

# EXPLORING THE WIDER WORLD

CASE STUDIES

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**Common themes and strands**

## 1. 'THINKING OUT OF THE BOX'

### DAY CARE NURSERY

Although previously enthusiastic about outings and trips, the 'Exploring the Wider World' project has enabled this setting to really begin to make the most of their immediate locality and to reflect on the many ways it supports the children's learning and development.

Going down to the canal to see the ducks and the barges is not only very enjoyable for staff and children alike, but also allows them to make links with their 'How we live' project, as they talk to the people living on the boats. After exploring woodwork activities in the setting, the children visited a local DIY shop, where the staff were very welcoming and encouraged the children to weigh out bags of nails with them. Following a visit to a local fruit and veg market, the children made soup with the vegetables they'd bought. The children have also really enjoyed a visit from the 'Farm on Wheels' as this was the first time many of the children had seen farm animals in real life. The nursery staff now enjoy the process of 'thinking out of the box' in their planning sessions, as they reflect on the children's needs and interests and plan for new and supportive experiences that stimulate and link to their learning.

The staff are clear that without the project and The Early Education Associate's input and encouragement, they would not have taken this step in their development. They have also become much more aware of the value of the 'simple' activities that might have been overlooked before e.g. going to the local fields and woods to play among the trees.

They post photos of the children on Tapestry (an online journal for recording children's experiences in the EYFS) so that parents can see and appreciate their children enjoying their experiences in the wider world – and understand why they might be talking all the time about barges and bags of nails! This also helps parents to appreciate the depth of learning that takes place when children explore their world and how it links with other aspects of the EYFS.

## 2. IT'S NOT JUST THE DESTINATION ... IT'S THE GETTING THERE THAT COUNTS

### FIELDHOUSE NURSERY

This setting has always taken children out, but not only has the quantity and range of outings increased as a result of the project, there has also been a profound shift in the way they view and plan for opportunities to develop children's Understanding of the World.

They now plan the details of an outing much more carefully, acknowledging that the experience starts "the minute the children leave the nursery gates" and that everything along the way is just as important as wherever they are actually going! This is an approach they have shared with parents too, involving them as much as possible with the outings and encouraging them to 'liberate' themselves from their phones when they are out together! Parents are encouraged to look at what's around them when they are with their children and make the most of opportunities for conversation when they are out and about. Planning for outings now goes beyond the required risk assessments - staff have found that they are focusing much more deeply on the potential of the whole journey and reflecting on the deeper learning and impact on everyone involved. They intend to develop this further, particularly with regard to involving parents as partners in these activities.

One aspect of the training that has been particularly inspirational in helping them to see the advantage of their unique locality as an excellent way of making connection with families is the 'Clay' workshop with an Early Education Associate. The staff so appreciated the fun (and also the relaxation) involved in working with clay, that they were reluctant for it to end! They hope to set up a clay workshop with families, drawing on the experience of many of the parents and grandparents who were connected with the potteries. The workshop will be called 'Clayheads' – reclaiming the familiar local term for people who worked in the 'potworks'. They hope one day to have their own potter's wheel in the setting.

They have also found that the books and resources provided by the project have been particularly valuable in providing the inspiration to go looking for things outside (e.g. post boxes) and then finding out more about what was happening historically at the time they were built. An open-ended play session

with the 'Big Maps' (another resource provided by the project) inspired the children to build a whole range of houses, castles etc. out of chairs, Duplo etc. (photos available). A staff meeting is planned for November that will involve a (torchlight) treasure hunt through local streets where two teams of practitioners will be encouraged to compete against each other to find local points and do specific tasks (e.g. tree rubbing/take photos). This is a fun staff training idea that could be replicated at different times of the year and by settings all over the country.

The fact that the setting has no nursery vehicle might be considered a challenge but they are making excellent use of the two bus stops right by the nursery! Staff are confidently taking children on bus rides that previously might have caused anxiety and are planning to go further afield. They now feel there are no limits to how far they can go, and their advice to other settings unsure about using public transport and getting out more into the wider world is, "once your risk assessments are complete and your planning is in place, then 'just do it'. If you hold yourself back – then you will be holding the children back." They have found that this project has given them the boost in confidence that has enabled them to do exactly this and to deepen their understanding, not just of the local area, but of children's learning and development in general.

