Education 3-13, International Journal of Primary, Elementary and Early Years Education. Doi: 10.1080/03004279.2019.1633376, published online 28 June 2019.

The sustained value teachers place on outdoor learning

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Abstract

Data from English primary school teachers in 1995 and 2017 illustrate the sustained value they place on outdoor learning in a period of curriculum and governance reform. With emphasis on a prescribed curriculum, metrics and performativity, and decreased expertise, these data show the strength of teachers' aspirations and values for developing provision in outdoor learning. Teachers use their autonomous space as curriculum makers to achieve different practices and their 'personality of change' accommodates this non-mandatory curriculum area. These strategies are relevant to beginning teachers and in international settings, to identify how teachers might respond to change and deconstruct their practice.

Keywords: teacher values, outdoor learning, curriculum reform, governance reform, England, primary schools

Introduction

This paper explores the value that primary school teachers place on the outdoors as a learning environment and their expertise and aspirations in delivering outdoor learning during a period of curriculum and governance reform, using data from England. It focuses on teachers' responses to the effect, or expected effect, of curriculum reform and changes in governance on their practice.

Outdoor learning is defined here as 'a purposeful and planned experience in the outdoors (and) a broad term that includes discovery, experimentation, learning about and connecting to the natural world, and engaging in outdoor sports and adventure activities' (Institute for Outdoor Learning, 2019). School-based outdoor learning can support a range of curriculum objectives across many subjects and topic areas (Macquarrie, 2016) and provides memorable, authentic and contextualised experiences to extend classroom-based learning (James and Williams, 2017; Karpinnen, 2012). Regular and long term opportunities for outdoor learning such as those in formal education can achieve a range of outcomes in health and wellbeing, self-constructs, relationships with nature and meta-skills (Fiennes et al, 2015).

This empirical research focuses on teachers' perceptions of the value of outdoor learning as a non-mandatory curriculum area in a neoliberal climate of metrics, performativity and reduced budgets. The research contributes to international discourse in contexts where teachers have to respond to curriculum development and changes to governance, and the ways in which they might deconstruct their practice to accommodate change. The research has application to other learning approaches and pedagogies in respect of which practices, experiences, opportunities or subject areas to prioritise beyond the mandatory curriculum and the agency of teachers as 'curriculum makers' (Clandinin and Connelly, 1992; Lambert and Hopkin, 2014). This debate about curriculum making and the deconstruction of the value of non-mandatory curriculum areas such as outdoor learning through the identification of teachers' personal values is particularly important for training and beginning teachers (Beauchamp and Thomas, 2009: Pillen, Beijaard and den Brok, 2013; Wilkins et al., 2012).

Theoretical framework

Non-mandatory curriculum areas may be offered in addition to, or integrated into, mandatory or prescribed content, and are part of teachers' autonomous space in which they need to reconcile their own personal values with their professional identities and balance these with the institutional priorities of their schools (Wilkins, 2015). The nature of this autonomous professional space beyond 'ideological' positioning is dependent, at least in English schools, on meeting performative thresholds in teaching performance and the attainment outcomes of their students (Wilkins, 2011). Personal values involve a reconstruction of meaning contained in a teacher's actions and involves reflection by them on their professional practice including what they see as important for the quality of learning for their students (Hofer, 2017). Teachers need to re-present the curriculum in ways that bring meaning and are creative, engaging and relevant to their students (Lambert and Biddulph, 2015). The process of 'curriculum making' is 'a signature part of teachers' identity' (217) and requires creative boundary work by teachers to balance curriculum and pedagogy, and mandatory and non-mandatory curriculum content.

External accountability instruments have been seen to present a challenge to normative values of the teaching profession (Day, Elliot and Kington, 2005) and can devalue or suppress more creative and interpretive aspects of teachers' work (Galton and MacBeath, 2008) and the opportunity for pedagogical innovation and their attitude to risk taking (Howard et al., 2018). Teachers' perceptions of their practices are inherently influenced by their philosophy of education and these can be captured through teachers' voices and narratives (Connelly and Clandinin, 1988; Lee and Fouts, 2005).

