

Gaining impact through schools

The Shropshire Wildlife Trust delivers most of the educational work for BRH. They have a proven track record in delivering high quality environmental education across the county. Here are a few tips.

Talk to people-

- Face to face contact with teachers is much more productive than letters or e-mails. Ring to make an appointment, keep it succinct and make it exciting, attractive and interesting.
- Teachers meetings are a useful forum or try the School Development Groups which meet termly and are forums for clusters of primary schools in geographic areas.
- Local Education Authorities have Curriculum Advisers who can also be useful contacts.
- Identify new sites which schools can 'adopt'. Landowners are more willing to get involved than we imagined- they just need some reassurance that they are doing it right!

Make it easy-

- Think about what's in it for them.
- Links to the National Curriculum (NC) are essential. Look at the NC on the internet or speak to Curriculum Advisers.
- Schools often struggle with travel costs so if you can help they are more likely to get involved.
- Working with primary schools is much simpler than with secondary in terms of timetables.

Safety first!

- Make sure that you have visited the site you use before you use it. Look out for fallen trees, unsafe boundaries and any potential hazards you may encounter during your education session.
- Make sure you report all your findings in a thorough Risk Assessment (RA) and remind the group of the main hazards when they arrive. Schools are used to seeing RA's so don't worry that they will be put off.
- It's a good idea to have a few simple safety rules for everyone to follow, such as, stay together at all times, listen carefully to instructions- and above all, make sure your group is adequately supervised throughout your session. This is especially important if you are using tools of any kind.

Plan well-

- Make sure that you have enough activities for everyone to do.
- Have you planned for wet weather activities?
- How do the activities help you communicate your message?

Avoid excessive use of handouts-

- We believe that if a group is spending all their time outdoors looking down at a piece of paper, they are missing out on first hand experiences with the world around them.
- Concentrate on activities which give your group direct encounters with the wildlife around them.
- Encourage your group to use their senses to explore their surroundings.

Have a clear message-

- Some topics can be very complicated, so make sure that your message is clear and easy to understand.
- Start with a question to help you establish any misconceptions about the subject; this will make your time outdoors far more productive and more interesting for your group.

Be creative-

- Constantly examine the way that you communicate with young people. Different people learn in different ways.

Have Fun!

- Teaching environmental education is a wonderful way of communicating with young people on issues that may affect them in every day life.
- Take the chance to express your own passion and interests, enthuse, have a laugh, your group will be talking about their trip for weeks to come!

Case study- Forest Schools

Background

We established a Forest School at Walcot arboretum in the autumn of 2003 and have worked with all the children of St Georges Primary, Clun and the key stage one class at Lydbury North Primary over that time. Helen Howes coordinates the activity with both schools.

Aims

Forest School is aimed at equipping young children with an education that encourages an appreciation of the natural world. Through a series of visits (ideally weekly over three terms) to a high quality woodland environment, preschool and foundation stage children are encouraged to be independent and by working through small achievable tasks in a stimulating environment, are able to build self esteem and develop social and behaviour management skills whilst at the same time learning.

Results

The success of the program has been highlighted in the interim evaluation report and through an evaluation of the work in the Spring and Summer terms 2005. The following comes from that report.

In general parents report that children enjoy Forest School (FS) and are able and willing to talk about their experiences at home. Many parents report that FS activities are continued in the home environment, with sticks appearing by the back door and the safety rules practiced at FS being 'a good reference point in ... everyday life'. One parent expressed the view that the FS was 'invaluable'.

Parents have also reported changes in their children subsequent to a spell at FS that have included increased confidence, a greater awareness of (natural) colours, more creative whilst playing out of doors and (now) loves playing outside. Other have noticed their children taking a greater interest in the plants and wildlife of their own gardens and even a willingness to try more vegetables subsequent to eating wood sorrel at FS!



Forest School sets children up for a lifetime rich in experiences of the natural world. As a practitioner this feels like our most powerful tool to date in '*providing opportunities for people to understand and enjoy the special character of the Shropshire Hills**'. We hope to begin to define for specific children in the coming term exactly what the outcomes are when attending extended FS and demonstrate how an education out of doors contributes to these children moving on towards the six early years stepping stones*.

* The stated aim of the AONB Life Long Learning Network .

* Knowledge and Understanding, Physical Development, Creative Development, Disposition and Attitudes, Social Development, Emotional Development