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Teachers' perceptions of the value of outdoor learning in a period of curriculum and governance reform

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Rationale for research

- Gap in knowledge about how teachers see the outdoor classroom; how and why they are using it (Rickinson et al, 2004; Hawxwell et al, 2019)
- 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, 2018)
- Opportunity to explore change over time (22 years) with different curricula & governance
- Situate outdoor learning research in a wider theoretical framework



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

- Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) (0-5 yrs)
- Key Stage 1 (KS1) (5-7 yrs)
- Key Stage 2 (KS2) (7-11 yrs)

& locations

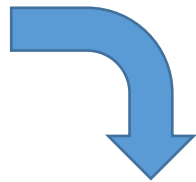
- urban
- suburban
- rural



Analysis

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

Thematic analysis of qualitative data, codes and themes (open responses)



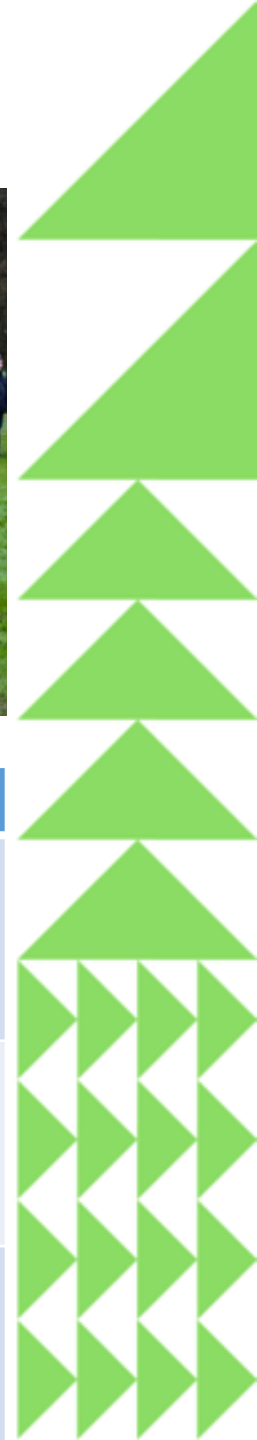
Teachers' aspirations, expertise and values



Outdoors as the optimum learning environment



| Rank | 1995 (n=45) | 2017 (n=34) |
|------|-------------------------------------|--|
| 1 | Environmental Education/Nature | Personal, Social, Health and Economic Education (PSHE) |
| 2 | Personal and Social Education (PSE) | Nature |
| 3 | Fieldwork | Forest School |



Stated teacher expertise



| | 1995 | 2017 | % change |
|-----|---------------|---------------|----------|
| Yes | 53% [n=32] | 41% [n=16] | -12% |
| No | 47% [n=29] | 59% [n=24] | +12% |



Continuing Professional Development (CPD) interests

| | 1995 (n=61) | 2017 (n=40) | % change |
|---|----------------|----------------|----------|
| Scientific investigation outdoors | 21% | 26% | +5% |
| Cross-curricular use of school grounds | 20% | 25% | +5% |
| Outdoor and adventurous activities (school grounds) | 20% | 26% | +6% |
| Teaching map work skills | 13% | 12% | -1% |
| Management and safety of groups outdoors | 9% | 3% | -6% |
| Outdoor and adventurous activities (centre based) | 4% | 3% | -1% |
| Reviewing | 1% | 0% | -1% |



Ranking of teachers' CPD interests (2017)

| Rank | CPD |
|------|---|
| 1 | Creativity in the outdoors |
| 2 | Scientific investigation outdoors |
| 3 | Outdoor and adventurous activities (school grounds) |
| 4 | Cross-curricular use of school grounds |
| 5 | Forest School |
| 6 | Literacy and numeracy outdoors |