This research is situated in Goodson's theory of change (2003), which identifies the forces impacting on teachers' practice in relation to curriculum change. In externally generated

change such as the introduction of a new curriculum or governance reform, teachers may participate passively and often hesitantly and feel that they lose personal agency. This was supported by research on teachers' responses to a new curriculum (O'Sullivan, Carrroll and Cavanagh,2008) in which initially teachers reported feeling a degree of uncertainty, a loss of control and becoming subordinate to the change process. Subsequently they communicated feelings of disorientation, unsure of expectations before accepting the implementation process. The meanings of the reform to teachers as change agents, must be evident and understood by them. Without teachers' personal involvement, creativity and commitment, it is likely that curriculum reform will be received half-heartedly and that teachers will be inhibitors to change rather than facilitators. This personal belief termed the 'personality of change' (Goodson, 2003, 76) involves teachers' commitments, beliefs, investments and ownership of their work and the balancing of personal and external forces of change is essential to achieve new practices.

Context

This research on teachers' perceptions of the value of outdoor learning comprises a contribution to the evidence base in so far as it utilises teacher response data at two points in time, 22 years apart, that reflect different stages in curriculum reform and governance. It is situated in England but is illustrative of educational change experienced in other countries across the world over such a time period. The first data collection took place in 1995, three years after a revision of the national curriculum that was introduced in 1989; the second point was in 2017, three years after a revised curriculum was introduced (with further iterations between these dates). The two points in time reflect periods of different models of governance: In 1995, schools were under local authority control; in 2017, a model of devolved governance was much more prevalent across England.

The Education Reform Act (1988) introduced, amongst other changes, a national curriculum in England in 1989, the first time that teachers in schools had been required to work to a prescribed curriculum. This comprised statutory programmes of study (the matters, skills and processes to be taught) and attainment targets (the knowledge, skills and understanding to be acquired – and tested) in 'core' (mathematics, English and science) and ten 'foundation' subjects. The interpretation of outdoor education prior to this was often as 'a subject/approach to learning' (DoE, 1975) and it was established in the curriculum of many schools with many Local (Education) Authorities owning their own Outdoor Education Centres (Ogilvie, 2013), where students could undertake residential experiences usually at reasonable or subsidised costs and staff were qualified teachers. Many authorities also had extended their provision through, for example, specialist advisory staff and continuing professional development for teachers at teachers' centres and non-residential outdoor centres, which supported the integration of outdoor education across the curriculum, or extended curriculum.

In spite of pressure from various outdoor professional bodies, the outdoor component in the formal curriculum was integrated as 'outdoor and adventurous activities, i.e. that part of outdoor education that is 'physical' in nature (DES, 1991) and is retained today (DfE, 2019a). Environmental education was identified initially as a 'cross-curricular' theme with associated documentation (Manchester Education Department, 1991). As a theme, it extended and enhanced the curriculum guidance in core and foundation subjects and was intended to permeate across the curriculum to: foster awareness of, and concern for, economic, social, political and ecological interdependence; create new patterns of behaviour (including pro-active attitudes), groups and society towards the environment; and, provide the knowledge, skills and experience upon which choices could be made (2). Conceptually, this theme has

not been retained although pervades through the formal science and geography curricula. The 'shifting sands' of outdoor education in the national curriculum over time are described by Leather (2018). In terms of the factors influencing outdoor education at that time, through Local Management of Schools budgets were devolved to schools, meaning that Headteachers and governors had choice in how to spend their income. Furthermore, schools could no longer charge parents/carers for activities taking place within school time. Without centralised funding and subsidies, there was a demise or reduction in outdoor residential centre provision.

The English school system in 1995 comprised primary education (4 -11 years) and secondary education (11-16 years) with various provision for post-16 education. Education from 4-11 years was often separated into 'infant' (4-7 years) including a reception class (4-5 years) and 'junior' (7-11 years) either in the same or in separate schools. Each school had a headteacher. In some authorities 'middle' schools (normally 9-13 years) crossed the primary/secondary threshold for pupils at 11 years of age. Pre-school education was through nursery schools and playgroups, sometimes in a completely different educational establishment to a primary (or equivalent) school. Schools were state schools (funded centrally through by the government) or private schools – sometimes 'preparatory' schools for independent secondary schools. By 2017, many junior and infant schools had merged to become primary schools with one headteacher and often had an attached nursery, with children starting at 3 years. Various funding models were in operation for state primary schools (see Gillard, 2019) with some larger 'federations', often with an Executive Headteacher (or equivalent). Some middle schools were in existence although other authorities had changed to a two-tier (primary/secondary) system. Special schools normally constituted separate educational establishments in both years.

