

Croeso i Gymru Skogsmulle

We were first introduced to Skogsmulle, pronounced skogs-mull-a, in our summer 2015 issue.

We looked at how this global nature-based pedagogy could support taking learning outside in the Foundation Phase, to encourage achievement and wellbeing, while strengthening our cultural identity and the use of the Welsh Language. We catch up with Darren Lewis in this issue to track the progress of Skogsmulle in Wales and the next steps in the journey to bring it into settings across Wales and the UK.

Skogsmulle, which translates as 'forest creature', is the Swedish early years outdoor learning pedagogy that facilitates children's learning through first-hand sensory experiences in the outdoors. Ignite UP celebrated Skogsmulle's first birthday in the UK at Dare Valley Country Park this July, during its early years conference, 'Learning the lessons from Scandinavia'.



Leadership course

The first ever Skogsmulle leadership course in the UK was held at Dare Valley Country Park in 2015. It was supported by members of our partner organization, Friluftsliv, along with three members of their Lidingö branch. These included Siw Linde, who opened Sweden's first 'I Ur och Skur' (rain or shine) nature nursery, called Mulleborg, and Kalisa Kallström, the current principal teacher at Mulleborg.

The key message from this training was that in order for this nature-based pedagogy to grow, we have to develop the practice ourselves, so the Ladybird Nature Parent and Toddler group was created at Dare Valley Country Park. The Ladybird group currently has over 300 members and regularly services 40 families per week with a two-hour session, based on the Swedish model.

The success of the group and the acceptance of a fully outdoors parent and toddler group is proven by its growth and retention rate. The average number of attendees has

grown from six to 18 per session, with the number of sessions increasing from two to seven in September 2016.

A local school in Rhondda Cynon Taff has also taken up Skogsmulle sessions with its Year 2 children, as part of a nature and nurture programme, which will also return later this year. These are the first steps in the mainstream implementation of Skogsmulle.

Study visit

In June 2016 we took 18 teachers from Wales, England, Scotland, Ireland and Greece to Mulleborg, Stockholm, as part of the next stage in growing the Skogsmulle movement. In order to develop the practice, we needed to train more practitioners and crucially take them to observe children in Skogsmulle groups. Those who took part in the study visit had expressed a desire to take forward a way of teaching that truly puts the child at the heart of the learning, and which sees the outdoors as a beneficial and core part of a child's development and learning; not just a risky and scary place outside a classroom.



Learning lessons

While working to increase awareness of Skogsmulle, we realised that hearts and minds needed to be won in terms of its effectiveness, so a conference was organised in July 2016, as part of the awareness campaign, to celebrate Skogsmulle's first birthday in the UK and the first training that took place in July 2015. The conference not only focused on Swedish practice, but became a celebration of experiential learning and learning-rich environments from Scandinavia and northern Europe, as well as in Wales. Speakers included the founder of Waldkindergarten's, Petra Jaeger and celebrated authors, Juliet Robertson and Rose Joyce. It was also pleasing to have Brengain Evans of Ysgol Y Wern in Cardiff speak

about the journey that the school has been on, introducing the Forest School concept and more recently Skogsmulle into the Foundation Phase of a Welsh medium primary school.

Why do we need Skogsmulle in the UK?

Children can play and learn in nature without Skogsmulle and it definitely doesn't replace the Forest School approach to learning in the outdoors. As a Forest School training company and a Director of the Forest School Association, I can see the value of how Skogsmulle can strengthen and enhance practitioner skill sets to facilitate exciting and rich learning experiences for early years children in nature.

What is unique about Skogsmulle:

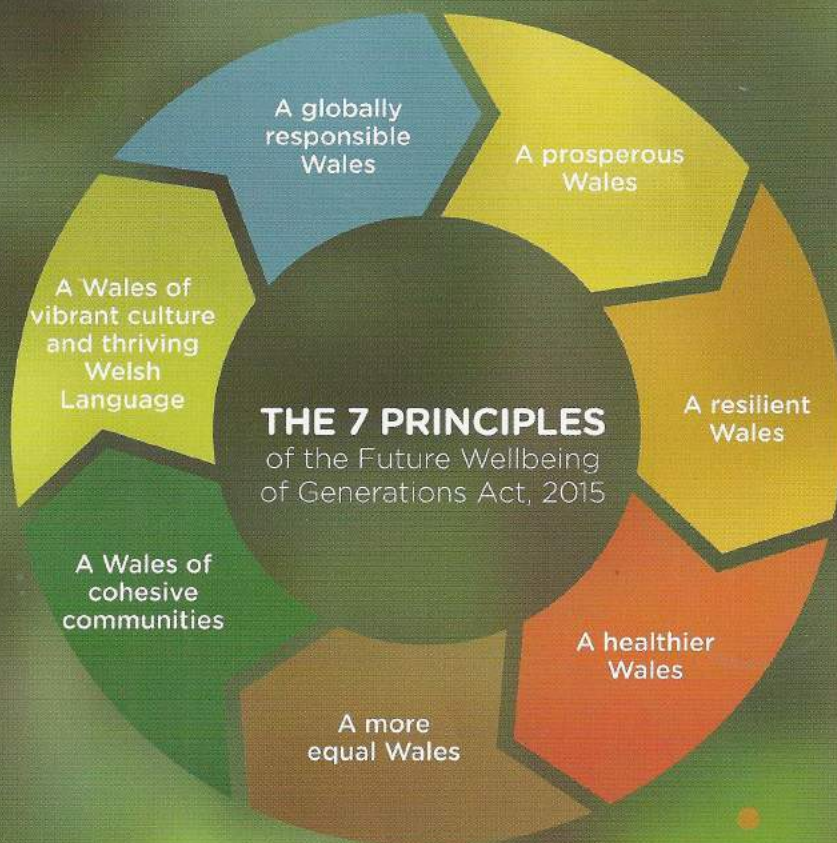
- 1 The Skogsmulle character was born in the forest and lives there. That's why he knows the language of nature and the animals. He wants to help children to learn all the fascinating lessons that nature has to teach us. Everyone knows that he is a fictional figure. However, as with Santa Claus, the children hope that he is real!
- 2 Skogsmulle is accessible as a figure for both children and adults, as a steward of nature. The character represents balance in nature and helps children to understand nature's own laws.
- 3 Skogsmulle is exciting for children at the fantasy play stage of their development. The age-appropriate games, stories and nature lessons ignite their imagination and creativity.
- 4 Skogsmulle acts as a third teacher, facilitating the important messages of the lesson that are set by the teachers. Children often listen and remember the messages if Skogsmulle told them!
- 5 Skogsmulle is the symbol of nature. The Skogsmulle activities help develop the knowledge and understanding of nature and the ecological thinking that our future leaders will need in an uncertain future.
- 6 Collaboration, team working and social interactions in Skogsmulle activities help children to develop friendships outside the family. These help to develop emotional intelligence (EQ).
- 7 Others characters that support Skogsmulle include Fjällfina, Laxe and Nova. You can use them to support knowledge and understanding of the mountains, water and the wider universe. Each character has its own fairytale, song and special call.
- 8 Skogsmulle is an important first step in a child's development of ecological thinking throughout life.
- 9 Skogsmulle can help to connect communities with their local environment and their language, two key pillars for community cohesion and a strong cultural identity.
- 10 Skogsmulle helps children to love nature; and what people love they cherish and look after.

What are the benefits for children?

Skogsmulle, which is experienced by a quarter of all Swedish children, is a unique pedagogical tool for teaching. Children gain first hand experiences through their senses: tasting, smelling, listening, feeling and seeing. Nature provides the best playground in the world. Its varied terrain invites movement and allows a child's imagination to run free.



The new Environment Act and Future Wellbeing of Generations Act, which came into effect this year, provides even more impetus for education to embrace nature-based pedagogies in order to compliment the development and learning of our youngest children.



Research tells us that playing and learning outdoors gives children:

- Better health and wellbeing
- Better gross and fine motor skill development
- Improved self-image and self esteem
- Social competence
- Enhanced brain development
- Reduced stress and stress-related illnesses
- The opportunity to fully use their imagination and creativity
- Strengthened skeletal and muscle structures
- Improved concentration and a reduction in the symptoms of ADHD and negative behaviour
- Environmental awareness

Does Skogsmulle have a future in Wales?

