

A hut above the rest

Anne Clarke of Tendring Primary School in Essex explains how they created a heritage area within school grounds

Tendring is a small primary school situated in North Essex. A chance conversation I had with Suffolk's Archaeological Service Outreach Officer led to the development of our somewhat neglected woodland and a project which set the whole school and its wider community buzzing.

Funding was an issue, but a successful application to the National Lottery's 'Awards for All' scheme and a donation from the school's PTA enabled us to complete the project. The scheme provided the school with an exciting outdoor learning environment, enthused and engaged the children and staff and brought together the wider community – including residents from a local centre for learning disabled adults and other specialists.



Over a period of four weeks every child in school, from Reception to Year 6, worked alongside staff and a band of 30 volunteers, which included local residents and parents, under the guidance of Duncan Allan, the Outreach Officer. Based around ancient technology, new skills and techniques were learnt as we constructed:

- An Iron Age roundhouse
- A Roman pit kiln
- A Roman vegetable garden
- Willow sculptures
- A clay bread oven

The project increased children's awareness of heritage through practical experiential challenges, pushed the boundaries of expectations/capabilities of primary aged children and enabled risk-taking in a controlled outdoor location. Children who had previously not been

'allowed' to use even the most basic of tools, such as potato peelers, began taking their new-found skills home - whittling with knives, carving sticks and spoons and building mini roundhouses in their gardens. As the roundhouse grew and took shape, so too did the levels of interest and engagement from parents and carers, who found an opportunity to become involved in the school and their child's learning but in an atmosphere different from the classroom.



The children have developed a deep sense of ownership and pride over the project and indeed all that they have created in the woodland. Feedback from the children centred around four main themes: working outside – away from the classroom; being involved in a once-in-a-lifetime-project; meeting and working with different people and, above all, trust – being trusted to use 'dangerous' tools, trusting one another to work together as a team, holding stakes which their partners hammer into the ground with wooden mallets.

The most important outcome was that the children were being trusted to embark on such a unique and ambitious project. This trust develops their confidence, self esteem and creativity which, we hope, will provide a lasting influence on children's attitudes to learning and their ability to learn.

For all involved there is also the legacy of the project – the need for us all as human beings to leave a mark on the landscape. This mark proves our worth and our existence and for the children to leave such a memorable mark, at so young an age, bodes well for their future.