The current statutory framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage, birth to five years (DfE, 2019b) includes the prime learning and development areas of communication and language, physical development and personal, social and emotional development. It also states that, 'providers must provide access to an outdoor play area, or if that is not possible, ensure that outdoor activities are planned and taken on a daily basis ...' (3.58, 30). However, the specification for outdoor play is not taken forwards beyond five year olds in the mandatory curriculum.

The term 'outdoor learning' is now used more widely than 'outdoor education' in primary schools in England. It has an overlap with 'learning outside the classroom' and the activities so embraced in the Manifesto launched by the government in 2006 that stated that every young person whatever their age, ability or circumstance should experience theworld beyond the classroom for learning and personal development (DES, 2006; CLotC, 2018). Using the definition of places for learning and teaching other than the classroom, these experiences extend to gallery, theatre and museum visits, in addition to direct engagement with the natural environment.

In the period 1995-2017, there has been an overall decline in the influence of the local authority and a greater role for headteachers in governance. In 1995, most state schools were under local authority control with budgets allocated to schools. Following the Academies Act in 2010, by 2014, 12% of primary schools in England had become academies and as such they are independently funded state schools directly responsible to government (Simpkins, 2015). This proportion had increased to 29.8% of primary schools in England as (open) academies (not academy projects awaiting approval) (DfE, 2019c, November 2018). The main reasons for converter academies (ie schools that voluntary elect to become academies) were reported to be to gain greater autonomy in funding spend and to raise educational standards (Eyles, Machin and Silva, 2017); 77% of academies stated that they converted for

the former reason (National Audit Office, 2012) and the raising of educational standards in primary academies has recently been questioned (Regan-Stansfield, 2018). Thus, there has been a tension between school autonomy and central government control and direction. The purpose of school governance has developed into a position to balance stakeholder involvement and democratic accountability such that it has shifted towards an explicit purpose of improving performance, which is configured in a relatively narrow way (James, 2014). Furthermore, many headteachers have felt impelled into leading their schools into associations with other schools (Coldron et al., 2014) and new forms of school grouping in consortia or federations and a minority of under-performing primary schools have been subject to imposed sponsored academy status.

In 1995, outdoor education was a specialist area of study in initial teacher education with some providers offering variants of 'outdoor and environmental education' or 'outdoor activities' and graduates from the previous fifteen years (or more) were teaching in primary schools. As outdoor and adventurous activities became embedded as a small part ($1/6^{th)}$ of the physical education statutory curriculum, most higher education institutions focused more on core and foundation subjects or generic primary initial teacher training leading to qualified teacher status. By 2017 there were few, if any, initial teacher education providers in the discipline, although teachers' personal interests can influence practice.

This English case study detailing curriculum change and governance reform and the ways in which teachers have had to respond and adapt to it as 'curriculum makers', is typical of other educational systems over such a time period. This empirical research provides evidence to fill a gap in knowledge about the strength and pervasiveness of teachers' values in creating their personalities of change to define a curriculum for their students, particularly for a non-mandatory area such as outdoor learning.

Method

A questionnaire was designed and deployed in 1995 to gather the perspectives of teachers representing a range of primary schools in England. The same questionnaire was slightly updated to reflect changes in terminology and nomenclature and then used again in 2017. The responses to each questionnaire are analysed and a comparison is made to consider teacher values in respect of outdoor learning and changes during this 22 year period that included significant changes in governance and curriculum.

Questionnaires are research instruments for surveys, which are recognised for their efficiency and flexibility and are independent of geographical location; they have internal and external validity, and ethical advantages above interviews in so far as the extensive deployment assures confidentiality providing response rates are acceptable (Mathers, Fox and Hunn, 2007). The questionnaire comprised a number of question formats allowing for binary selection (closed responses), qualitative commentary (open responses) and ordering (ranking, 1-5). Cross-referenced questions were included to test reliability (Adèr and Mellenbergh, 1999; Kelley et al., 2003).

The sampling framework was stratified and purposive across primary schools in England and questionnaires were addressed by name to Headteachers (or equivalent) at schools to complete themselves or pass to a colleague. The respondents were asked to state to which phase of schooling their responses pertained and the broad location ('rural', 'suburban' or 'urban') of their school. In 1995 the sample comprised first destination employers for graduate teachers from Charlotte Mason College, a legacy higher education institution of the University of Cumbria. At that time, some of these graduates were specialists in Outdoor and Environmental Education. After piloting to teachers out with this stratified sample whereby

its validity was confirmed, the questionnaire was deployed to a sample of 101 schools using a postal survey with a response rate of 60% (n=61).

