

Origins of Forest schools and how it came across to Britain.

Forest School originated in Scandinavia: Denmark and Sweden, and was aimed at children aged 3-18. link to Shropshire CC forest school website <http://www.shropshire.gov.uk/forestschools.nsf>

In 1994 a group of students from Somerset visited Denmark and brought the idea back to England (The Bridgewater project).

They began by taking 6-8 children onto the college grounds on a regular basis. The emphasis was on the children making independent choices in the outdoors in real contexts and situations, e.g. Problem solving whilst attempting to make a rope swing: What equipment will they need? What will they use if there is not everything they need?

The children need to choose a tree, fix the rope, select a stick for the seat and measure the seat for the correct height, width and length.

All activities are carried out under the watchful eye of the Forest school leader, offering help and practical advice where needed.

This sort of activity helps the children to practice existing skills and also develop new ones. The children are encouraged to use tools in a controlled environment. So they learn the correct way of using them.

Younger children:

Forest Schools moves them beyond the home/school environment into an environment they might not otherwise encounter until they were much older, if at all. They look at mini beasts, unfamiliar/familiar plants, animals, and the route to and from the site, the physical challenge of walking on uneven surfaces can be quite tricky for some. The children are able to take risks in a controlled environment.

Older children:

Using tools for a purpose and taking risks, setting up and maintaining the site for the younger children, forest management, communicating and planning to build a fence, a semi-permanent shelter or to improve access. Many of these older children, especially the kinesthetic learners, can be turned off by certain aspects of the normal school day/ routine and begin to develop behaviour that can be disruptive to their learning. Sometimes they can perceive themselves as poor learners, but Forest Schools can give them the opportunity to develop life skills in a non-threatening environment.

Forest schools can provide these children with the motivation to learn again. They then rediscover confidence in themselves as learners, enjoy increased respect from their peers and begin to rebuild their self-

esteem. This in turn helps them to better manage their own behaviour and make more proactive life choices.

Forest School at Ruyton:

We started in the summer of 2006 when one member of the teaching staff (Mrs Sharon Jones) attended training to gain a level 3 certificate as a Forest School Leader.

That autumn we began to develop the school grounds to enable forest school sessions to begin. We made a seating area on the playing field (which is now surrounded by willow weaving).

In 2007 we were granted access to an area of local woodland, within walking distance of the school. We are able to use this area for half the spring term and all of the summer term each year. This is a fantastic opportunity for us to develop our own area in woodland. We have cleared an area in the woods for a seating area and shelter, made trees safe, erected a shed for storage and a poo-loo, and we have begun to build up a range of tools and equipment for the children to use.

During the autumn term when we cannot access our local woods we use an area of woodland that has been developed by the local authority for the sole purpose of forest schools.

So far class 1 has all year round access to forest schools.

Class 2 has autumn and summer term access.

Year 6 children have summer term access.

We are trying to gain timetable space to allow other year groups / classes access to forest schools in the near future.