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Changes in outdoor learning in primary schools in England, 1995 and 2017: Lessons for good practice

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Abstract

Outdoor learning provides memorably relevant learning and authentic, contextualised opportunities to extend classroom-based education. This research draws on empirical data from surveys involving teachers in primary schools in England in 1995 and 2017 (n=61 and n=40 respectively). It adds to the evidence base of outdoor learning in the statutory curriculum, illustrating that schools are continuing to use their playgrounds and day visits as locations for practice with a proportionate increase in residential visits in 2017. The expertise in schools had decreased by 2017 but the 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') although in the Early Years Foundation Stage, practitioners report an enabling curriculum for outdoor learning. The research identifies the strength of teachers' values and beliefs, an open approach to curriculum interpretation, the importance of suitable locations, a culture of risk benefit and positive initiatives as key ingredients for successful outdoor learning in primary schools. These outcomes should support practitioners and policy makers in promoting more opportunities for learning outdoors within formal curricula.

Key words: Outdoor learning; outdoor education; change; primary schools; curriculum

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Introduction

'Outdoor learning' is defined by the Institute for Outdoor Learning (IOL, 2018) as, 'purposeful and planned experience in the outdoors. It's a broad term that includes discovery, experimentation, learning about and connecting to the natural world, and engaging in outdoor sports and adventure activities.' School-based provision is where outdoor learning is used to support curriculum delivery and integrated into it (Fägerstam, 2014; Macquarrie, 2016;) and not as supplementary (Nicol, 2014) or seen as a privilege (Power et al, 2009). It can be integrated in all teaching and learning (Dolan, 2015) as regular rather than short term provision (Stern, Powell & Hill, 2014).

The gap in knowledge about how teachers see the outdoor classroom and why and how they are using it was identified by Rickinson et al. (2004). It was evident from the Blagrave Report, which reviewed the effectiveness of outdoor learning in the UK (Fiennes et al., 2015) that more research data and evidence of practice and interventions needs to be captured on the types and volume of activity. Thus, there has been a renewed emphasis on research initiatives that result in a better understanding of the breadth and depth of outdoor learning practice, encourage the development and use of good practice and raise the value placed on outdoor learning (IOL, 2018).

This research project gathered data in the form of surveys from teachers in state primary schools in England at two points in time, 1995 and 2017. Its purpose was to identify any changes to outdoor learning practice over 22 years in respect of: the locations used by teachers; the curriculum areas in which outdoor learning was embedded; the level of expertise of teachers; the factors influencing provision; and, teacher perspectives on the place of outdoor learning in the curriculum. From the data, key ingredients for successful implementation of outdoor learning in schools are identified.

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This research adds to the evidence base, as it also identifies the breadth of practice, and positive initiatives and good practice that support its development and enable it to flourish for the benefit of all children in school. It also examines the challenges and barriers to implementation and ways in which schools value outdoor learning and have sought to enable experiences for their students. It is hoped that the sharing of these data will support primary schools, practitioners and policy makers in promoting more opportunities within formal curricula.

School-based outdoor learning

Outdoor learning provides memorably relevant learning and authentic and contextualised opportunities to extend classroom-based learning (James & Williams, 2017; Karpinnen, 2012). There is evidence that where outdoor experiences are regarded as having inherent educational value and equivalence with classroom learning, outdoor learning can support curriculum delivery very effectively (Macquarrie, 2016; Maynard & Waters, 2007; Merewether, 2017). A regular programme as an intervention for 8-11 year olds has also been shown to improve achievement, particularly in reading (Quibbell, Charlton & Law, 2017) and mathematics (Harvey, Rankine & Jensen, 2017) adding to the evidence of the impact of residentials on attainment (Paul Hamlyn Foundation, 2015).