The updated questionnaire in 2017 was distributed to the same sample of schools, where possible. Some schools had merged reflecting the integrated provision of education 3-11 years or 3-7 years and included the early years curriculum. 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 and the Executive Headteacher in the consortium identified by reference to websites; where a school had closed, it was sent to the next nearest geographically located primary school as identified from online map data supported by school unique reference numbers (URNs) (DfE, 2019d). This created an unmatched sample but as the research aimed to examine the perspectives and opinions of teachers reflecting on their educational establishments' policies and practice, rather than the schools themselves, this was felt to be acceptable. This survey was deployed using the Online Surveys software (2019) which resulted in a very low response rate presumably due to teachers being focused on classroom delivery for much of their day and not able or having the time to respond to emails. Thus a postal survey followed, accepting that this is, '… the best form of survey in an educational enquiry' (Cohen, Mannion and Morrison, 2018, 405).

In 2017, an initial sample comprised 99 schools with a response rate of 17% (n= 17 and a replicated sample of 11% (n=11) of schools. Given this low response rate, the sample was doubled using the same criteria (graduate first destinations from the University of Cumbria in 2017, no specialist discipline training in Outdoor and Environmental Education) giving an overall response rate for 2017 of 20% with returns from 40 schools. The overall response rate for both surveys was 40%; this compares with a mean response rate of 35.7% from 1607 studies published between 2000 and 2005 in 17 refereed academic journals in organisational

research (Barlich and Holtom, 2008). A non-response bias was considered not to have influenced the outcomes of this analysis but rather reflected the multitude of time demands and pressures on teachers in schools. Non-response could also 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. Anecdotal evidence would suggest that this was not the case but it has to be acknowledged as a possible limitation of the research.

The research on the effect of curriculum reform on practice was 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 a meta-analytical articulation of the influence of curricula on the practices of teachers within schools (Holland, Thomson and Henderson, 2006).

To assure confidentiality in data storage, analysis and reporting and the rights of teachers to withdraw from the research at any time, the project was approved through the ethical processes of the University of Cumbria. A summary of the datasets is shown in Table 1.

<Table 1 here>

Analysis

The two survey datasets were initially analysed separately to describe teachers' responses at the two points in time and were subsequently compared to seek to understand change or difference in teachers' perceptions. The analysis for qualitative and quantitative data followed the 'convergent' design for mixed methods (Creswell and Creswell, 2018): The qualitative data were coded whereby the open responses were categorised manually with an *'in vivo'* (language of participants) term and collapsed into broad themes (Braun and Clarke, 2006;

2012). Themes can reflect similarities in meanings, frequency of appearance within the data, correspondence and causation (Saldaňa, 2009). A descriptive analysis of the quantitative data was undertaken from the data collated on Microsoft Excel to report measures of proportion, order and variation. Rankings were shown by integers (1 – most highly ranked, 2- next most highly ranked etc.) to an 85% or greater threshold of all responses. The two datasets were integrated for 'side by side' comparison. Open qualitative comments were recorded through this thematic analysis; Quantitative data analyses are summarised in tabular form and both are embedded in the findings and discussion.

The two datasets are examined here holistically for comparative purposes, with differentiations and cross referencing (such as for age phases and special schools) but two-way analyses of variables, for example, to teacher expertise or professional development needs, are not reported in this paper.

Findings and discussion

In comparing the analysis of responses for 1995 and 2017, it is important to note the changes in age phase of schools (14%) and in the organisation of schools away from local authorities towards grouping of some schools in alliances/federations (3%). These findings reflect the national pattern of changing governance, often to larger operational units either in age groupings or by location (Simpkins, 2015; Wilkins, 2015). It is not possible to predict the impact of these changes on the responses but at least we must acknowledge that the analysis is limited to identifying broad patterns within a changing context.

The value teachers place on the outdoors as a learning environment

Teachers were asked if there was any activity or experience for which they considered the outdoors to provide the optimum learning environment. The results are shown in Table 2. 26% of teachers in 1995 and 15% in 2017 did not answer this question.

