I received satisfactory answers to all my questions Yes/No

Signature: _____

I have read and understood the information in this form. The researcher has answered my questions and concerns, and I have a copy of this consent form. Therefore, I consent for Scoil X to be the site for this research study.

Chairperson's Signature: _____

Name in Block Capitals: _____

Witness: _____

Date: _____

If participants have concerns about this study and wish to contact an independent person, please contact:

The Secretary, Dublin City University Research Ethics Committee, c/o Research and Innovation Support, Dublin City University, Dublin 9. Tel 01-7008000, e-mail rec@dcu.ie

Researcher:

Rachel Rafferty

Email:

Ph:

Appendix H: Outdoor Learning programme

Research Design

Theme: Ancient Ireland

Week	Topic/Theme	Curricular Linkage
1	Stone Age tools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • History – Early people and ancient societies - Stone age peoples • Science – design and make • Art – making construction, looking and responding • Drama – exploring and making drama
2	Stone Age building techniques Hut building	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • History – continuity and change over time – homes and houses • Science – design and make • Art – Making construction, looking and responding • Literacy – procedure • Maths- Length and Shape
3	Stone Age Farming Working with soil Sowing seeds/harvesting seeds	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • History – continuity and change over time – food and farming • Geography – soil types • Science – Life cycle/living things • SPHE – Food and nutrition
4	Stone age cooking. Making butter Cooking on fire (toasting bread)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • History- continuity and change over time – food and farming • Science • SPHE – Food and nutrition • Gaeilge – Irish words, use these in lessons • Art – looking and responding
5	The Vikings Storytelling Map reading	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • History- Early people and ancient societies - Vikings • Art – whittling • SPHE – Taking care of my body • Literacy – Narrative (story telling) • Geography – Viking route maps - maps globes and graphical skills • Drama – exploring and making drama

6	The Vikings Viking Long ships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • History – continuity and change over time - transport • Geography – transport and communications • Literacy – procedure. Following step by step building instructions independently • Science – float and sink • SPHE – Relating to others • Art – looking and responding
7	The Vikings Trading	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • History – continuity and change over time – food and clothes • Geography – transport and communications • Drama – co-operating and communicating in making drama • Science – design and make
8	The Vikings Cooking on fire (soup)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • History- continuity and change over time – food and farming • SPHE – food and nutrition • Literacy – procedural writing • Gaeilge – trí ghaeilge

Appendix I: Lesson Plan 1

Ancient Ireland Lesson 1: Stone Age tools

Equipment:

Teacher Bag	Pupil Bag
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › Mini first aid kit › Large first aid kit › Hot drinks › Spare clothes › Toilet roll › Nappy bags › Knife › string/rope › Tarpaulin › Hand Sanitiser › Cups › Water › SOME SUGAR › Waterproofs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › Water › Sit mat › Cup › Lunch › Hi vis › Forest Cookie
	Resources
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › Markers › Paper/notebook › Stone age pictures › Rope

Learning Outcomes

- › Inquire about pictures of stone age times.
- › Take part in team discussions and group work.
- › Apply mini lesson on knots to construct own stone age tools.
- › Plan, make decisions and design stone age tools.
- › Experiment with different materials.
- › Build stone age tools.
- › Collaborate with others.
- › Test and evaluate the structural integrity of tool.
- › Present and explain the design and building process to the class.
- › Share opinions on classmate's tools.

Introduction

- › Children walk up safely to the forest with bag of everything needed
- › Once in forest they find a space to sit
- › Whole class recap over the outdoor learning code (Set of rules for when outside and in forest)
- › In groups **TEAMWORK**, children are given a series of pictures about the stone age to inquire about. They must create 2 questions each and answer a series of 5 questions from the teacher
- ❖ When were these pictures set? How do you know
- ❖ What were these used for?
- ❖ Who used these
- ❖ Who owned these?
- ❖ What were they made from/ How were they made?
- › Whole class discussion on pictures
- › Introduce the stone age or neolithic people to the class.

