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School-based Outdoor Education: Lessons in enabling good practice for children 3-11 years

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Associate Professor
Rationale for research

• Gap in knowledge about how teachers see the outdoor classroom; how and why they are using it (Rickinson et al, 2004)

• More research data needed on evidence of practice and interventions on types and volume of activity (Fiennes et al, 2015)

• Better understanding needed of breadth and depth of outdoor learning practice to encourage the development and use of good practice and raise the value placed on outdoor learning (Institute for Outdoor Learning (IOL), 2018)

• Opportunity to explore change over time (22 years) with different curricula & governance
Method

Replicate surveys of state primary schools in England, 1995 (n = 61) and 2017 (n= 40)

Postal questionnaires completed by teachers about outdoor education/outdoor learning provision in their schools

Response rate overall of 40% (60%, 1995; 20% 2017); Replicate response rate: 11%

Differentiation of phases & locations
• Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) (0-5 yrs)
• Key Stage 1 (KS1) (5-7 yrs)
• Key Stage 2 (KS2) (7-11 yrs)
• urban
• suburban
• rural
Analysis

Descriptive analysis of quantitative data for order and variation (ranking questions, closed questions)

Content analysis of qualitative data, codes and themes (open responses)
# Locations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>1995</th>
<th>2017</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Playgrounds (95%) [n=58]</td>
<td>Playgrounds (88%) [n=35]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Day visits (87%) [n=53]</td>
<td>Day visits (83%) [n=33]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Local area – built (79%) [n=48]</td>
<td>Residentials (78%) [n=31]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Other school grounds (74%) [n=45]</td>
<td>Other school grounds (75%) [n=30]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Curriculum areas

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>1995</th>
<th>2017</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Geography (100%) [n= 61]</td>
<td>Physical education (83%) [n=33]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Science (95%) [n=58]</td>
<td>Science (80%) [n=32]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Environmental education (93%) [n=57]</td>
<td>Geography (78%) [n=31]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Outdoor education (75%) [n=46]</td>
<td>PSHE (70%); Environmental education (70%) [n=28;28]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Stated teacher expertise

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1995</th>
<th>2017</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>53% [n=32]</td>
<td>41% [n=16]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Outdoor education as optimum

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>1995</th>
<th>2017</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Environmental Education/Nature</td>
<td>PSE including teamwork</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Physical Education/Physical Activity</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Policies or curriculum change helping or hindering outdoor education?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Helped</th>
<th>Leader training, Forest School, access</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hindered</td>
<td>Budget, paperwork, buildings</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Factors influencing provision

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>1995</th>
<th>Diff. in mean rank</th>
<th>2017</th>
<th>Diff. in mean rank</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Expense</td>
<td></td>
<td>Time</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Time</td>
<td>0.08</td>
<td>Expense</td>
<td>0.28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Weather</td>
<td>0.44</td>
<td>Expertise</td>
<td>0.28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>More important priorities</td>
<td>0.57</td>
<td>More important priorities</td>
<td>0.46</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Place of outdoor education in the curriculum

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>1995</th>
<th>2017</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>A subject/approach to learning in its own right</td>
<td>Included in PE as outdoor and adventurous activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Included in PE as outdoor and adventurous activities</td>
<td>For personal, social (and health) education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>For personal, social (and health) education</td>
<td>A subject/approach to learning in its own right</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Taught through geography</td>
<td>Taught through geography</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
“Life is not computer generated or all about social media, it’s about …”
“…connecting with people face to face …”
“…connecting with environments …”
“…getting dirty …”
“...experiencing real things and making memories.”
Comparative studies

**Expense** was highest ranking barrier to teaching outdoor education (Zink & Boyes, 2006). Is this because teachers choose to travel to facilities or expertise at a distance from schools? (Remington & Legge, 2017)

Teachers report a desire to implement ‘out of school’ learning but ‘financial arrangements’ and ‘fitting the activities into the syllabus’ are major constraints (Füz, 2018)

Positive teacher attitude but barriers are bureaucracy, lack of time, rigid curriculum, safety & risk assessments, lack of support, cost (Nemitsa, 2017)

Dyment (2005) found barriers of teacher confidence & expertise, requirements of school curricula and wider curriculum reform (as Rickinson et al, 2004) and competition from other curriculum areas
Good practice – making it happen

The strength of teachers’ values and beliefs

“We believe that children often learn better outside the classroom. The factors do not hinder us. We aim to be outside as much as possible.” (rural)

“We take the learning outdoors at every opportunity.” (urban - no expertise declared in this school.)

“There are no factors that would prevent us from learning outside - we would find somewhere.” (rural)
Good practice – making it happen

An open approach to curriculum interpretation

“I think outdoor education is an approach to delivering a range of curriculum objectives across all subjects.”
(rural)

“Our aim is to provide interesting, exciting and experiential learning in every subject - a visit, trip or visitor every topic/subject.”
(urban)
Good practice – making it happen

A suitable location

Well-resourced, safe, accessible

“In EYFS we use the outdoors every day and encourage the children to take the learning from inside to the outdoor areas. E.g. baking - mud kitchen. PE - bouldering wall.” (rural)
“Risk assessments and paperwork have previously restricted use of the outdoor area around school. EYFS team effort has made it possible over the last few years”. (suburban, SEN/D school)
Good practice – making it happen

Positive initiatives

School clusters

‘Step Outside’ quality mark

Forest School

‘Forest Fridays’

Beach School

‘No Child Inside’
‘Every Child Outdoors’
‘CIDIO’

‘Grandparents Gardening Week’

Natural Connections demonstration school
Summary of research

• Schools are continuing to use their playgrounds and day visits as locations for practice
• Proportionate increase in residential visits in 2017
• Teacher expertise in schools had decreased by 2017
• Major challenges and barriers to implementation of time and expense remain similar in both years.
• Teachers no longer see outdoor education as a subject in its own right but as part of the physical education curriculum (‘outdoor and adventurous activities’); Early Years Foundation Stage practitioners report an enabling curriculum for outdoor learning.
Enabling good practice

Five key ingredients for successful outdoor education in primary schools:

• the strength of teachers’ values and beliefs
• an open approach to curriculum interpretation
• the importance of suitable locations
• a culture of risk benefit
• positive initiatives
References