<Table 2 here>

Interestingly, there is not much difference between the two years, although environmental education was more prevalent as a term in 1995 than currently. In the pre-aggregated data from 1995, outdoor education, adventure and residentials were ranked more highly by teachers in junior than infant schools and in the latter, environmental education/nature accounted for all the answers (n= 9). It seems that the importance of a relationship or connection with nature remains in the consciousness of teachers and the emergence of Forest School is named in 2017 by teachers in all phases. It will be interesting to see if developing relationships with nature expands through schools using outdoor environments as key frameworks such as the 25 year Environment Plan (DEFRA, 2018) and Learning in the Natural Environment (Natural England, 2017a) become more embedded, particularly as teachers are noting 'first hand experiences' and 'real life learning' as a positive outcome of outdoor learning. Many teachers see the outdoors as an optimum learning environment for personal and social education with mention of development of meta-skills such as teamwork and team building. Core and foundation subjects were not mentioned in the highest rankings although qualitative comments indicated a much more open approach to the use of the outdoors in 2017:

Whichever lesson lends itself to that environment

A variety of opportunities for 3-7 year olds

Indeed, it would seem that teachers in the early years see outdoor learning as a key vehicle for, 'role play, large construction, gross motor skills and co-ordination' with teachers in special schools seeing the outdoors as an optimum environment for 'contextual spatial awareness and freedom'. In 1995, three schools stated that residentials manifested the outdoors as an optimum learning environment but there was no mention of this in 2017, even though the proportion of schools undertaking residential experiences had risen by 8%.

Teachers' expertise and aspiration in delivering outdoor learning

The capability, capacity and confidence of teachers contributes to their expertise and aspiration to facilitate outdoor learning and is critical to its provision in schools (Waite, 2011). Table 3 shows the self–reported expertise of teacher respondents to the survey and reflects diminishing expertise in the workforce from 1995 to 2017. Perhaps this is to be expected given that in 2017, outdoor learning or outdoor and environmental education was not a specialist area in Initial Teacher Education. 9% of schools reported, however, 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.

<Table 3 here>

The interests that teachers express in a range of areas for continuing professional development (CPD) can be seen as a proxy of their aspiration and confidence to deliver outdoor learning. Development and training for teachers supports 'enactment' (Grossman, Hammerness and McDonald, 2009) whereby core practices such as planning and facilitating learning, in this case in the outdoors, increase teacher confidence. In both surveys, teachers were asked to state to rank a number of pre-determined check boxes with space for 'other' free text suggestions. The options were the same in both surveys. The comparator analysis

illustrated in Table 4 shows a slight shift to support in areas that can operate in the core curriculum and/or in locations close to school. Teachers are seeking training and development to implement meaningful outdoor learning themselves at low cost with justified curricula identity.

<Table 4 here>

When all stated CPD interests are ranked in 2017, there are some areas that did not appear in 1995 as shown in Table 5.

<Table 5 here>

Requests for CPD support in creativity, Forest School and literacy and numeracy outdoors might reflect a number of different things: a greater understanding of the notion of outdoor learning as an area not needing highly specialised expertise that can be facilitated by all teachers, the flourishing of the Forest (and Beach) School initiatives with organised training and certification and the centrality in the curriculum of literacy and numeracy. Creativity has been highlighted as one of three major attributes (the others being ownership and progression) of outstanding outdoor learning (Graham, 2014) and is embedded in a shift in inspection from outcomes to process (Dfe, 2019e). Thus, teachers appear to have aspirations to deliver outdoor learning indicated by their desire to engage in CPD to support them in constructing a curriculum involving outdoor learning utilising their existing pedagogical skills.

The effect of curriculum reform

The results in Table 6 for 2017 indicate a positive picture in terms of outdoor learning in schools in England following the most recent major curricula reforms, although not all in the sample returned answered this question.

<Table 6 here>

In 2017, only 6% of respondents thought that outdoor learning provision had decreased in their schools and that this was due to pressures on time with a typical response of, ‘increasing time on English and Mathematics, reducing the time available for non-core subjects, Physical Education, and Science.’ The expanded responses providing reasons for an increase in provision reflected the following themes: topics (lending themselves to the outdoors), learning focused on the local area, objectives allowing for more teacher creativity, working towards a quality mark (‘Step Outside’), more funding and a strong teachers’ belief in the value of outdoor learning.

> *Nothing is of greater interest to children than the natural world*
>
> *More open objectives will allow teachers to be more creative in using the outdoors, so we are hoping to develop more outdoor learning experiences*

The reasons teachers gave to explain why curricula reforms had not had an effect on provision were categorised as follows: that practice was not influenced by curricula reforms, and local initiatives e.g. ‘Forest Fridays’.