Teacher asks class what they know about the stone age/neolithic people. Teacher records prior knowledge on white board. Teacher guides class towards discussion about stone age tools.

Development:

- Having discussed the use of stone in the stone age. Children in pairs, gather materials to make some stone age tools (pictures provided for assistance.)
- MINI LESSON:** Once children have collected materials, everyone sits in a circle and practices the clover hitch knot.
- Children choose a partner to work with. **CHOICE.**
- Children are given paper and markers to design their tool (Art & Science)
- Teacher gives **LEADERSHIP ROLES** to the pairs.
- A = designer and B = gatherer. Children make the tool together. These roles change when the pairs make the next tool. Teacher makes sure to emphasise that the designer is the leader and that the gatherer must listen.
- Teacher reminds the pairs that their tools must be sturdy and function like a tool. (Planned **CHALLENGE.**
- In pairs **TEAMWORK** children make stone age tools independently in the forest (**RESPONSIBILITY**) with the aid of pictures out of the materials they have gathered. Teacher provides extra materials like rope/twine and sticks in case a lack of materials in the area.(Science)

Conclusion:

- In pairs **TEAMWORK** they present their tools as if they were from the stone age. They are free to portray themselves physically as being from the stone age eg. Messy hair, mud on face...)
- Children give peer feedback to each other while also acting as from the stone age
- Children then go for a stone age walk in the forest and take a mental note of things stone age people might have liked to use to build or cook with.
- Children end hike at car park and walk safely back to school

Learner Identity Elements

Element of choice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Choose their materials and tool to make Choice over where they work Choice over equipment and method
Responsibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Being trusted to work independently in the forest Some children given litter pickers to clean as we go on the hike
Leadership roles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Both children must present to the class parts of their procedure builder/designer Leader of the hike
Challenge (planned challenge but children will come upon challenges social or subject based throughout the lesson)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tool must be sturdy and function like a tool
Teamwork	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Children work in groups in introduction, pairs in development of lesson and pairs and as a whole class group at the end of the lesson.

Reflection	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Pause for a moment in the forest and think about what you have learned today - about yourself, about others• Filling in reflection copy back at the classroom/in the forest depending on time
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Appendix J: Lesson Plan 2

Ancient Ireland Lesson 2: Stone Age building

Equipment:

Teacher Bag	Pupil Bag
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › Mini first aid kit › Large first aid kit › Hot drinks › Spare clothes › Toilet roll › Nappy bags › Knife › string/rope › Tarpaulin › Hand Sanitiser › Cups › Water › SOME SUGAR › Waterproofs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › Water › Sit mat › Cup › Lunch › Hi vis › Forest Cookie
	Resources
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › Markers › Paper/notebook › Stone age pictures › Rope › Water bottle

Learning Outcomes

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › Inquire about pictures of stone age settlements. › Take part in team discussions and group work. › Plan, make decisions and design stone age settlement. › Experiment with different materials. › Build stone age settlements. › Collaborate with others. › Test and evaluate the structural integrity of settlement. › Present and explain the design and building process to the class. › Share opinions on classmate's settlements.
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Introduction

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › Children walk up safely to the forest with bag of everything needed › Once in forest they find a space to sit › As a class we remind ourselves of our Outdoor Learning code and what it means to wear the forest cookie. › Children recap over what they have learned about stone age/neolithic people so far. › In groups, children are given pictures of stone age settlements. The groups must answer and ask questions about the pictures ❖ How was this built? ❖ What materials did they use? ❖ What did this settlement provide/what was it used for? › Whole class discussion on pictures › Teacher introduces the stone age building techniques
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Main Lesson:

- **MINI LESSON:** Children sit around in the circle and teacher gives an example on how to build a structure that is strong, what techniques to use etc.
- In groups **TEAMWORK**, children must build a stone age settlement using materials available on forest floor (20 - 30 minutes). **CHOICE**
- Children are given markers and paper to design their settlement. They are also given pictures to work from. Leader, designer, gatherer, builder **LEADERSHIP ROLES**
- Teacher visits and conferences each group questioning elements of structure.