There has been considerable emphasis on the benefits of children's relationships with the natural environment in the context of formal education for a number of educational outcomes (Malone & Waite, 2016) including health and wellbeing (Dyment, Bell & Green, 2017; Humberstone & Stan, 2009; Norðdhal & Jóhannesson, 2013) and the development of self constructs and teamwork (Hattie et al, 1997; Neill, 2008). The importance of outdoor play cannot be underestimated (for example, Carrington, 2016).

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Context

Each country in the UK has different governance and curricula; this study examined the provision across a sample of English primary schools. A range of factors appear to have influenced the provision of outdoor learning in schools in England, which have contributed to the perceived 'downward path' in recent years (Waite, 2010). Schools in England have been increasingly pressured by government policy and directives to drive pupil performance with metrics derived from testing and reporting particularly in the core areas of English, mathematics and science (James, 2014; Prince & Exeter, 2016). Curriculum reform has resulted in the inclusion or exclusion of outdoor and adventurous activities in the formal physical education curriculum over the years (Leather, 2018), and outdoor 'learning' or outdoor 'education' has been taught through a range of curriculum subjects, topics or initiatives, and in some schools, as a subject in its own right (Allison, Carr & Meldrum, 2012). The safeguarding and risk management agenda has been more prominent in recent years with substantial permissions and approvals needed to take children outdoors and the varied perception of risk by parents/carers and teachers (Little, 2015; Savery et al., 2017). Furthermore, budgets and the prioritisation of how and what to spend money on are ever more challenging for Headteachers and can limit the resourcing for outdoor learning with requests for parental contributions permissible out with formal curriculum time.

The definitions employed in this paper, other than in quotations, follow those in common usage in the national curriculum of England (DfE, 2018) and use the terms 'outdoor learning' in 2017 and 'outdoor education' in 1995.

Method

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A survey utilising questionnaires was undertaken in both years to focus on macro-data from a number of teachers representing a range of primary schools. Surveys are known to have internal and external validity, are efficient, can cover a wide geographical area, have ethical advantages and are flexible (Mathers, Fox & Hunn, 2007). The questionnaire involved a number of open, closed and ranking questions, with space for more extensive qualitative comments and included cross-referenced questions to test reliability (Adèr and Mellenbergh, 1999; Kelley et al., 2003). The sampling framework was stratified and purposive across primary schools in England, which were first destination employers for graduate teachers from Charlotte Mason College[1] in 1995. Some of these graduates were specialists in outdoor and environmental education and a question within the survey elicited the expertise of teachers in the discipline through a clear descriptor. After piloting to teachers out with the stratified sample, the questionnaire was deployed to a sample of 101 schools using a postal survey with a response rate of 60% [n=61].

This survey was repeated in 2017 using the same sample, where possible. Some schools had merged (for example, from an infant and junior school to a primary school), some had become multi-school academies on more than one site, some had changed names and some had closed. Where a multi-site academy was found, the questionnaire was sent to the main school in the consortium; where a school had closed, it was sent to the next nearest geographically located primary school. Although this created an unmatched sample, the research aimed to examine the perspectives and opinions of teachers reflecting on their educational establishments' policies and practice, rather than the schools themselves and therefore, this was felt to be acceptable. This survey was deployed using an online platform and elicited a very poor response, so a postal survey followed, accepting that this is, '… the best form of survey in an educational enquiry' (Cohen, Mannion & Morrison, 2018, p.405). The first phase comprised 99 schools and elicited a response rate of 17% with an overlap of

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the same schools of 11% [n=11]. Acknowledging that this is a low response rate, the sample was doubled using the same criteria (graduate first destinations from the University of Cumbria[2] in 2017, no specialist trainees) giving an overall response rate for 2017 of 20% with returns from 40 schools. The research project was approved by the Ethics Committee of the University of Cumbria.

The research was an exploratory analysis '…investigating data without the ambition to make inference about the population the data came from' (Adèr and Mellenbergh, 1999, p. 135). The research was a longitudinal by definition as there were two (or more) discrete surveys (Kelley et al, 2003) in an attempt to analyse change and to ascertain if there were trends within (termed 'residual heterogeneity' by Galton et al, 1999) and between each dataset. Essentially, it was cross-sectional at two points in time designed to provide an articulation of the influence of curricula and the practices of teachers within schools (Holland, Thomson & Henderson, 2006).