> *We make good use of outdoor learning anyway*
>
> *It is a staff initiative to increase outdoor learning*

In 1995, fewer teachers thought that curricula reforms had benefitted the provision of outdoor education, although more teachers felt that they had not had an influence than in 2017. The positive influences were categorised as: subject specific curriculum requirements (e.g. geography fieldwork), Local (Education) Authority support, use of locality and first-hand experiences and flexibility outwith the statutory curriculum (20% time for schools to use as they saw fit). Decreases in provision were seen by teachers to have been influenced by changes to curriculum content in Physical Education and lack of time and costs (including parental contributions). However, as in 2017, there was a majority response emphasising the value of outdoor learning,

> *Outdoor learning is something we must do*
>
> *We run outdoor residentials anyway*
>
> *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*

These results support the suggestion of a strong teachers' values base to the importance of outdoor learning and that if curriculum content changes de-emphasise this learning, teachers will look for other ways for its inclusion. In both years, local, first-hand experiences were considered important by teachers and often key pedagogical approaches in the geography, history and/or science curricula.

The effect of governance reform

Support from local authorities was diminished or non-existent in 2017 but teachers reported increased engagement in local initiatives by groups or federations of schools, or through national movements e.g. Forest School (Knight, 2016; Elliott, 2015; O'Brien, 2009). In-school and between school co-operation was shown to be a key mechanism for curriculum innovation where teachers can be empowered to experiment with the curriculum (Brundrett and Duncan, 2014). In respect of supportive policies, frameworks and provision, schools had received help in terms of funding (sports, shared school budgets, continuing professional development, National Lottery and private sponsor), access (transport links, forests, residentials), sharing of practical ideas (school consortia), quality marks and the physical education curriculum enabling more outdoor and adventurous activities. Teachers predominantly felt that budget cuts and those anticipated are having a detrimental effect on provision including through reduced staffing in schools and travel costs. The need to ask for parental contributions to support visits and activities also mitigates against implementation in some schools. The documentation required to take children out of school was prohibitive for some and 'the safeguarding agenda, whilst important, can also be restrictive.' Some schools were losing access to school grounds through increasing numbers on roll. There was also mention of the performativity agenda, particularly in literacy and numeracy.

> *Our school has expanded to a four form entry. The new buildings take up playground space*
>
> *The relentless pressure of SATs (*Standard Assessment Tasks*) force the focus to be narrowed towards the core subjects at certain times. Budget cuts make travel even more difficult to afford and therefore, parents are asked to make a contribution more and more*

Nearly twice as many teachers thought that policies, frameworks and other local outdoor provision helped schools implement outdoor learning than hindered them (Table 7), with pockets of local initiatives and training particularly influential. Changes in governance and the reduction of the influence of local authorities has, in some cases, opened up new funding opportunities to support learning or perhaps teachers are, by necessity, making more efforts to seek them out for the benefit of their pupils. The government performativity agenda with budgeting cuts and to a more limited extent, health and safety considerations mitigated against practice in some schools.

<Table 7 here>

These data support the findings that time and cost (ranked first and second in 2017; second and first in 1995 respectively (Prince, 2018)) are the two most important factors that teachers consider influence the provision of outdoor learning experiences as part of the school curriculum in primary schools in England as in other countries. However, once again, there seems to be a considerable drive from committed practitioners to facilitate outdoor learning in spite of challenges.

Teacher values

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

The data show that teachers place value on the outdoors as an optimum learning environment and have developed open and creative approaches to involving outdoor learning in the curriculum. They use outdoor learning, particularly in local environments, as part of the wider curriculum and the value they place on it has been sustained over the 22 years of this research, even though teacher expertise has decreased. Using CPD as a proxy for teacher aspiration and confidence, 100% of respondents in both years showed interest, indicating again the value that they place on implementing outdoor learning for a range of outcomes.

The influence of teachers' personal values on practice and the balance they need to make with institutional priorities (Wilkins, 2015) is illustrated through this research on the implementation of outdoor learning in primary schools in England. Although teachers did encounter challenges in implementing outdoor learning in schools in 1995 and 2017, there was a commitment and drive demonstrated by teacher values as expressed by a majority of respondents, to enable practice and realise outcomes for the benefit of pupils. There was a strong voicing of teacher values about outdoor learning in these data, particularly in the qualitative open comments. The relationship of teacher values to professional identity is more complex and would require a wider scope of research to examine their association.