### 3. LITTLE AND OFTEN

#### GIGGLES AND WIGGLES

The setting has found the project really helpful in building their confidence in taking the children out in both small and large groups around the local area, as well as further afield. They are now capitalising on days when there are fewer children attending, to spend time out in the local area making the most of nearby open spaces and being involved in the local community. They visit the local shops, go on picnics and take part in seasonal activities like conker collecting. The setting regularly makes good use of a local patch of open space and has plans to do some planting there in the future.

One of the key new activities for the children has been to go out regularly litter picking. The children are learning about important aspects of environmental awareness and are also educating their parents too, who report that their children now notice litter when they are out with them and are encouraging the parents to help pick it up! This is a perfect example of the wider value and potential long-term impact of the project. These children are giving something back to their local community as well as benefitting from it. This is being recognised by local residents, who are engaging with the children when they are out and about and making good suggestions to staff for places to find the best conkers etc!

They would advise other settings who might be anxious about exploring further afield, to just start by taking little walks around the block as often as they can – and you might as well collect the litter as you go!

#### 4. MAKE SOMEONE'S DAY

##### LITTLE DUCKS

This nursery is very committed to taking the children out, they have minibuses and people carriers which enable them to take small groups out into the local area and further afield. They are very keen to be involved with the programme, have signed up for all the experiences on offer in the project and are completing their outings log – a diary of all outings undertaken with the children that includes all relevant information. This can be used to inform future outings as well provide starting points for practitioner discussion and reflection.

On one outing to Rudyard Lake the children kept meeting an elderly couple who were also visiting the lake. The couple were obviously enjoying seeing the children and commented on what they were doing. The lady then came to the staff and gave them some money; she said that her husband wanted to buy all the children an ice-cream because he had so enjoyed seeing a group of children outside exploring and clearly enjoying the environment. He said that he worried that children spent too much time playing computer games and never went outside. His wife then explained to the staff that her husband was suffering from dementia and that as a result of seeing and interacting with the children he was having a 'better day' (health-wise) than he had had for a very long time.

This is another example of how it's not just the children who benefit from being out in the wider world more often. Local residents are encouraged by seeing the children out and about and in this case in particular, the children's presence had a very positive impact on one local resident and his wife.

## 5. FIRST STEPS

### NORTH ROAD NURSERY

This nursery had a new manager and new staff and were initially unsure about the project and what it might involve. Following a first visit from the Early Education Associate, the manager became quite enthusiastic about the idea and started to talk about possible places the setting could visit.

They had a staff meeting on the first day of the new term to discuss possible outings and the Early Education Associate followed up with a second visit soon after. The setting wanted to visit Pets at Home so they discussed the organisation of a trip there and the possible planning that would be needed before and after the visit. They haven't been able to book in with the store this term so will go next term but, in the meantime, they are now enthusiastically planning to take the children out in the local area to look at signs of autumn.

They have also taken their nursery and reception classes to the art exhibition 'Through the Eyes of a Child' (see case studies 9 and 10). The adults didn't really know what to expect but were very impressed at the amount the children got from the experience, how it really engaged them and how much they loved it! Following the visit, the children have created their own canvases inspired by what they saw in the exhibition; they went on an autumn walk and used things that they saw and found to create their own artwork.

The setting has subsequently booked some of the training and the experiences on offer and have received and are using the resources provided.

They have also asked to visit Oaklands Nursery in order to see the practice in another setting and to find out more about how they can use and make the most of the outdoors.

This is a setting which historically has not taken the children out very much, but following involvement in the project, they have not only taken their first steps, but are enthusiastic about finding out what more they can do so that their children and practitioners benefit from exploring the wider world out there.