There was some concern about unbalanced samples for comparative studies. Both surveys were addressed by name to Headteachers (or equivalent) at schools. It was not possible to ascertain what role all respondents had in their schools but they were asked to indicate which phases their answers referred to (Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS)[3], Key Stage 1 (KS1)[4] and/or Key Stage 2 (KS2)[5].) Thus, the surveys generally are representative of practices of a number of teachers within each school. The surveys did not include any incentives for completion (other than a report on the research) and one reminder was sent by email in 2017 following a shift from online (Bristol Online Survey, 2018) to postal survey. Barlich & Holtom (2008) reporting on the survey response rates in organisational research from 1607 studies published between 2000 and 2005 in 17 refereed academic journals, conclude that the use of incentives was not found to be related to response rates and the use of reminders was associated with lower response rates. Interestingly the mean response rate

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from their research was 35.7%; in this research it is 40%. It was not felt that non-response bias was influential to this exploratory analysis and rather a manifestation of the multitude of time demands and pressures on teachers in schools in England, particularly in 2017. Non-response could mean that those schools were not active in providing outdoor learning in the curriculum, or that teachers did not understand the meaning of the term and although anecdotal evidence would suggest that this was not the case, it has to be included as a critique of the research.

Surveys produce summary reported data that are overarching and cannot portray the micro-level of rich practice as a case study would do, or include narratives and creative data sources representing the voices of teachers, carers or children as, for example, Waite (2010). They do not provide a more objective observation of practice that might be elicited through inspection reports, for example. The questions were designed however, to ascertain the depth of curriculum integration and learning embedded as outdoor learning, and to differentiate this practice from those who are just taking their 'indoor' teaching outdoors (Ager, 2018). They enable key headline messages supplemented by qualitative comments to illustrate practice and change.

Analysis

A descriptive analysis of the data was undertaken from collation of the quantitative data on Microsoft Excel to report measures of central tendency, order and variation (Cresswell & Cresswell, 2018). Rankings are shown by percentages of responses and total number of respondents (n) for questions where multiple answers were possible (e.g. locations used by schools for outdoor learning). In questions where only rank was requested such as factors influencing the provision of outdoor learning, mean rankings were calculated from all data

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and the factors then ordered (1-4 are shown in the tables). The differences in the mean ranks (rank differentials) from 1-2, 2-3 and 3-4 are shown to illustrate ranking distribution. For example, a rank differential of 0.08 between factor 1 (most important) and factor 2 (next most important) shows that these were ranked closer together by respondents than a rank differential of 0.28. The first four ranks are given to include curriculum areas beyond core (e.g. science) and foundation (e.g. geography) subjects such as outdoor and environmental education and PSHE (personal, social, health and economic education) in curriculum based questions. For parity, this approach is followed for data presentation for all relevant questions. A detailed content analysis was undertaken of each set of data and codes and themes were elicited in the qualitative answers. Open qualitative comments were recorded and are embedded in the analysis and discussion.

An overview of the two datasets is provided in Table 1. The datasets are examined here holistically, with differentiations and cross referencing (such as for EYFS respondents, 'urban', 'suburban' and 'rural' schools, and SEN/D[6] schools) but two-way analyses of variables, for example, to teacher expertise or professional development needs, are not reported in this paper.