It would seem that the theory of change model (Goodson, 2003) has relevance here in so far as in 1995, the National Curriculum was so different to the period prior to its introduction in 1989, that many teachers were still in stasis and may not have accepted or adapted to curriculum change. Although curriculum reform had been prevalent and regular to 2017, teachers by that time, had established their 'personality of change'. The identification of the importance of teacher values and identity through this research has wider relevance to other international contexts in which educational systems alter through time. If teacher values are consistent with a 'personality of change' teachers become more accepting of, and resilient to, change and will feel empowered to use their autonomous space to facilitate the learning

for children that they value and believe in, and work through any mitigating factors to enable practice to occur.

Outdoor learning is illustrative of a non-mandatory curriculum area in this context. Anecdotal evidence suggests that there needs to be more research in terms of the comparative value of non-mandatory or extra-curricular provision such as aspects of music, drama and educational visits beyond metrics (Education Endowment Foundation, 2013) to account for the choices teachers make for their autonomous space.

Conclusion

This research provides evidence that teachers' values can transgress curriculum and governance reform to facilitate the implementation of a non-mandatory area such as outdoor learning. Teachers develop a personality of change and use their autonomous space as curriculum makers to achieve new and different practice, or to maintain current practice, that they believe in. As curriculum and governance reform de-emphasises outdoor learning, particularly as it is rarely included as a major part of initial teacher education, teachers will look for other ways to include it and demonstrate flexibility in curriculum interpretation.

Teachers acknowledge the challenges of implementing outdoor learning, particularly in respect of time and cost, in a neo-liberal climate of performativity and accountability. However, they utilise the benefits of larger operational units such as federations and groups of schools (Eyles, Machin and Silva, 2017; Regan-Stansfield, 2018) to share resources, funding, ideas and opportunities for continuing professional development to enhance their practice and to increase the opportunities for their students. Early years practitioners view their Framework (DfE, 2019b) as an enabling curriculum for outdoor learning through its expectation around access to outdoor space supporting outdoor play and learning.

Curriculum reform, although subject to criticism for the pace and iterative nature of change in English primary schools, is seen by teachers as enabling outdoor learning in many schools in 2017. If expertise has decreased over time perhaps because of the changing emphasis of initial teacher education, teacher aspiration has not. Many teachers feel able to interpret the curriculum and utilise their local area in ways that facilitate first hand experiences, particularly in geography, history and science. Quality marks such as 'Step Outside' have provided further incentives to integrate outdoor learning opportunities through high quality teaching.

Teachers values and beliefs in outdoor learning came through strongly in this research with a facilitative and enabling mindset and these values are crucial in transcending any negative effects of reform. The notions of developing a 'personality of change' (Goodson, 2003) and a professional identity (Wilkins et al., 2012) are important, particularly for trainee and beginning teachers. Although the place of outdoor learning is unspecified within most of the primary curriculum in England, positive teachers' values have been sustained in respect of the importance of this non-mandatory curriculum area, and have enabled teachers to support provision with increased opportunities for pupils in schools.

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

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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 and 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 and 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. Outdoors as the optimum learning environment, 1995 and 2017 (n= 45 and 34 respectively)

Rank	1995	2017
1	Environmental Education/Nature	Personal, Social, Health and Economic Education (PSHE)
2	Personal and Social Education (PSE)	Nature
3	Fieldwork	Forest School

Table 3. Stated expertise* of teachers, Primary Schools in England , 1995 and 2017 (n = 60 and 40 respectively)

Response	1995	2017	% change
Yes	53%	41%	-12%
No	47%	59%	+12%

*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).’

Table 4. Continuing Professional Development (CPD) interests, Primary teachers in England, 1995 and 2017 (comparator data) (n = 61 and 40 respectively)

CPD	1995	2017	% 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	11%	5%	-6%
Outdoor and adventurous activities (centre based)	9%	3%	-6%
Skills training in higher level adventure activities	4%	3%	-1%
Reviewing	1%	0%	-1%

Table 5. Most highly ranked Continuing Professional Development (CPD) interests, primary teachers in England, 2017 (n= 40)