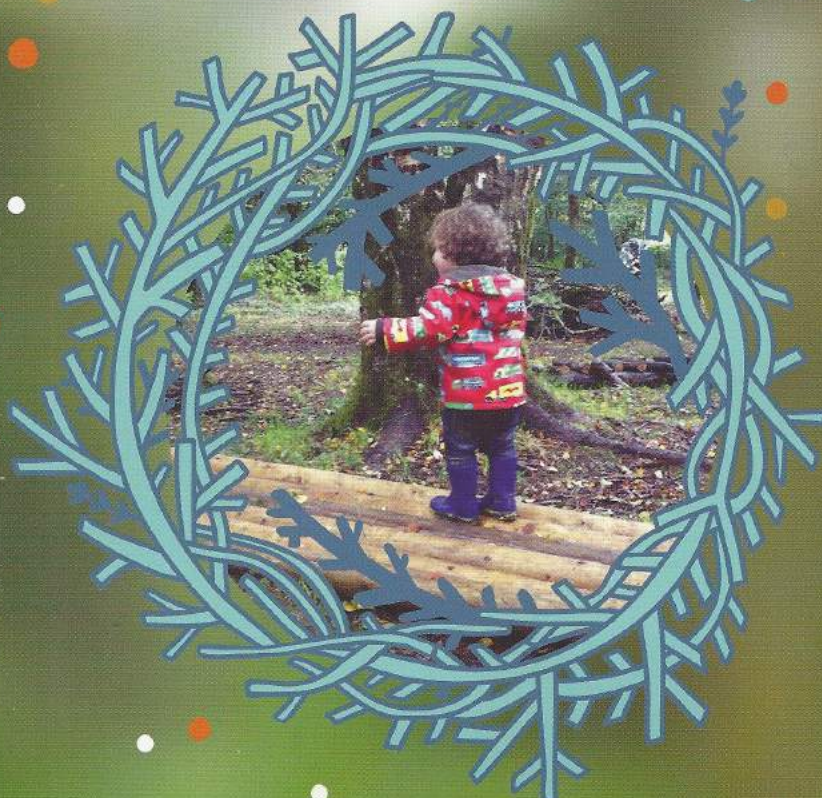
The Donaldson Report sets out four key purposes for the new curriculum in Wales. We believe that Skogsmulle is a perfect vehicle for embedding these four key purposes in the early years.



- 1** Ambitious, capable learners, ready to learn throughout their lives
- 2** Enterprising, creative contributors, ready to play a full part in life and work
- 3** Ethical, informed citizens of Wales and the world
- 4** Healthy, confident individuals, ready to lead fulfilling lives as valued members of society

“It’s necessary to be outside to be stimulated from the flow of sound, light, shapes and colours that nature provides, especially between the ages of three and six, when the energy flow in the human brain is at its greatest”

David Ingvar, Professor of Neurophysiology



How can I get involved in the Skogsmulle movement?

- We have a number of working groups looking at bringing the characters into Welsh culture and heritage. These will consider the characters' appearance, their songs and even their names. We are also translating the stories from Swedish to English and from English to Welsh. We want Skogsmulle to be bi-lingual and children from all families in Wales to have the opportunity to enjoy Skogsmulle.
- We are looking for sponsorship and funding to create leader manuals that directly achieve against the Foundation Phase curriculum with sample lesson plans, risk benefit assessments and case studies of schools, community and play groups using Skogsmulle for the benefit of children and their families.
- Join our Ladybird Nature Parent and Toddler Group, which was inspired by the practice of the I Ur och Skur, Mulleborg, as a member or a volunteer.
- The next Skogsmulle leader course will be in the Summer of 2017 and you will automatically receive a place at the International Symposia in August 2017.
- The International Skogsmulle Symposia will be held in Dare Valley Country Park, RCT, on 3rd August 2017. Previous hosts have included Sweden, Finland and Japan.

For further information and details on Skogsmulle and Scandinavian nature pedagogy please visit igniteup.co.uk or email Darren Lewis at info@igniteup.co.uk



We at Ignite UP believe it is difficult to see how the four key purposes can be met without a high degree of outdoor learning taking place in the early years. We know from research that children who learn and play outdoors are better at making decisions and taking calculated or appropriate risks. Often in Sweden you can hear the pedagogue saying to the child 'find your challenge'. This leads to competent, capable learners that have mastery of themselves. This in turn provides a setting filled with engaged, enthused and internally-motivated children; individuals with a 'growth mindset'.

Skogsmulle children are given time in nature to develop their interests. Nature provokes ideas, supporting the child to develop mental maps of the world. Giving them more than one way to express their thoughts and feelings and encouraging their imagination through fantasy is the beginning of creativity.

In Sweden, wellbeing is placed at the core of the pedagogical approach. From here a child is free from any obstacles that may get in the way of their learning.

...what's next?

On 3rd August 2017 we will welcome teachers and practitioners from across the UK, Sweden, Germany, Finland, Latvia, Russia and Japan to Wales for the tri-annual International Symposia. Around 200 early years practitioners from across the globe will attend Wales' first International Nature Pedagogy Symposia. With previous hosts being Sweden, Finland and Japan, we are excited to showcase the great outdoor learning that takes place in Wales.

Given the work undertaken thus far, the huge effort in developing Skogsmulle practice in Wales, and the additional funding support over the next 12 months, the 2017 International Symposium could mark the beginning of a real sea change in early years and foundation practice, in terms of truly utilising and embracing the outdoors for the unique benefits it can provide.