<Table 1 here>

Results and discussion

<Table 2 here>

Table 2 shows the most used locations for outdoor learning in 1995 and 2017; the first two ranks are the same in both years. Schools in 1995 seemed to be using their local environments to a greater extent than in 2017, including the built environment. The use by schools of residentials increased by 9% in 2017 (69% of schools used residentials in 1995). Interestingly in both years, day visits are more popular locations for outdoor learning than

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school grounds beyond the 'playground' (usually a hard surface area). There were associated comments about both the lack of school grounds but also school expansion and new buildings reducing the area of school grounds, 'The school has expanded to a four form entry. New buildings take up playground space'. However, school grounds were used by a higher proportion of EYFS respondents (83%, n=5) with mention of EYFS/KS1 specialist areas including for outdoor play and by both of the SEN/D schools. In 2017, the variety of locations for outdoor learning had expanded to include school gardens, vegetable plots, forest school gardens, allotments, beach schools and museums/galleries. This could be a reflection of the influence of the Manifesto for Learning outside the Classroom (DfES, 2006; LotC, 2018) that defines learning outside the classroom more widely than previously to include visits to cultural facilities, for example.

The apparent increased use of residentials over the 22 years is interesting, given the decline in local authority funded outdoor centres in the UK. It could be that some schools interested in outdoor learning opportunities have benefitted from national initiatives such as 'Learning Away' in which consortia of schools used funding to provide residential opportunities (Kendall & Rodger, 2015) Students in mainstream schooling are shown to benefit from residential experiences (Christie, Higgins & MacLaughlin, 2014) but the increased engagement illustrated by these data is not reflected in published research (Prince et al, 2018).

<Table 3 here>

There appears to have been a change in the subject areas in which outdoor learning is integrated at the two time points in this study. Environmental education and outdoor education were seen much more as curriculum areas in 1995, perhaps reflecting the former as a defined 'cross-curricular theme' (Manchester City Council, 1991) and although outdoor &

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adventurous activities were only compulsory at KS2 in 1995 within the physical education curriculum, outdoor education was recognised as a curriculum area in its own right. This could be reflective of teachers within the schools who had trained in outdoor and environmental education whereas in 2017, this was not a specialist area although 9% [n=3] of schools reported that they could access specialist support and expertise through governors, local outdoor centre staff or that the staff themselves had a strong personal interest in outdoor activities (see Table 4).

Teachers in 2017 used the mandatory physical education curriculum as a vehicle for outdoor learning, fewer schools used geography but science is ranked the same in both years. PSHE features in 2017. All the respondents representing only the EYFS stated that they used the outdoors in all curriculum areas. A range of curriculum areas was mentioned in both years including art, music, technology, and drama. 16% (1995, n=10) and 13% (2017, n=5) mentioned that they used the outdoors for literacy/numeracy (or 'language'/'mathematics'). Forest School entered the lexicon in the 2017 survey.

<Table 4 here>

Teachers were asked if there is any activity or experience for which they consider the outdoors to provide the optimum learning environment. In 1995, the main area was 'environmental education/nature' (31%, n=19); in 2017 it was 'PSHE' (30%, n=12) with several schools mentioning teamwork as important part of this provision. In 1995, teachers tended to respond to this question by naming subjects within the curriculum; in 2017, there seemed to be a much more open approach and less compartmentalisation, 'whichever less lends itself to that environment', 'experiencing nature', 'reflection' and 'real life situations' were some responses. In EYFS/KS1, there are a 'variety of opportunities' with mention of 'role play, large construction, gross motor and coordination skills' and in SEN/D schools,

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'contextual spatial awareness and freedom'. Interestingly, three schools in 1995 mentioned that residentials provided the optimum learning environment but only one mentioned these in 2017 even though the percentage of schools undertaking residentials had increased. In 2017, Forest School was cited by 23% [n=9] of schools as an experience using the outdoors as an optimum learning environment.

Forest School has become a popular initiative in English primary schools and its efficacy in the curriculum is well researched (Cumming & Nash, 2015; Elliott, 2015; Knight, 2013). It is not easy to ascertain if its implementation is as a result of the recognition of its value in regular participation for pupils outdoors, or because many local authorities and schools are supporting the professional development or teachers to obtain Forest School Leader awards, or both. Forest School training has engendered confidence in teachers who have had little experience of outdoor learning and has provided a framework for opportunities in curriculum integration.