## 6. BECOMING WORLD READY

### TINY TREASURES

This setting felt they hadn't been very good at taking the children out before becoming part of the project. They believed there were often too many logistical barriers making outings difficult with the babies in particular, but involvement in the project has not only given them confidence and ideas, it has also changed their thinking. They now take advantage of every possible opportunity and recognise the potential of involving the younger children on routine trips to collect older children from school (for after school provision). Not only does this extend the possibilities for outdoor experience, it also supports the younger children with their later transition to school as they build familiarity with the place and the end of day processes.

Both the pre-school lead and the manager have attended the training and everyone has now read the materials. They enjoyed the farm visit and extended the learning by writing a letter to thank them – and making an experience out of the trip to the post box to post it.

They now make regular visits to a local café, which is enjoyed and appreciated by the café owner as much as the children. The children have been observed re-enacting the experience back in the setting at their snack table and parents report conversations at home about the children's experiences.

This setting is now very enthusiastic about the role that the wider world plays in children's all-round learning and development and commented that these experiences contribute to helping children become 'world ready'. They believe that local outings should be part of the regular timetable in the EYFS to ensure they become central to the child's experience of life in nursery.

## 7. EVERYONE ON BOARD

### HANFORD NURSERY

This setting has seen the staff become very much more empowered as a result of the project. Having witnessed the impact on the older children of going out locally and being keen to get involved, the practitioners in the Baby Room set to and solved the problem of not having enough pushchairs. They asked the parents, who readily offered both a spare single and a double buggy for taking the babies out exploring! Each phase now has a 'Lead Person for Going Out' which has also raised the profile and status of exploring the wider world.

As part of their planning for more outings in the local community, the setting sent out letters to the local residents, suggesting they stop and chat if they saw them in the street and to suggest interesting things the children might like to see. This has been very successful! The local window cleaner got in touch to say when he would be in the area and the children went to watch him at work. Another resident called to say they were having bags of gravel delivered by crane and the children went along to watch and take photographs. They regularly take the bus to the bakers, who, knowing they are coming, has bread ready to show them in various stages of preparation and baking. They are planning other visits to the butchers and the opticians, making the most of connections made through parents of children in the setting, both past and present.

As part of their regular 'harvest' delivery they visited a local cul-de sac. The residents have since been in touch to ask if the children would come and sing carols for them at Christmas time – which is further evidence that the community as a whole is benefiting from the children's experiences and their greater visibility within the community.

The setting has also noticed the impact on parents and their willingness to engage with the project, particularly in response to a current theme of 'recycling' (linked to the story book 'This is the Bear'. Parents are helping children collect recyclable materials at home and taking photographs of them preparing them ready to bring in to nursery e.g. washing out the plastic milk bottles. Their photos will be mounted on the Big Map resource on the roads where the children live. A recycling skip has been delivered to the setting by a

local husband and wife team who are also very enthusiastic about being involved and have agreed to take photos of the entire process as the materials are taken to the recycling plant. The setting will make their own extension to the Big Map to show the location of the recycling plant and the whole thing will be displayed somewhere prominent, where parents and children will be able to see it.

The setting is very pleased with the impact of the project so far and are considering ways they can extend their reach and go further afield in the future. They are a very large setting, however, and they appreciate there are certain challenges they face which must be planned for carefully in order to ensure that all children benefit from the experiences. In the meantime, they are building confidence and making important connections in the community that are having a profound and positive impact all round - and allowing staff, parents and local residents to 'jump aboard' the project along with the children.

## 8. BRINGING THE OUTSIDE BACK IN

### STAFFS UNIVERSITY NURSERY

This nursery found that the project has helped them to focus more closely on what they were already doing, in order to make the most of their regular outings and daily routines of coming to and from the setting. They commented that it has opened their eyes to many of the things on their doorstep that, as adults, we often become oblivious to especially in a built-up urban environment. They now spend time looking at the outside structure of the nursery and the architecture of other buildings nearby, as well as markings in the road, weeds growing on the path etc. Similarly, they are also focussing on the routine small events that happen in nursery (e.g. fire drills, deliveries etc) and valuing them as new learning opportunities for young children. They make the most of these experiences to support memory development and recall, by photographing aspects of these events and using the photos afterwards to explore sequencing and recall. This is an important way of supporting children's memory development, as it builds on practical first-hand experience and social connection to help develop meaningful recall. Taking photographs also helps children to share their experiences back in nursery with others, as for a variety of reasons, not all children are able to experience the same events and outings, particularly those who are not in all day or every day.

