

# Enhancing child led opportunities outdoors

## Case Study 9

### Ashbridge School and Nursery – Sandra Bentley

Sandra is the Reception/Year 1 teacher at Ashbridge School and Nursery which is set in 10 acres of woodland and meadow. A parent questionnaire helps her to get to know the likes and dislikes of the children and Sandra uses this to help her plan her work. Parents are also encouraged to contribute to the Learning Journals and these are added to throughout the year. The outdoor area is already used regularly by the children.

#### AIMS

- to integrate outdoor and indoor learning opportunities;
- to make greater use of the outdoors as an active and creative learning environment;
- to evaluate the effect of building on child initiated activities outdoors as a tool for learning.

#### HOW THE PROJECT DEVELOPED

Information was gathered in Reception as to how effectively child initiated activities were being used to enhance learning. This was done through observation, photographs, analysis of planning/pupil progress and talking to children and staff involved. It was found that although child initiated learning was encouraged and included in the next steps indoor and outdoor learning were often separated. It was decided that activities outside could be used more effectively to enhance learning. Observation during the project helped to develop further learning both indoors and out.

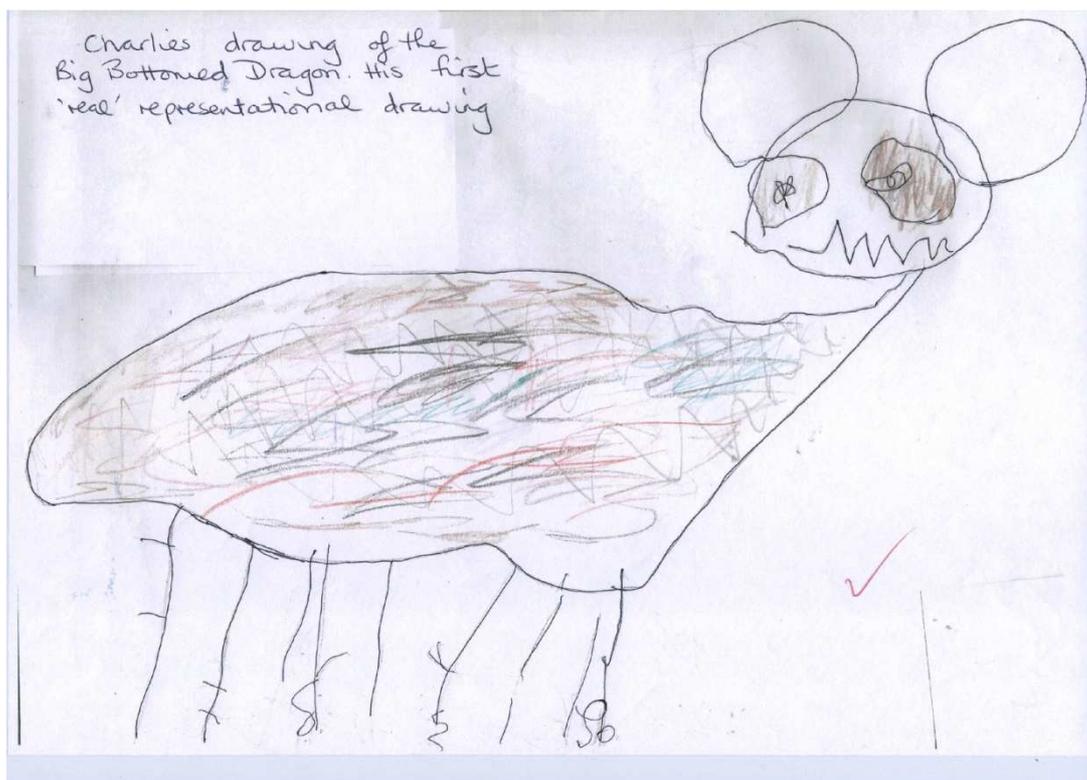
#### An example showing how one activity developed:

*Context* – In the woodland area the children had been building up a story of a Big Bottomed Dragon who lived in the woods. Over a series of weeks the children became fascinated with their stories and their imaginations took over! They saw *the dragon, his breath rising up from the ground* and soon fairies appeared in the wood too. The story developed as the dragon became cross and decided to *“get the fairies unless the dragon did something to save them”*. The children met together to form a plan and Harry decided *“to build something to protect the fairies from the nasty dragon”*. Feathers and twigs were collected and stuck in the ground and hung from trees then Fay suggested that all the children shout *“good luck fairies”* and *“the feathers will protect you”*.



The stories were so real to the children that some of them became worried about the dragon. One of the older children reassured the younger ones by saying that the dragon was friendly and only joking with the fairies! Discussion followed about what the Big Bottomed Dragon looked like – the children began to draw and print scales to make a large dragon. They then measured it using pencils and even discovered it was as long as two of them! They counted scales and teeth, wrote about their experiences of the dragon, what he liked to eat etc.

Charlie who was usually very reluctant to do any 'sit down table' activities did his first representational drawing of what he thought the dragon looked like.



## OUTCOME

- the experience has inspired more teacher led and child initiated activities involving the dragon and the fairies e.g. at Halloween the dragon burnt Winnie the Witch's friend's broomsticks and the children received a letter from her asking to make new ones.

Dear Team Leaders,  
Please, please, please could you help us - you are our last chance of freedom. On Saturday night as you know it was Halloween. Well - our good friend Winnie invited us to the woods for a party. We had a wonderful time but while we were partying the Big Bottomed Dragon stole our broomsticks and burnt them with his fiery breath. We now have no way of returning to our territories and are hiding in the woods. Could you find the time to make us some more broomsticks as we would like to leave the woods before Bonfire Night (we don't like rockets and bonfires as the sparks set our hats and hair alight). We would be most grateful!  
Many thanks

Red Witch, Green Witch, Black Witch and  
Titchy Witch X X X X

Dear Infants, —  
I have been asked by my friends to say a great big thank you to you for helping them to escape from the woods. The broom sticks you made were a little bit tricky to ride to start with but they soon got the hang of it! (Red Witch fell off a couple of times and needed a magic spell to make her leg better, but she's fine now)  
It is lovely to know that you are our friends and that we can call on you for help. (I still remember when you made me a shelter and left me an apple)  
We hope you continue to enjoy the time you spend in the woods and we have left you a little treat to say thank you.

You are all very kind and caring children!

Lots of love

Winnie X



- the link between indoor and outdoor learning is increasingly integrated as a result of the children's enthusiasm;
- learning opportunities outdoors have extended children's creativity.

## **CONCLUSION**

- learning in the outdoors gives children opportunities to do things on a much bigger scale as they are in an environment where they are free to learn and investigate with fewer rules and boundaries.
- the power of child initiated activities can have a profound effect on children's learning and through observing the children's activities and building on them learning can be greatly enhanced.
- children who could be reluctant learners in other situations or environments, gained further ownership of their own learning through increased application and genuine enthusiasm.