<Table 5 here>

Teachers were provided with a number of factors to rank from 1 – 5 (1= most important, 2= next most important etc.) that they felt influenced the provision of outdoor learning in the curriculum of their school. Table 5 illustrates the overall average rank of factors and the difference in ranks. Time and expense were ranked top in both years, although expense was more dominant in 1995 and time in 2017, with time a slightly more differentiated influence in 2017 (another factor termed 'more important priorities' ranked equally but not so highly in either year). Interestingly, weather achieved the lowest rank in 2017 with expertise being much more of an influencing factor and not far behind expense. In 1995, teachers were asked about the single most enhancing factor for the provision of outdoor education and staffing (expertise, skilled adults and number of staff) was equally ranked as

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top with a well-resourced, close, safe and accessible environment, followed by staff effort and enthusiasm.

There are similar findings in studies across different cultural contexts. Zink and Boyes (2006) found expense to be the highest ranking barrier to teaching outdoor education in New Zealand but Remington and Legge (2017) question whether cost is increased by the choice to travel to facilities or expertise at a distance from schools. Füz in a recent extensive online survey on 'out-of-school learning' in Hungary, reports a desire amongst teachers for this practice but that 'financial arrangements' and 'fitting the activities into the syllabus' to be barriers to implementation, which only occasionally takes place (Füz, 2018). The frequency of implementation is reflected in Cyprus, where Nemitsa (2017) in research involving 362 primary teachers, also reports a positive attitude but where the main barriers are bureaucracy, lack of time, a rigid curriculum, safety and risk, assessment issues, lack of support and cost. In Canada, Dyment (2005) found that three of the barriers recognised by Rickinson et al (2004) – teacher confidence and expertise, requirements of school curricula and wider curriculum reform (perhaps symptomatic of 'time' or 'more important priorities') were influencing practice but at that time, shortage of time, concerns over health and safety and access to resources and support were not influential. Interestingly, she also identified additional barriers such as competition from other curriculum areas for example, sports, music or drama, which although reported anecdotally from schools in 2017, was not stated overtly in survey responses.

Many of the schools in this study were utilising environments close to the school and time as the most influential factor in provision was almost always linked to performativity and testing in 2017 as illustrated by comments such as, 'Outdoor learning is lost while the government/senior school leaders/teachers struggle to meet unrealistic targets in core subject areas'. (55, suburban[8])

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The appetite for continuing professional development in areas related to outdoor learning was keen in both years with teachers requesting focus on scientific investigation outdoors, outdoor and adventurous activities in the school grounds and cross-curricular use of the school grounds. However, there has been a shift from requesting support for teaching mapwork skills and outdoor adventurous activities in outdoor centres in 1995, to creative approaches in the outdoors, teaching numeracy and literacy and Forest School training in 2017.

Teachers were asked to state what they considered the place of outdoor education/outdoor learning in the curriculum from a list of options and an open answer in rank order. The results are shown in Table 6.

<Table 6 here>

The place of outdoor education as a 'subject/approach to learning' stems from the Dartington Conference (DES, 1976) at a time when outdoor education was being established more formally in the curriculum of schools (Ogilvie, 2013). It seems that, by 2017, the notion of outdoor education/learning as a subject in its own right had somewhat diminished and has been superseded by its place in the formal curriculum, particularly in physical education (outdoor and adventurous activities). This supports the data in table 3. It seems that some teachers in both years see outdoor education in the curriculum as a subject/approach to learning in its own right and 'indispensable' as argued for in Australia (Quay, 2016) - this could reflect the influence of responses from EYFS practitioners.

Identifying trends in practice

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After various iterations of the national curriculum, outdoor and adventurous activities are again part of the formal physical education in England and EYFS curricula, and teachers see the place of outdoor learning there in 2017. In 1995, all teachers were involving outdoor education in the geography curriculum, although this and environmental education were seen more as curriculum areas in their own right perhaps due to supporting framework documents and the more widespread initial training of teachers in those areas. This was also reflected in the expertise in schools. However, in 2017, teachers saw the place of outdoor learning most importantly for PSHE, with team building and communication skills often mentioned by respondents.