Conclusion:

- Children present their settlements to the class. They describe how they made it (procedural writing) and show their design. **LEADERSHIP**
- Teacher tests if the shelter is waterproof by pouring a cup of water on the shelter while a child is inside. **PLANNED CHALLENGE**
- Children give peer feedback to each other (two stars and a wish).
- Children then go for a mini hike around the wood on the lookout for good settlement making materials or areas.
- Children end hike at car park and walk safely back to school

Learner Identity Elements

Element of choice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Choice over where they work • Choice over equipment and method
Responsibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Being trusted to work independently in the forest • Being trusted with choosing materials and working with new materials • Some children given litter pickers to clean as we go
Teamwork	Children working in groups
Leadership roles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All children must present to the class parts of their procedure • builder/designer • Leader of the hike
Challenge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Structure must be waterproof to a certain extent. Test with water bottle
Reflection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pause for a moment in the forest and think about what you have learned today - about yourself, about others • Filling in reflection copy back at the classroom/in the forest

Appendix K: Lesson plan 3

Ancient Ireland Lesson 3: Stone Age Farming

Equipment:

Teacher Bag	Pupil Bag
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › Mini first aid kit › Large first aid kit › Hot drinks › Spare clothes › Toilet roll › Nappy bags › Knife › string/rope › Tarpaulin › Hand Sanitiser › Cups › Water › SOME SUGAR › Waterproofs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › Water › Sit mat › Cup › Lunch › Hi vis › Forest Cookie
	Resources
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › Markers › Paper/notebook › Stone age pictures › Wheat seeds › Rulers › Paints › Paint brushes › Food pictures

Learning Outcomes

- › Inquire about pictures of stone age farming.
- › Take part in team discussions and group work.
- › Prep soil for sowing seeds.
- › Plan and make decisions in pairs.
- › Measure distance between seeds.
- › Plant and water wheat seeds.
- › Sort and classify foods made from wheat.
- › Create stone label for row of wheat .

Introduction

- › This lesson takes place in the school garden
- › Children recap over what they have learned about stone age/neolithic people so far.
- › In groups, children use their prior knowledge to record how they think stone age people farmed and what they did to the soil to add nutrients.
- › Whole class discussion on fertilising
- › Whole class discussion on sowing seeds and what crops they farmed
- › In groups, children order the method of growing wheat.

Main Lesson:

- › Teacher demonstrates how to prepare the soil for sowing seeds
- › In pairs **CHOICE**, children prepare the soil.
- › **MINI LESSON:** How to sow crops like wheat. Teacher demonstrates

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › In pairs sow a row of wheat, measuring the correct distance to separate seeds, how far seeds go into the soil (Maths) Children are trusted to use garden tools independently, this is mentioned by the teacher. RESPOSIBILITY AND CHALLENGE › Children are given roles in the pairs: Digger, sowing the seeds, measuring the distances between seeds. LEADERSHIP ROLES
Conclusion:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › Back in the circle, children make labels for their wheat by painting rocks › We discuss all the things that can be made from wheat (picture sorting activity) › Once the children have chosen what can be made from wheat. We then talk about healthy eating and how often we should consume these products. Reference made to food pyramid here. (SPHE) › Discussion on healthy eating choices and why it is important to eat healthily. › Children write in their reflection diaries in the garden/classroom

Learner Identity Elements

Element of choice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › Choice over tools the use › Choice over measuring their own sowing area
Responsibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › Being trusted with garden tools › Must effectively sow a seed independently
Teamwork	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › Children working in groups
Leadership roles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › Changing of roles › Digger, fertiliser, sowing the seeds, measuring the distances between seeds
Challenge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › Independent aspect of this lesson is a challenge. Teacher gives children full responsibility after the demonstration. Teacher silently observes.
Reflection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › Pause for a moment in the garden and think about what you have learned today - about yourself, about others › Filling in reflection copy back at the classroom