This is a very important aspect of the project for this setting, as it has highlighted the ways that they bring the "outside back in with them" in order to make full use of the experience later. This has broadened to include raising awareness of the outside world even on days when they can't leave the setting. As an example, for World Food day, when it was too wet to go shopping, staff helped the children to go online and select food from Asda that reflected the countries of origin of the children and their families. As a University Nursery, the setting has a diverse group of families represented among the children – but they have extended this activity in ways that would be just as relevant in all settings. Now, when the regular ASDA delivery comes every week, they go out to greet the delivery van and later help with unpacking the food. Staff make the most of this time to talk about where the food comes from, to look at packaging, drawing attention to flags and different languages etc. Not only does this raise awareness of food and transport etc.,

this attention to the roles and occupations of people who bring the 'outside' into nursery, has also heightened awareness of a broader spectrum of occupations and 'people who help us'.

It has also helped link home with the setting as they have been spurred on to capitalise on aspects of the children's lives that can be used as starting points for wider projects. When a child commented on the 'stinky cheese' he found in his fridge at home, not only were staff ready to take the children on an impromptu trip to Sainsbury's to buy cheese for a tasting session back at nursery (exploring the deli counter and getting a 'cheese wire' demonstration along the way) but they also extended it later to cooking with cheese and talking about other foods at home.

Because many of the parents are unable to help out with trips during the day, staff have created a novel way of helping parents to also explore the wider world with their children. They have devised individualised Treasure Hunts (matched to children's developmental stages) for families to try when they are outdoors. They can be very simple (e.g. find 3 brown things) or more challenging, as appropriate. Prompts are provided that encourage parents to think creatively and have fun with their children. These have been very well received and children are keen to bring their responses in to nursery where the 'finds' can be shared and talked about with everyone.

Having had a successful time last year exploring the wider world with older children, the staff were apprehensive about continuing the same approach with the much younger and less experienced children who arrived in Nursery in September. Their fears were unfounded however, as they started 'small and often' and have been spurred on to try new and different scenarios, as well as old favourites like going out to look for leaves. Children and staff from mixed age groups also go out together e.g. nursery children and a practitioner might accompany baby room staff out on their walks with the babies in their buggies. This flexible and responsive approach has ensured that everyone is getting the best from the wider world outside the nursery.

## 9. ACCEPTING THE CHALLENGE

### KINGSLAND KINDERGARTEN

The manager of the setting was concerned that they weren't making the most of outside opportunities due to a variety of factors - mostly because of a lack of confidence, concern about the logistics/ratios and how children would cope with busy main roads in the area etc. With lots to focus on, it was initially low down their priorities. After speaking with their Early Education Associate and getting some reassurance about ratios etc, the manager felt ready to accept the challenge, and to inspire the staff to view 'going out' differently. So much so that it now features in their weekly planning and the requirement to arrange one small outing a week is generally exceeded to two or three, in response to the children's interest and the enthusiasm of the staff for making the most of the local area. Like many other settings, they have been encouraged to start small – with small groups, short trips and exploring nearby streets which has helped those staff who weren't very familiar with the immediate area. Although it is still early days and staff are working with a new intake of children, they have noticed how happy the children are going out on their little trips.

The attention to planning means that they are making natural connections with children's interests. They make the most of outings for natural 'back and forth' conversation building. This enables them to integrate support for children with delayed speech naturally into their practice, helping them to use every day words more confidently and they expect this to increase over time. Although there's now a box on their planning sheet for 'Going Out' it's actually so much more than just a 'box ticking' exercise as the staff are enthusiastic about linking outings with children's interests and motivations and now view going out as an integral activity in their curriculum.