Time and expense were the major factors inhibiting provision in schools, although time (linked to performativity) was more clearly the major factor in 2017, particularly if linked to expertise, 'The curriculum is too formal and pressure for SATS[9] results mean that teachers are reluctant to take on new ideas …' (27, rural). This aligns with identified needs for continuing professional development concentrated on the locality and in areas where teachers' expertise can readily be developed in outdoor learning, including supporting curriculum delivery through science, creativity, literacy and numeracy and Forest School.

Good practice: Making it happen

The research evidence and supporting literature identifies the following key ingredients to enable high quality outdoor learning to be an integral part of the formal curriculum in primary schools (quotations are from the 2017 survey):

Values and beliefs of teachers

The importance of teachers' beliefs, drive, effort and enthusiasm was paramount to enabling outdoor learning in both years. Sometimes, the manifestation of this in the curriculum was

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linked to expertise and personal experience (Remington & Legge, 2017) but also through mechanisms that empower teachers to experiment through distributed forms of leadership and in-school cooperation (Brundrett & Duncan, 2014) and pedagogical transgression to challenge dominant discourses (Merewether, 2017).

> 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. (68, rural)

> 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. (231, rural)

> There are no factors that would prevent us from learning outside - we would find somewhere. (271, rural)

> We take the learning outdoors at every opportunity. (238, urban - no expertise declared in this school.)

> We believe that outdoor learning is very important for children. It is often what they remember most about school. (242, urban)

> Outdoor learning can have a major role in most of the 'formal curriculum' but usually needs a 'champion' or 'specialist' to drive it. (276, urban)

An open approach to curriculum interpretation

Many teachers were embedding outdoor learning across the curriculum through different subjects, topics and experiences:

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> I think outdoor education is an approach to delivering a range of curriculum objectives across all subjects. (289, rural)

> Our aim is to provide interesting, exciting and experiential learning in every subject - a visit, trip or visitor every topic/subject. (276, urban)

In EYFS in particular, the current curriculum comprising prime areas of learning in communication and language, physical development and personal, social and emotional development (DfE, 2018) provides much scope for learning outdoors:

> We have identified as many learning outside the classroom opportunities across as many areas of the curriculum as possible. (68, rural).

Suitable location

A well-resourced, safe, accessible environment or resource is important, and the breadth of resources accessed by teachers has grown by 2017 to include woodlands, gardens and allotments, and beaches, partly as a result of initiatives and available training. This might be a reflection of the wider agenda for natural schooling, enhancing children's relationship with nature and the use of green spaces.

> 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. (243, rural)

Culture of risk benefit

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Although aspects of safeguarding (more in 2017) and risk management were mentioned in 1995 and 2017, risk and concerns about safety was ranked low by teachers in both years. There seems to be a culture of risk benefit amongst teachers who regularly take children outdoors.

> 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. (316, suburban, SEN/D school)

Initiatives

It is obvious that some initiatives and funding has supported the development of outdoor learning in schools. Some are in clusters of schools or a region, for example, a school in SW England that took part in the Natural Connections demonstration project (Waite et al, 2016) the 'Step Outside' quality mark for EYFS/KS1 schools in NW England; school gardening support and 'Grandparents Gardening Week' (see Grow to School, 2018); some are more national or international (e.g. Forest School, see Knight, 2013, and access to forests by the Forestry Commission - a government agency, Beach School); some are initiated by schools themselves such as 'Forest Fridays' (following ideas such as CIDIO 'Can I do it outside?' (Ager, 2018), 'No child left inside' initiative in Oregon, US (Oregon Community Foundation, 2012), 'Every Child Outdoors' (Hunt, 2018)).

