

People and Places Project Go! Event - West

Who

Teachers from the West of Scotland

Where

Cadzow Oaks -Chatelherault Country Park

When

13th November 2012

Why

Time to reflect on the possibilities of a place based approach to outdoor learning

“the
possibilities
of this place
are endless”

C M J Richardson

A photograph of a large, mature tree with dense green foliage, standing in a grassy park area. The tree is the central focus, with other trees and a clear sky in the background. In the distance, a few people can be seen walking on a path.



If you go down to the woods today....

Why do you teach where you do? What makes it special? What or who lives there, has lived there, might live there? Aline from BigWorld Adventures in Nature and myself, Caroline from Grounds for Learning, spent a day supporting teachers on the People and Places project to think about these and other questions, as they prepare to build their curriculum around the possibilities of a place near them.

We set up our base under the mighty Cadzow Oaks in Chatelherault Country Park and as Aline prepared a meal of vegetable broth, baked apples and bananas I walked along the forest trails to meet a group of teachers, Sally and Karen from the Forestry Commission and Julie from Education Scotland.

We set off back to camp with a simple task of introducing themselves to each other along the way - choosing a new partner every time they passed a pink ribbon. Much laughter and conversation followed, but as they talked they forgot to notice the world, and pink ribbons around them. To tune into the space we therefore spent the final part of the journey in silence - just looking for something 'nice'. The difference in feel of these two parts of the journey was palpable - everyone slowed down and when we arrived we shared our thoughts about the place, what we had noticed and how we felt. Everyone mentioned the different effects of having a directed task vs an open ended one - saying that having time to themselves allowed them to appreciate their surroundings and open their senses. Some however said that even the open ended task was too restrictive!

We spent time introducing ourselves to each other and the site, sharing knowledge, thoughts and questions before splitting into clusters and building shelter. Once complete we reflected on how they had changed a space into a place,

why is
the fence
there?

I want to
shout at
the top of
my voice

how the open ended nature of the task sparked questions ranging from why the fence was there (land management and ownership), why the land had mounds and dips, prevailing wind direction, problem solving and their feeling of achievement. With the possibilities of following the questions that come from interactions with the environment, as opposed to predetermined ones, slowly becoming apparent we stopped for a break with food and drinks cooked over the fire.

After break we spent time as a group, in pairs and on our own tuning into the space. We did 3 short exercises that could be replicated with any class. The colours in the growing dusk were beautiful.

The final part of the day was thinking about the possibilities of the space - what excited or interested them. The full list can be seen below and highlights the range of possibilities and interests that even a small group can have. Each one is different but equally valid and each one will produce motivated and meaningful working if allowed to pursue them. The groups shared their findings and were left to ponder how to make this work within a class -choosing just one or letting each child follow their own interests.

By 5pm we said good bye and good luck to the group -it was dark and wet but hopefully they would return home with renewed energy for their People and Places Project and excited to find the possibilities of a place near them.

Can we
play
capture
the castle?

Why are
the trees
hollow?



Possibilities of a place

To end the day we shared ideas of the possibilities of the place they had started to get to know - just a few of the ideas the group would like to do include:

Finding out more about the place: Quadrants (2)/Survey the lichen/ look/listen for animals/creatures/minibeasts/learn the species of trees/ collect things/sort leaves/contour map of the woodland/birds eye view

Find out more about the hollow trees - why and how they survive/measure round them/research the log/Bark Rubbing/ talk to estate staff/

Spending social time there: Halloween party/Picnic/bring my dog/ Bring my children/grandchildren back here to play x6/sing with friends and guitar once dark

Being creative: Make a picture/face/fairies and elves with leaves and twigs/sketch the broken tree/Printing/paint with mud/Photo a day for a year/Take photographs 2

Be active: Make a seating area/bench/tree swing/shelter
Play capture the castle/hide and seek/football/treasure hunt
Explore different areas/climb a tree/shout at the top of your voice

Be calm: sleep/ Come back on my own/read/sleep over/be here in the dark

I want to
shout at
the top of
my voice

I would like
to come
back in the
dark...