Appendix L: Lesson Plan 4

Ancient Ireland

Lesson 4: The stone age cooking techniques

Equipment:

Teacher Bag	Pupil Bag
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › Mini first aid kit › Large first aid kit › Hot drinks › Spare clothes › Toilet roll › Nappy bags › Knife › string/rope › Tarpaulin › Hand Sanitiser › Cups › Water › SOME SUGAR › Waterproofs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › Water › Sit mat › Cup › Lunch › Hi vis › Forest Cookie
	Resources
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › Markers › Paper/notebook › Pestle and mortar › Dough ingredients › Bowls and wooden spoons › Fire pit › Wood › Long sticks for cooking

Learning Outcomes

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › Make flour using a pestle and mortar › Follow recipe to make bread dough independently › Collaborate with group while making dough › Cook bread around the fire › Demonstrate responsibility working with fire › Reflect on lesson and learning
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Introduction

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › This lesson takes place in the school garden › Children recap over what they have learned about stone age/neolithic people so far, emphasising farming and crops › Children are shown a neolithic grinding device and asked what they think it is used for. › Children are given stones, mortar and pestle and wheat which they must grind to make flour. <p>RESPONSIBILITY</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> › Whole class discussion on this technique.

Main Lesson:

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › Teacher demonstrates how to make a simple dough. The recipe is written out on a whiteboard. › Children form groups of 4 CHOICE › Children collect their equipment and ingredients. Children measure ingredients correctly, following the recipe. Children make the bread dough. › Leadership roles: 2 gatherers and 2 mixers TEAMWORK, RESPONSIBILITY, CHALLENGE › Teacher makes fire and demonstrates how to cook stick bread › Children cook their stickbread on the fire (Norwegian friluftsliv bread) CHALLENGE

Conclusion:

- As children are enjoying their bread, children think about what they could add to the dough mixture to make it into something else.
- Children reflect and recap over the stone age period of learning and discuss what they have learned.
- Children fill in their reflection journals afterwards in class.
- Focus group interviews occur after this lesson.

Learner Identity Elements

Element of choice	Choice over who they work with
Responsibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Being trusted with gathering the equipment and ingredients for the dough• Trusted with cooking using fire
Teamwork	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Children working in groups
Leadership roles	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Changing of roles• Collector, mixer
Challenge	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Independent aspect of this lesson is a challenge. Teacher gives children full responsibility after the demonstration. Teacher silently observes.
Reflection	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Filling in reflection copy back at the classroom

Appendix M: Lesson plan 5

Ancient Ireland Lesson 5: The Vikings - Storytelling

Equipment:

Teacher Bag	Pupil Bag
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › Mini first aid kit › Large first aid kit › Hot drinks › Spare clothes › Toilet roll › Nappy bags › Knife › string/rope › Tarpaulin › Hand Sanitiser › Cups › Water › SOME SUGAR › Waterproofs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › Water › Sit mat › Cup › Lunch › Hi vis › Forest Cookie
	Resources
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › Markers › Paper/notebook › Viking pictures › Potato peelers

Learning Outcomes

- › Inquire about pictures of Viking times.
- › Take part in team discussions and group work.
- › Observe whittling method
- › Find and choose appropriate whittling stick
- › Whittle a Viking oar
- › Create and tell a story about your viking oar to the class
- › Respond to peers' stories
- › Reflect on lesson and learning

Introduction

- › This lesson takes place in the forest and in the school garden.
- › Children given pictures related to Vikings. Children, in groups, discuss what they think these are.
- › Whole class discussion on pictures
- › Teacher leaves a map of northern Europe on the ground and the class, in groups, **(TEAMWORK & LEADERSHIP)** must create a large copy of the map on the ground using what is on the forest floor. Children must name each country with the name cards
- › Teacher tells the children the story of the Vikings with the aid of the map the class have created