> Our Early Years team are currently working towards the 'Step Outside' quality award. This has given us more experiences and a mentor to lead us in the right direction. (261, urban)

> We are fortunate as a school as we provide Forest School sessions (we got lottery funding to secure an area) - that doesn't follow a curriculum and it is good at how

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free/natural it is. We are trying to develop more outdoor learning opportunities over the next year that link with curriculum topics. (250, urban)

Changes reflecting an upward path for outdoor learning?

The main locations schools use for outdoor learning are playgrounds and day visits and these have not changed between the survey periods but the proportion of schools undertaking residentials has increased. There continues to be limited use of school environments beyond the playground with some evidence of reducing 'green space' rather than a lack of realising potential of these spaces. Interestingly, the UK government through its 25 year Environment Plan (DEFRA, 2018) has released funding of £6.3 million to support primary schools in areas of disadvantage to create and use 'nature friendly' grounds and enable visits that will provide children with access to 'green' spaces primarily to promote health and wellbeing and engagement with school.

Schools focused their integration of outdoor learning in the formal curriculum in 2017 in areas that specify relevant knowledge and skills in the curricula Programmes of Study (physical education, science and geography – by 83%, 80% and 78% of schools respectively) although teachers recognise its value in PSHE and through environmental education. An exception to this is in the EYFS, where outdoor play and a broad curriculum framework facilitate the inclusion of outdoor learning by committed practitioners. In 1995, outdoor education was integrated in geography by all schools and recognised as a subject in its own right by 75% of respondents, perhaps because it was previously a more common specialist subject in initial teacher training. The level of expertise of teachers in primary schools reflects this as the data showed that it has decreased by 12% between the two surveys.

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Although there are barriers and challenges to the implementation of outdoor learning in primary schools in England, these have not changed significantly over the last 22 years and there is much cause for optimism. Expense and time were the two major factors influencing provision with expense more predominant in 1995 and time in 2017. Teachers now believe that the place of outdoor learning within the curriculum is foremost within physical education (where 'outdoor and adventurous activities' are specified). However, second to its implementation in this subject in the formal curriculum, in 2017 they also saw it as an approach to teach PSHE.

Conclusion

This paper seeks to ascertain meaning from albeit limited and self-reported data from teachers for enabling practice in schools. It has identified five key 'ingredients' to enable outdoor learning to take place in primary schools, namely: The values and beliefs of teachers; an open approach to curriculum interpretation; a suitable location; a culture of risk benefit; and, initiatives.

Responses from teachers in 2017 show a more diverse range of environments being used for learning outdoors (some supported by training and funding initiatives), integration across a range of curriculum areas and a determination to seek out opportunities and expertise is evident from the data. It could be argued that the term 'outdoor learning' (used in 2017) is broader than 'outdoor education' (used in 1995) and that frameworks such as the Learning outside the Classroom Manifesto have widened this further. However, it was evident that many teachers in both years hold strong value sets and belief in the importance of learning outdoors and that this is key to making it happen.

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Risk management is seen by some teachers as adding to the burden of administration that detracts from the time available to plan and implement high quality outdoor learning experiences. Others see the notion of managed risk as part of the value of outdoor experiences and an important part of the learning that children can take away with them.

Examination across the data sets provides an indicator broadly termed 'initiatives' as levers to implementation at a macro-level. These comprise international approaches and associated training such as Forest School and projects in which schools have been supported to develop practice. Some schools have also achieved, or are in the process of achieving, quality marks and catch phrases also appear successful to either drive the curriculum integration of outdoor learning or raise awareness of stakeholders, particularly where a whole school approach is envisioned.

This research is part of a wider project on the influences of curriculum reform on school-based provision in outdoor learning in England. It alludes to comparisons in the barriers and enablers to practice in a selection of other countries for children 3-11 years, and this could be extended further. Objectivity and depth could be also be examined through using government inspection data and layered analyses in selected schools. This research seeks to extend the evidence base by moving beyond summarising change to influence practice by identifying the key 'ingredients' for successful implementation of outdoor learning in English primary schools.

