START SMALL
LET CURIOSITY LEAD

Independent Primary School Case Study

How the Advanced Certificate in Forest School & Outdoor Learning transformed one educator's confidence and approach



THE OUTDOOR TEACHER

BOLTON SCHOOL

A PASSION FOR EARLY YEARS AND OUTDOOR LEARNING

For Danielle Findlay, outdoor learning has always been closely connected to her passion for Early Years education.

Danielle is a teacher at Bolton School, where she currently works in Pre-School and holds responsibility for outdoor learning across the school's Primary Division. Alongside her teaching role, she is Chair of Governors at Haslam Park Primary School.

With a long-standing interest in early years and outdoor learning, Danielle already understood the value of giving children opportunities to learn beyond the classroom. What she wanted was greater knowledge, a different perspective and a clearer understanding of what could genuinely be achieved in an outdoor space.

Danielle enrolled on The Outdoor Teacher's Advanced Certificate in Forest School & Outdoor Learning hoping to connect theory with what happens in real educational settings. For her, the question was not simply why children should learn outdoors.
It was how to make it meaningful.





TURNING THEORY INTO ACTION

One of the greatest strengths of the programme for Danielle was its ability to make outdoor learning feel practical and achievable.

The course videos were particularly valuable, providing the opportunity to see approaches demonstrated rather than simply reading about them.

The supporting resources also helped Danielle navigate an area that can often feel overwhelming for educators: paperwork and risk assessment.

Outdoor spaces are naturally dynamic. For teachers wanting to develop their provision, knowing where to begin with risk assessments and planning can sometimes become a barrier in itself. The programme helped provide greater clarity.

By combining the thinking behind outdoor learning with practical guidance and resources, Danielle began to feel more confident about translating ideas into real experiences for children.

> “The videos were very helpful, especially for someone who needs to see something done to do it for themselves.
> Sometimes it's really hard to know where to begin with the extent of risk assessments in an outdoor space.”

REFRAMING WHAT OUTDOOR LEARNING CAN LOOK LIKE

Perhaps the most significant change was not a new activity or resource.
It was a shift in perspective.

Danielle began to reconsider what a successful outdoor learning session needed to look like. This reframing has influenced the way she facilitates learning outdoors.

Rather than feeling that sessions need extensive equipment or complicated planning, Danielle has become more confident in working with the environment, observing the children and allowing their curiosity to help shape what happens next.

The result is outdoor learning that feels responsive rather than over planned.
Simple experiences can become powerful learning opportunities when children are given time to notice, question and explore.

> “It doesn't have to be grand and all singing and dancing. My greatest sessions have been with the fewest resources and using the children's curiosity.”

WHEN SIMPLE EXPERIENCES CREATE LASTING MEMORIES

Some of Danielle's most successful outdoor learning experiences have been remarkably simple.

One particular session involved making popcorn over a fire.
“Both the children and adults helping were amazed!”

The activity created excitement and wonder, but also gave children the opportunity to experience fire, food and the outdoor environment in a memorable and carefully facilitated way. Danielle has also begun developing children's connection with the natural environment through a focus on trees and woodland.

Children are being encouraged to notice, appreciate and develop a relationship with the trees around them as part of wider work towards the Green Tree Schools Award.
These experiences reflect Danielle's evolving approach: using what is already available and creating opportunities for children to become genuinely curious about the natural world.

CURIOSITY AND WONDER

The impact on the children has been clear. They already loved being outdoors, but Danielle has seen what happens when those experiences are enriched with greater confidence and intention.

"Their curiosity and wonder has soared."

Time in the woodlands gives children opportunities to explore, ask questions and follow interests that emerge naturally from the environment around them.

For Danielle, the programme has strengthened her ability to recognise and develop those moments.

Rather than always beginning with a fixed outcome, outdoor learning can begin with what a child notices.

A tree.
A sound.
A change in the season.

A question.
The learning grows from there.

> We can change the preparation, our approach or the environment rather than expecting the learner to manage a difficult transition on their own.



CONFIDENCE THAT EXTENDS BEYOND ONE TEACHER

The impact of the programme has also extended into Danielle's wider role in outdoor learning.

She describes feeling more confident in leading activities and, importantly, better equipped to support colleagues.

This is particularly important as outdoor learning develops across different age groups. Early Years education often provides greater flexibility to move between indoor and outdoor environments. The challenge is ensuring that the value of outdoor learning continues as children move through school.

Danielle has begun creating sessions across Key Stage 1 that encourage children to explore nature and remain curious about the world around them.

Her growing confidence allows her not only to develop her own approach, but to help other teachers recognise what is possible.

> “I feel like it has empowered me to help my colleagues do the same.”



MAKING OUTDOOR LEARNING PART OF EVERYDAY LEARNING

For Danielle, outdoor learning works best when it is not treated as an occasional event. In Early Years, children regularly have opportunities to venture outside. The Advanced Certificate has helped Danielle build on this and consider how outdoor learning can become a more consistent part of children's educational experience.

Her advice to other schools is simple.
“Start small. A little and often approach always works best.”

Outdoor learning will not look the same in every school.
Some settings have extensive woodland.
Others have a playground, a few trees or a small patch of green space.

Danielle believes the starting point should always be the environment a school already has.

“Work with what you have and lead the way in helping your children to connect to the nature in your space, however little or vast that may be.”

By making going outside part of daily or weekly learning, schools can allow their approach to develop naturally over time.

Confidence grows.
Ideas grow.
And children's relationship with the natural world grows with them.

> “I feel like it has empowered me to help my colleagues do the same.”



A DIFFERENT WAY OF SEEING OUTDOOR LEARNING

Completing the Advanced Certificate has strengthened Danielle's knowledge, but its greatest impact has perhaps been the confidence and reassurance it has given her.

She feels more certain about the way she facilitates outdoor learning and more able to recognise the value in simple, child-led experiences.

The programme has also given her resources she can return to as her role and outdoor learning provision continue to develop.

Her advice to anyone considering the Advanced Certificate is unequivocal.
"*DO IT! 100%. I have learned so much in such a short time.*"

For Danielle, outdoor learning no longer needs to begin with a grand plan.
It can begin with curiosity.
With the space already available.
And with the confidence to step outside and see where children's questions lead.

SUPPORTING CONFIDENT OUTDOOR LEARNING

The Outdoor Teacher supports schools and educators to build confidence in outdoor learning through practical training, online courses and nature-based educational approaches.

Designed for real educational settings, the training helps schools create meaningful outdoor experiences that support wellbeing, resilience, creativity and engagement.

Find out more at: www.theoutdoorteacher.com