Main Lesson:

- › Whole class discussion about how the Vikings used a lot of wood in their communities for building.
- › Children learn how to whittle **(CHALLENGE)**
- › Teacher demonstrates using a knife and a potato peeler
- › Children find a stick of their choice that they feel would make a good oar **(CHOICE)**
- › Children begin to whittle and oar **(RESPONSIBILITY)**
- › Teacher circles the class assisting those who need it.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children are encouraged to chat during this activity • The children spend 30 minutes doing this. Children keep their oar for them to continue the next day. Teacher packs up potato peelers and everyone walks back to the school garden chatting along the way.
Conclusion:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Back in the circle children present their oars to the class in a dramatic format • Children act like Vikings telling of the historical background of their oar, where it has travelled from and their Viking clan. Teacher demonstrates an example first to engage children. • Peers comment on each other's oars • Recap over what they have learned about the Vikings.

Learner Identity Elements

Element of choice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Choice over sticks they use • Choice over partners they work with
Responsibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Being trusted with potato peelers • Independent construction of long ship
Teamwork	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children working in groups
Leadership roles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Changing of roles – independent, leader of own
Challenge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Independent aspect of this lesson is a challenge. Teacher gives children full responsibility after the demonstration. Teacher silently observes.
Reflection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pause for a moment in the forest and think about what you have learned today - about yourself, about others • Filling in reflection copy back at the classroom

Appendix N: Lesson plan 6

Ancient Ireland

Lesson 6: The Vikings - Viking long ships

Equipment:

Teacher Bag	Pupil Bag
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › Mini first aid kit › Large first aid kit › Hot drinks › Spare clothes › Toilet roll › Nappy bags › Knife › string/rope › Tarpaulin › Hand Sanitiser › Cups › Water › SOME SUGAR › Waterproofs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › Water › Sit mat › Cup › Lunch › Hi vis › Forest Cookie
	Resources
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › Markers › Paper/notebook › Stone age pictures › Rope and string › Sticks (pre-cut) › instructions

Learning Outcomes

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › Whole class discussion about longships › Observe and practice the clove hitch knot › Follow the instructions to build a long ship (raft) in groups › Design and create a sail for the longship › Persuade the class why your long ship will win the race. › Race the long ships in the school pond › Reflect on lesson and learning

Introduction

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › This lesson takes place in the school garden. › Recap over Viking routes. › Whole class discussion on Viking longships › Children are split into to teams and act out rowing a Viking longship

Main Lesson:

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › In groups, children are given procedural instructions to make a mini raft (long ship) › (TEAMWORK) › MINI LESSON: Teacher demonstrated the clove hitch knot (CHALLENGE) › They choose leadership roles amongst themselves (designer, builder, gatherer) (CHOICE) › The children follow the procedure and build the raft together independently. › The groups design a unique sail that represents their clan. › Teacher observes and assists those who need it › Once rafts are complete, the children then talk to the class about their Viking clan and why their boat will win the long ship race.

Conclusion:

- Children test their mini rafts on the school pond. **(RESPOSIBILITY)**
- Children race the boats in the school pond.
- Children reflect and recap over what they learned about the Vikings
- Children fill in their reflection journals afterwards in class. **(REFLECTION)**

Learner Identity Elements

Element of choice	• Choice over groups they work with
Responsibility	• Working around the pond • Independent construction of longship
Teamwork	• Children working in groups
Leadership roles	• Builder, designer, gatherer
Challenge	• Independent aspect of this lesson is a challenge. Teacher gives children full responsibility after the demonstration. Teacher silently observes.
Reflection	• Filling in reflection copy back at the classroom

Appendix O: Lesson plan 7

Ancient Ireland Lesson 7: The Vikings - Trading

Equipment:

Teacher Bag	Pupil Bag
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › Mini first aid kit › Large first aid kit › Hot drinks › Spare clothes › Toilet roll › Nappy bags › Knife › string/rope › Tarpaulin › Hand Sanitiser › Cups › Water › SOME SUGAR › Waterproofs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › Water › Sit mat › Cup › Lunch › Hi vis › Forest Cookie
	Resources
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › Markers › Paper/notebook › Viking trading pictures

Learning Outcomes

- › Inquire about pictures of trading materials during Viking times.
- › Design, create and build a trading stand in groups
- › Design and create materials or object to trade
- › Participate in role play trading as Vikings
- › Reflect on lessons and learning

Introduction

- › This lesson takes place in the forest.
- › Children recap over what they have learned about the Vikings
- › The word trading is put in the middle of the floor.
- › Whole class discussion on trading.
- › Picture cards are given to each child of things the vikings had traded. Each child must explain what is on the card to the group.
- › We discuss leadership roles within the viking trading community and list them on a sheet as a whole class. (Children make the leadership roles) **(LEADERSHIP & CHOICE)**

Main Lesson:

- › Children in groups, go and create their trading stand **(CHALLENGE)**
- › They are given paper and markers to plan or create labels.
- › Children must make the items for trading with materials found in the forest
- › After 30 minutes of creating their trading stand children begin to trade among groups. **(RESPONSIBILITY)**
- › This is a form of role play and children must act like vikings during this lesson.

Conclusion:

- › After 20 minutes of trading the children come back into the circle and they we hold a whole class discussion on trading: the challenges of it, how it made them feel etc.
- › Children fill in their reflection journals afterwards in class.
- › Focus group interviews occur after this lesson.

Learner Identity Elements

Element of choice	<ul style="list-style-type: none">› Choice over building their own trading setup› Choice over who they sit beside
Teamwork	Children working in groups
Responsibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none">› Being trusted in the forest› Responsible for managing each other
Leadership roles	<ul style="list-style-type: none">› Changing of roles on trading stand
Challenge	<ul style="list-style-type: none">› Independent aspect of this lesson is a challenge.› Class must work as a group
Reflection	<ul style="list-style-type: none">› Pause for a moment in the forest and think about what you have learned today - about yourself, about others› Filling in reflection copy back at the classroom

Appendix P: Lesson plan 8

Ancient Ireland

Lesson 8: The Vikings - cooking methods

Equipment:

Teacher Bag	Pupil Bag
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › Mini first aid kit › Large first aid kit › Hot drinks › Spare clothes › Toilet roll › Nappy bags › Knife › string/rope › Tarpaulin › Hand Sanitiser › Cups › Water › SOME SUGAR › Waterproofs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › Water › Sit mat › Cup › Lunch › Hi vis › Forest Cookie
	Resources
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › Flint and steel › Cotton wool › Vaseline › Tiles › dough › fire pit › sticks for cooking › chocolate and jam for toppings

Learning Outcomes

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › Observe method of making fire using flint and steel › Make fire using flint and steel › Cook bread over fire › Reflect on Outdoor Learning programme

Introduction

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › This lesson takes place in the school garden › Children recap over what they have learned about the Vikings so far, emphasising farming and crops › Children discuss fire and how to make fire.

Main Lesson:

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › In groups children make fire using flint and steel independently (TEAMWORK, CHALLENGE & RESPONSIBILITY) › Children then bake bread on large fire created by the teacher. This time children get to choose what additions they will add to their bread(chocolate/jam/cheese). › While cooking the bread around the fire, the children recap on the Outdoor Learning programme

Conclusion:

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> › While eating, whole class discussion on this cooking technique. How do you think the Vikings coped with this cooking technique. › Children fill in their reflection journals afterwards in class.
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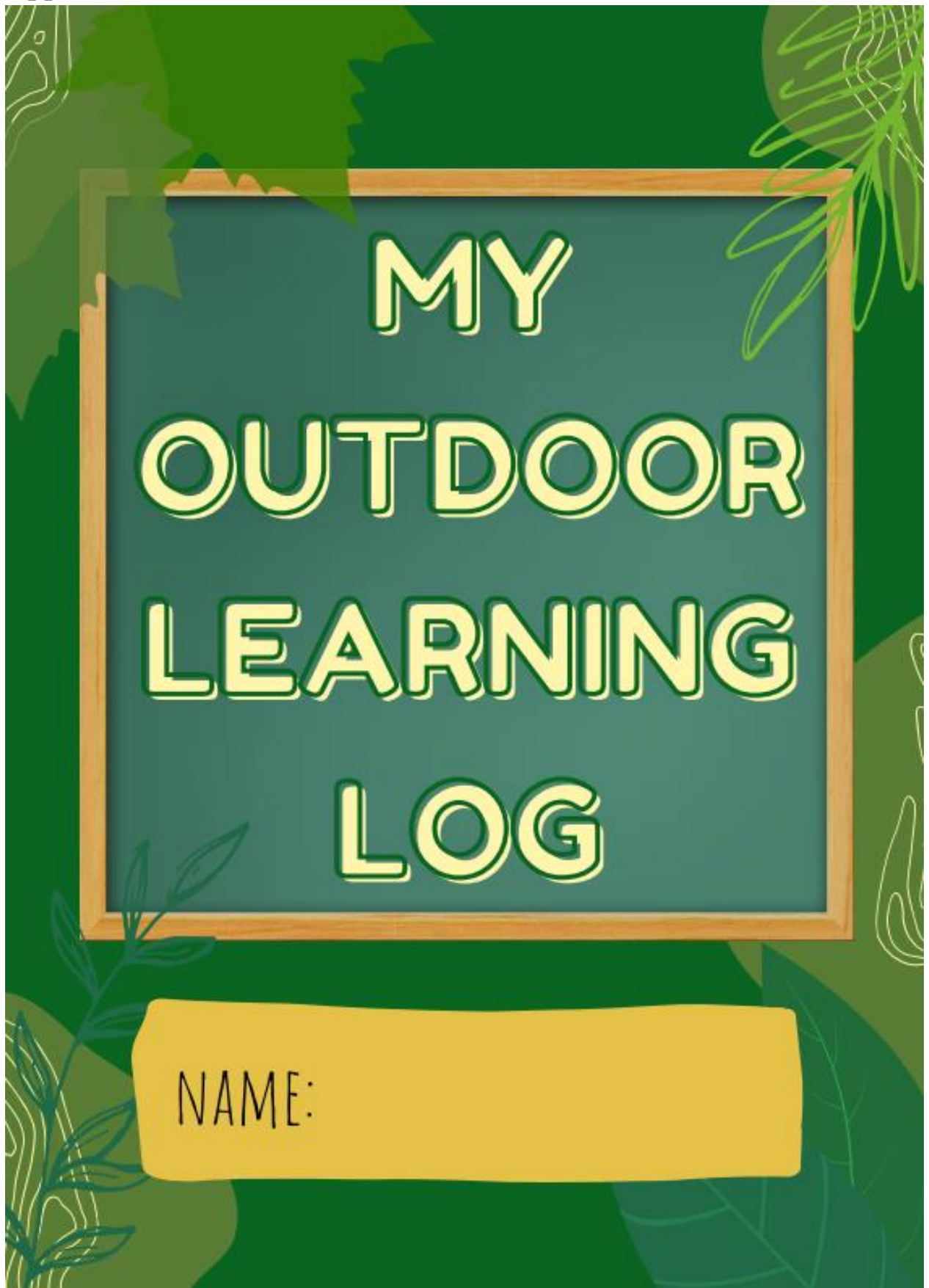
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Learner Identity Elements