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Disclosure statement
No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

Notes

[1]Charlotte Mason College, Ambleside, Cumbria, UK – a legacy higher education institution of the University of Cumbria
[2]University of Cumbria, UK

[3]EYFS: birth to 5 years
[4]KS1: 5-7 years
[5]KS2: 7-11 years
[6]SEN/D: Special Educational Needs/Disability
[7]PSHE: Personal, Social, Health and Economic Education (PSE: Personal and Social Education in 1995)
[8]Attributed quotations: (anonymous identification number, urban/suburban/rural)
[9]SATs: Standard Assessment Tasks (testing at the end of KS2)

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Changes in outdoor learning in primary schools in England, 1995 and 2017: Lessons for good practice

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Table 1: Survey datasets, Outdoor learning in primary schools in England, 1995 and 2017

Phase	Location descriptor			1995 survey	Total responses by phase (1995)	2017 survey	Total responses by phase (2017)	Duplicates	Totals both surveys	Rural schools both surveys	Suburban schools both surveys	Urban schools both surveys
(EYFS) KS1 & KS2	rural			11	48% [n=29]	7	67% [n=27]	3	18	26% [n=26]	30% [n=30]	44% [n=45]
		suburban		9		5		3	14			
			urban	9		15		2	24			
KS2	rural			2	34% [n=21]	2	12% [n=5]		4			
		suburban		8		3		2	11			
			urban	11					11			
KS1	rural			3	15% [n=9]		3% [n=1]		3			
		suburban				1 (+EYFS)			1			
			urban	6					6			
SEND		suburban		2	3% [n=2]	1	3% [n=1]		3			
EYFS	rural					1	15% [n=6]		1			
		suburban				1			1			
			urban			4		1^	4			
Number of responses [n]				61		40		11	101			

EYFS (Early Years Foundation Stage): birth to 5 years [nursery & reception in 1995]
KS1 (Key stage 1): 5-7 years
KS2: (Key stage 2) 7-11 years
SEN/D: Special Educational Needs/Disability

^ KS2 urban in 1995

Table 2: Locations for outdoor learning, primary schools in England

Rank	1995		2017	
1	Playgrounds (95%)	[n=58]	Playgrounds (88%)	[n=35]
2	Day visits (87%)	[n=53]	Day visits (83%)	[n=33]
3	Local area – built (79%)	[n=48]	Residentials (78%)	[n=31]
4	Other school grounds (74%)	[n=45]	Other school grounds (75%)	[n=30]

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Table 3: Curriculum areas for outdoor learning, primary schools in England

Rank	1995	2017
1	Geography (100%) [n= 61]	Physical education (83%) [n=33]
2	Science (95%) [n=58]	Science (80%) [n=32]
3	Environmental education (93%) [n=57]	Geography (78%) [n=31]
4	Outdoor education (75%) [n=46]	PSHE[7] (70%); Environmental education (70%) [n=28;28]

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Table 4: Stated expertise* of teachers, primary schools in England

	1995	2017
Yes	53% [n=32]	41% [n=16]
No	47% [n=29]	59% [n=24]

*defined as 'any member of staff with expertise in outdoor education (e.g. as major part of teacher training, holding national governing body awards in outdoor activities, substantial involvement and Continuing Professional Development (CPD) attendance over time.)'

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Table 5: Factors influencing the provision of outdoor learning experiences as part of the school curriculum, primary schools in England

Rank	1995	Difference in mean rank	2017	Difference in mean rank
1	Expense		Time	
2	Time	0.08	Expense	0.28
3	Weather	0.44	Expertise	0.28
4	More important priorities	0.57	More important priorities	0.46

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Table 6: The place of 'outdoor education' (1995, n=61)/'outdoor learning' (2017, n=40) in the curriculum, primary schools in England

Rank	1995	2017
1	A subject/approach to learning in its own right	Included in PE as outdoor and adventurous activities
2	Included in PE as outdoor and adventurous activities	For personal, social (and health) education
3	For personal, social (and health) education	A subject/approach to learning in its own right
4	Taught through geography	Taught through geography

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