

7Cs – CLARITY AND CHALLENGE

Assessing your space

Auditing the clarity of outdoors

This exercise will help you think about how legible your outdoor space is; in other words, how easy it is for children to make sense of it physically as they move around it, and how coherent it feels as an integrated landscape.

- Make an A3 plan of your outdoor space – you can often acquire one of these from the local authority, your setting's regional office or they can be bought online as JPGs or PDFs from planning map retailers. Alternatively, sketch the space freehand or from an aerial view.
- Mark on the entrances and exits to outdoors, including gates and doorways.
- Sketch the key features, including play equipment, planting, sandpits, steps, etc.
- Using different colours, mark key routes through the space and important 'vistas' across the space.

Make copies of the plan and annotate them as you observe children at play – you'll also need a set of coloured marker pens. Try to undertake each audit at least twice, at different times of day and in different environmental conditions.

- Record the routes of two or three specific children as they move around the space, noting any obstacles they encounter in their play. Note timings too – how long did children linger in a space? What did they do there?
- On a new copy of the plan, make coloured dots to represent different types of activity – look for active play, sedentary play, collaborative play, etc. Do you notice anything about where each type of activity is clustered?

What do these diagrams tell you about how children utilise the space - are some areas underused? Why is this? Do certain children congregate in particular places but avoid others? What would help children make the most of the affordances in your outdoor space? How could you more effectively link the subspaces within your wider landscape?

Auditing challenge

What equipment, fixtures, resources and environmental features could provide challenge for young children? What affordances can you find outdoors? Recreate the headings on this table and tour your outdoor space, attempting to view the features within it with 'new' eyes. Try to consider what a child would do, knowing as you do that they will always push the potential of a resource to its limit.

CHALLENGE:	Potential LOCATIONS for the challenge	Key BENEFITS / RISKS of the challenge
CLIMB		
BALANCE		
LEAP		
HIDE		
COLLABORATE		
ROLL		
TALK TO AN ADULT		
OBSERVE		
<i>Add your own challenges...</i>		

This download is linked to the 7Cs article on Context and Connectivity, first published in Nursery World on 2nd June 2014. For more information about the 7Cs approach to designing and resourcing your outdoor space, download Outside Criteria's illustrated [7Cs information guide](#).