## 10. CULTURAL CAPITAL

### JACK IN THE BOX, MEIR

Following the first meeting for the project, this setting decided to find a local countryside venue that they could visit weekly. They had to discount their first possible choices as the toilet facilities weren't suitable for regular lengthy visits, but settled on Trentham Garden as their main location to visit weekly. Previously they used to go out quite often to various places but usually only during school holidays. Since starting the project, they have been going out continuously throughout the year with all the different ages of children within the nursery setting. Going on more regular outings has supported the staff to feel more confident in taking the children out and exploring new experiences which they have then shared with the families. They use photos and experiences from the outings to create books for all the setting to see. Some parents were a bit reluctant at first, but sharing the photos etc. has helped overcome their fears and concerns. Now they don't want their children to miss out on trips and staff have noticed that when outings are announced, more children are being booked in on those days! This shows that parents are really starting to see the importance of outings and to value the experiences their children are gaining when they go out and about. This has also encouraged families to visit places themselves with their children and the parents are growing in confidence about getting out more and visiting new places.

They were able to draw on all these experiences for the Art Exhibition over the summer holiday, which was organised with a local art gallery. The children explored a range of media including clay, tile art, painting, glue and used water colour and oil pastels for the first time. The parents and families got on board with the exhibition and took their children to see the work for themselves, taking photos and using social media to share just how proud they were! The art work was taken back to the setting afterwards and displayed. This meant that parents and families who were not able visit the exhibition could see it and everyone received the catalogue containing the children's work.

The Big Map of the area around the setting has been a very popular resource with the children. They asked lots of questions about map symbols and where places were, e.g. their homes and schools they knew. Many children hadn't

ever seen a map before, and it kept them interested and focussed for a long time.

The setting was initially lucky to have a minibus to support their outings with the children, but they have recently had to sell it. However, with the support of the parents who now appreciate the value and impact of the outings, they have insured all the staff cars so that they can be used to transport children on visits slightly further afield.

The setting is aware of the importance placed by OFSTED on cultural capital and they believe the project has helped them fully incorporate the value of this with their children and families, especially for those who are less advantaged.

**11. 'I FOUND A LAMPOST WITH MY MUM!' BROOK COTTAGE CHILDCARE**

From a confident foundation of already going out on trips and outings, this setting has found the project has really enhanced their appreciation of the opportunities available to them in their local area. This includes the simple, everyday things that adults often take for granted (and no longer see) but are intriguing to children e.g. post boxes and lampposts. Finding a lamppost with your mum may not seem like a momentous experience – but it clearly was for this child who gleefully reported back his find, after he'd been exploring lampposts with nursery. Making connections, remembering and recalling vocabulary from previous first-hand experience and linking knowledge between home and nursery are powerful learning experiences for young children and contribute to a sense of achievement and self - agency in their learning. Expeditions to discover lampposts (and learning why we have them) were enhanced by the resource materials from the project (e.g. photo books) which triggered conversations about similarities and differences and also encouraged staff to consider appropriate vocabulary to extend language learning.

This setting was also involved in the Exhibition at Bare Wall Gallery and staff and parents were impressed not just by the artwork, but how children recognised their own work in the different context of the gallery. Participating in new artistic experiences such as printing and working with clay proved very popular and have been brought back into the setting, as has the artwork from the exhibition which is now on display for all parents and children to see.

Although the project didn't present any particular new challenges to this setting and their local area offers ample opportunities for exploration, they are very clear that being part of the project and benefitting from the resources, training and exhibition etc has greatly enhanced their practice. Their advice to other settings in the early stages of exploring the wider world is to talk to and visit other settings to get ideas and encouragement from them and to allow staff time to talk about what they might be able to do in their area.

Encouraging staff to go out without the children initially, to look at the environment with fresh eyes and to make their own photograph books to share with children back in nursery is a good first step, and is likely to provide the urge to get back out there with the children.