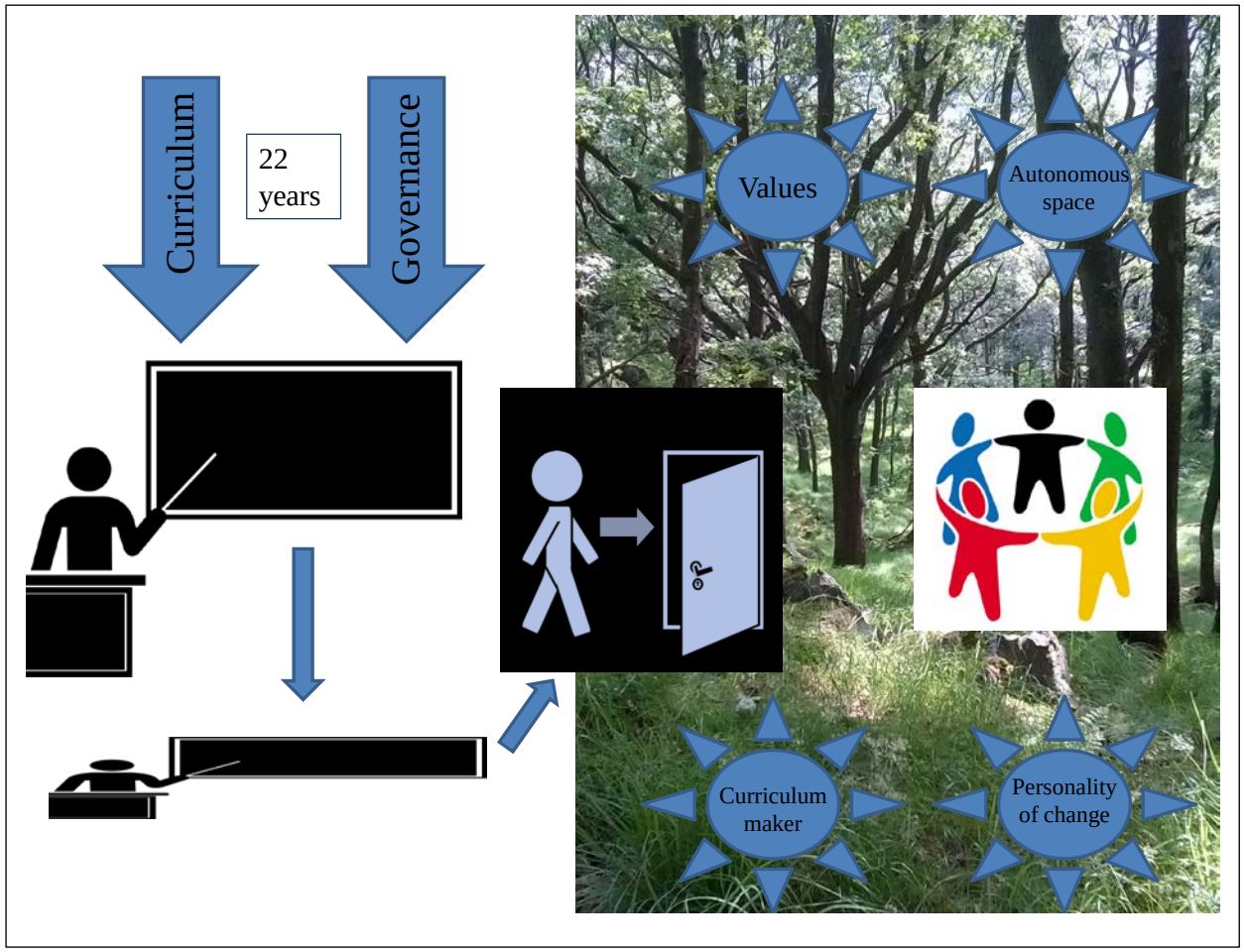
Rank	CPD
1	Creativity in the outdoors
2	Scientific investigation outdoors
3	Outdoor and adventurous activities (school grounds)
4	Cross-curricular use of school grounds
5	Forest School
6	Literacy and numeracy outdoors

Table 6. Effect of the revised National Curricula in 1995 (revised 1992) and 2017 (revised 2014) on the provision of Outdoor Learning, Primary Schools in England (n = 57 and 34 respectively)

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

Table 7. Effect of other government policies, organisational frameworks or outdoor provision locally on the provision of Outdoor Learning in the curriculum, Primary Schools in England 2017 (n=29)

Responses	2017
Yes (helped)	46%
Yes (hindered)	25%
No	29%



Graphical abstract