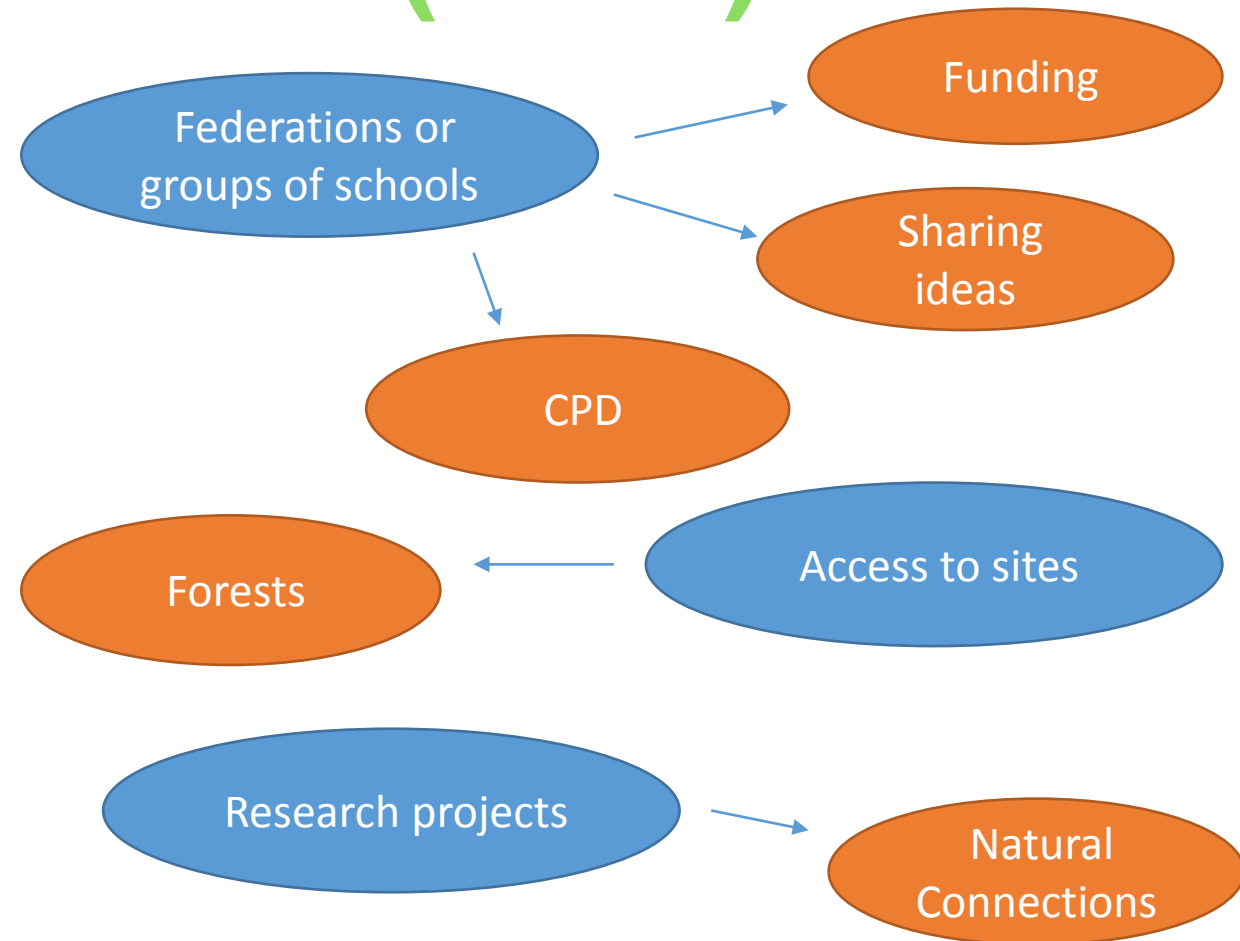
Effect of curricular reform on outdoor learning provision

| Responses | 1995 (n=57) | 2017 (n=34) | % change |
|-------------------|-------------|-------------|----------|
| Yes (increased) | 25% | 44% | +19% |
| No | 58% | 50% | -8% |
| Yes (decreased) | 16% | 6% | -10% |
| Yes (no tendency) | 1% | - | -1% |



Effect of other government policies, frameworks or local outdoor provision on practice (2017)

| Responses | 2017 (n=29) |
|----------------|-------------|
| Yes (helped) | 46% |
| Yes (hindered) | 25% |
| No | 29% |



The strength of teachers' values

“Outdoor Learning is something we must do.”

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

“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.”



“There are no factors that would prevent us from learning outside - we would find somewhere.”

“We run outdoor residentials anyway.”

“(Outdoor Learning) is part of how we teach to provide a rounded education.”



The sustained value teachers place on Outdoor Learning

Teachers' values transgress curriculum and governance reform

Teachers as '**curriculum makers**' (Lambert & Biddulph, 2015)

Teachers undertake creative boundary work to balance curriculum and pedagogy, mandatory and non-mandatory curriculum content

Teachers use their autonomous space to create a '**personality of change**' (Goodson, 2003) – commitments, beliefs, investments and ownership of their work, the balancing of personal and external forces of change is essential to achieve new practices.

Important for trainee and beginning teachers

Link to professional **identity**? (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009)

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