## 12. KICKSTARTING WIDER CHANGE

### STEPPING STONES COMMUNITY NURSERY AND PRE-SCHOOL

The manager of this setting is very clear that her attendance at the initial training session kickstarted a step change in practice that has ultimately benefitted the setting and its community in a whole range of ways. She and the staff are now confidently planning for outings both near and far and bringing the families along with them too. The manager and staff are challenging themselves to find and explore a variety of different places to take the children e.g., museums, riding stables, swimming etc as well as local nature parks (Hem Heath) so that parents can try out activities with their children in a safe, supported way. They are starting to see parents becoming more confident to try out these experiences by themselves when they are at home (and also away on holiday) with their children.

This broader outlook has opened their eyes with regard to possibilities and they now seize every opportunity that comes their way for engaging with the wider world - and also the world on their doorstep. For example, a chat with a local builder working next door to the setting led to the children spending time outside watching a special demonstration of the fork lift truck and other construction vehicles. Back indoors the children extended this first-hand experience by developing their own role play construction site, which the manager enhanced with additional scrap resources to create bricks etc. In the same way, a fascination with the Gruffalo led to a whole group outing to the woods, along with family members. Not only did everyone have a great time, but the story came to life for the children as they explored the woods and made connections with characters and events from the tale. These are just a few examples of the local expeditions made by the setting, but the impact on children, families and staff has been profound in the way it has supported and developed learning and enhanced the quality of practice.

Links have been made with the local community that have led to other opportunities (e.g. the builder next door wants to extend his involvement with the setting to include his links with a local football stadium) and the setting uses social media to share their adventures, as well as to involve parents in planning and preparations for outings.

The manager is clear that effective communication with parents has played an important part in the successful outcomes of the project. Traditionally, this community of parents were not used to their children leaving the setting and there were some initial concerns. By being given clear guidance on the preparations and on what to expect on each outing, they have managed very quickly not only to reassure parents about the value of exploring the wider world, but also to build their confidence in the setting as a whole and to raise their enthusiasm and engagement in their children's learning.

An added and unexpected bonus of the project has been the way the manager has extended the focus to include other parts of the community centre attached to the nursery. Given the potential for disharmony in the city due to misunderstandings of faiths, communities and ways of life, she believes that the centre is in a key position to work with diverse age groups from the wider community and other agencies, to improve awareness and understanding through the innovative approach to the work they do.

By encouraging a range of outings and expeditions they are not only opening the eyes of their own community to the wider world but also inviting others in the local area to engage with them too. Some of the people they now interact with regularly (e.g. from the museum and riding stables) comment very positively about the way the nursery is enabling greater participation from minority ethnic groups who traditionally did not access their provision. The manager links all this change and positive development right back to her involvement with the project and the way it has broadened her perspective and 'liberated' her to be able to achieve so much in such a relatively short space of time.

**Common themes and strands:**

**Starting small and building confidence** – both in the size of the groups and in the area covered.

**Appreciating what's on our doorstep** – looking with fresh eyes at the immediate 'wider world' and seeing from the child's perspective

**Two-way street** – local residents and community benefit from seeing the children out and about and have much to offer in terms of connection, interaction and education.

**Bringing it back** – making the most of the experience when back in the setting, recalling, sharing, sequencing events, elaborating and extending following the children's interests and motivations triggered by the outing.

**Planning and reflecting** – maximising the potential of an outing / recognising the meaning it has for the children and their perspective on the experience as reflected in their play and conversation with families

**Involving parents** – innovative ideas to address the challenge of getting parents involved, reducing concerns, building confidence to venture out by themselves with their families

**Appreciating our world** – connecting with built environment, nature, architecture, care for the environment etc

**Importance of project resources and training** – providing confidence boost, starting points and ideas, support for problem solving /overcoming challenges etc

**Importance of REAL LIFE FIRST HAND EXPERIENCES** - in building vocabulary, encouraging conversation, making connections, improving physical and emotional wellbeing, providing contexts for learning and supporting development. 'Going Out' fundamentally supports the development of the Prime areas as well as Specific areas of learning.