

Combe Down Primary School

How much freedom do we give children?

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How much freedom do we give children to use their imagination and follow through their ideas?

We began our research with a trip to our local woods with Sue Harper from Wild Things as our outdoors expert. We wanted to maximise this opportunity, so almost all sessions were outside which brought a sense of freedom.

The children were excited as we ran down to the woods and soon went off in different directions.

There was a strong smell of wild garlic. Livia: 'I'm cutting my way through the onions.'

Charlotte: 'I'm building bridges over squishy squodgy mud.'

Eliza: 'The trees are like bendy pipe cleaners.'



Den building

Den building then developed as a natural response. Taylor started to organise the other children as they picked up bigger and bigger logs.

Paige moved into the den: 'This is my princess castle, come in Mrs Phillips. Here's my bedroom, your bedroom. Now let's keep building the roof then we could sleep in it too and look, there's a door bell.'



Emerging Patterns

It emerged that the boys were the main den builders and the girls were interested in the inside. We wanted to make sure between us that we followed both lines of enquiry. With a group of 4 girls and 4 boys we looked at the relationship between gender difference and the children's pre-dispositions. Back in the woods they were keen to get on with building the den and to 'make a house'. They got busy tying wool around trees and weaving through branches with a coat hook, making it homely and adding the doorbell.



The girls started a story as they were wrapping wool around the trees. Molly: 'This tree is naughty, it has to be tied up because it takes all our toys.' Livia: 'It's a Christmas tree with all the decoration on.' Molly: 'Ok, a naughty Christmas tree.' The following week back in the woods, Molly sees the tree: 'It's a happy birthday tree now, we taught it to be good and now it's a happy birthday tree. We're going to put some more clothes on him now.'



Experimentation

Some of the boys were making maps to show how to get to the den. Logs were moved to build fires and fireworks were made by wrapping brightly coloured wools around sticks. Painting trees and making wallpaper continued the 'home-making' theme.



We met both the girls' and boys' needs in different ways - they played together but with a different focus. The children loved their time in the woods and making their own decisions about the direction of their play. We realised the importance of listening to children to support the growth of their ideas.