Element of choice	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Choice what aspect of the cooking they take charge of• Choice over who they sit beside
Responsibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Being trusted with cooking equipment and fire• Responsible for managing each other
Teamwork	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Children working in groups
Leadership roles	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Changing of roles
Challenge	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Independent aspect of this lesson is a challenge.• Class must work as a whole - this will be challenging. They must organise themselves. It is a challenge
Reflection	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Pause for a moment in the forest and think about what you have learned today - about yourself, about others• Filling in reflection copy back at the classroom

Appendix Q: Researcher Observation Template

Learner Identity Development Element	Observation
Choice	
Challenge	
Responsibility	
Teamwork	
Reflection	



MY OUTDOOR LEARNING LOG – LESSON 1: STONE AGE TOOLS

1. How did you **feel** during Outdoor Learning today? Why?

2. Describe how you felt when you **worked in a group** today?

3. How did you feel when you were allowed to **choose** your own materials for building the tools?

4. Being the designer (**leader**) of my group made me feel

5. Write about a time when you felt **challenged** during the lesson.
How did you solve or fix the challenge or problem?

6. Being **trusted** with building stone age tools with my group and using materials like rope and rocks made me feel

Appendix T: Focus Group Interview Questions



Focus Group Interviews – Post Outdoor Learning session

Interview Schedule

Date: _____

1. Describe a typical day in school for your class (what does that look like for you?)
2. Tell me all about Outdoor Learning, can you describe it for me? (what does it mean for you).
3. How do you feel about learning in the outdoors? How does learning in the Outdoors make you feel as a learner?
4. Can you tell me how you feel when you make choices and decisions during Outdoor Learning?
5. What are your thoughts on or what do you think about building, using tools and working with fire during outdoor learning? (how does that make you feel?)
6. Can you tell me about a time when you were the leader – what happened?
How did you feel?
What are your thoughts on having leadership roles in outdoor learning?
 - What about when others were the leaders? (What did you think about that?)
 - Do you prefer to be the leader or have others be the leaders? Why is that?
 - Is it the same being a leader in the classroom and being a leader during outdoor learning?
 - What can children learn from getting the chance to be the leader of a group or tell me about all the things you learn when you are the leader.
7. Tell me about working in groups in Outdoor Learning, (what are your thoughts on group work in the outdoors?)
 - Do you prefer to work with others or on your own in outdoor learning? Can you like both do you think?
 - Is there a difference between indoor group work and outdoor group work?
 - What about in other places where you might be learning things – do you prefer to work on your own or with others?
 - Can you explain why you prefer to work on your own/with others?
8. Did you experience any challenges (a time when you found something difficult and had to fix or solve a problem maybe in your group or in the task you had to do) during the Outdoor Learning lessons? Explain
 - How did you feel when faced with a challenge? Do you think everyone in the group felt the same?
 - Did you work as a group to solve problems?
 - What did you learn from that challenge?
 - Were you able to solve it/get over it?, how did that make you feel?
 - Is it easier to solve challenges or problems in outdoor learning or indoor learning? explain

9. You have lots of really cool things in your diary and I'd like to ask you about some of them.....
 - Tell me about your experience of writing in your diary
 - Tell me about at the end of an outdoor lesson when we have a chat about what we've done.
10. If you were to choose between indoor learning and outdoor learning, which one do you feel you learn better in? why?
11. Can you tell me about some of the things you've learned over the last couple of weeks?
12. What have you learned over the last 8 weeks doing Outdoor Learning?
13. From the 8 outdoor learning lessons, which one was your favourite? Why?

Questions must be framed neutrally – minimise the potential for social desirability in the response. Ensure that their responses can be as authentic as possible.

- *Does anyone feel differently about that?*
 - *Does anyone have a different experience than that?*
 - *If you haven't had a chance to say something now is a good time to do so.*
- self-esteem
- self- awareness
- independence
- confidence
- relationship skills
- motivation to learn
- problem-solving skills