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# Outdoor Learning and Place-based Curriculum Framework

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## Introduction

### The purpose of this Framework

This Framework was developed as a response to the request from teachers in Cumbria and Lancashire to provide an evidence base for an outdoor learning and place-based curriculum such as the Morecambe Bay Curriculum (Eden Project North). It should support teachers and educators in developing teaching and learning for children and young people in schools and other educational settings and to gain confidence and belief in the efficacy and vision of such a curriculum.

### Design of the Outdoor Learning and Place-based Curriculum Framework

The vision of curricula such as the Morecambe Bay Curriculum and Cumbria County Council's Nature-based Curriculum includes an outdoor learning curriculum with a focus on nature, sustainability, climate change and biodiversity.

**Outdoor Learning** is defined as a broad term 'for actively inclusive facilitated approaches that predominantly use activities and experiences in the outdoors, which lead to learning, increased health and wellbeing and environmental awareness' (Institute for Outdoor Learning, 2022).

**Place-based education** is 'the process of using the local community and environment as a starting point to teach concepts in language arts, mathematics, social studies, science and other subjects across the curriculum. Emphasizing hands-on, real-world learning experiences, this approach to education increases academic achievement, helps students develop stronger ties to their community, enhances students' appreciation for the natural world, and creates a heightened commitment to serving as active, contributing citizens' (Sobel, 2013, p. 11).

The evidence base was created by reviewing the literature focusing on each of Key Stages (KS) 1, 2, 3 and 4. Each researcher focused on a succinct review of the evidence with limited (maximum of 25) references. Some of the evidence included one or more Key Stages and indeed was critical in this respect (for example, on how outdoor learning and a place-based curriculum can support transition of students from KS2 to KS3). Evidence at KS1 and 2 was difficult in many cases to differentiate, so the evidence base was combined. Each researcher provided a rationale for the curriculum in addition to outcomes. For both elements, the evidence is integrated into this Framework, which follows the format of the ITT Core Content Framework (DfE, 2022a) and the Early Career Framework for teachers (DfE, 2022b) of a knowledge base ('Learn that ...') and practical teacher support for developing learning opportunities and experiences ('Learn how to...').

Five core areas of evidence for outcomes are identified in this Framework: **Learning and Engagement, Academic Achievement, Knowledge, Mental and Physical Health** and **Social Competencies**. It is recognised that these areas are not discrete, and that a multitude of interconnected outcomes may be possible in any one outdoor learning and/or place-based experience. References with web links are supplied, some of which address multiple outcomes.

## Rationale for Outdoor Learning and a Place-based Curriculum

1. Outdoor learning is a unique pedagogical approach involving active learning outdoors in 'real' contexts.
  - 1a. It provides 'low risk – high transfer' of textbook knowledge to the everyday world.
2. It can take place in school grounds or local green/blue spaces and does not require expensive resources.
3. It supports the transition from KS2 to KS3 to sustain students' excitement about learning and mitigate against any declines in motivation, health and wellbeing.
4. Children spend less time outdoors than in previous generations but they wish that they could spend more time outdoors, particularly at school.
  - 4a. School-based time outdoors has decreased in primary schools due to loss of nature-based and play-based learning.
  - 4c. The outdoors can engage all ages yet there is a marked decline in outdoor learning experiences between the early years and later stages of primary education.
5. The outdoors provides a very different environment provoking different student reactions and alternate perspectives to explore.
  - 5a Outdoor learning provides added value to classroom experiences.
6. Outdoor learning can provide a cross-curricular approach to achieving educational aims.
7. It improves young people's quality of life and can meet many wellbeing policy aims.
8. Outdoor learning may utilise adventurous activities, but 'real' risk is not a necessity and challenge may manifest itself through a range of approaches for educational aims.

<b>Outcomes of Outdoor Learning and a Place-based Curriculum</b>	
<b>Learning and engagement:</b>	
<b>Learn that ...</b>	<b>Learn how to ...</b>
<p>1. Outdoor learning improves students' engagement in learning through higher motivation, a greater sense of efficacy and a desire to learn.</p> <p>2. Involvement in activities in outdoor environments improves students' concentration and work patterns, creativity and brain function., including recall.</p> <p>3. Motivation and a desire to learn outdoors is translated back to learning in the classroom and attendance.</p> <p>4. Outdoor learning Increases autonomous and collaborative abilities.</p> <p>5. Digital literacy can encourage positive environmental perceptions</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Develop practical skills to improve motivation and engagement.</i></li> <li>• <i>Design activities that will promote active participation and 'hands on' learning.</i></li> <li>• <i>Promote 'learning as fun' - the joy of learning.</i></li> <li>• <i>Design curriculum opportunities for immersion, or regular experiences in the outdoors.</i></li> <li>• <i>Embed learning from the outdoors in classroom learning to deepen and reinforce the benefits.</i></li> <li>• <i>Foster curiosity and awareness of and in nature in local environments.</i></li>   <li>• <i>Encourage opportunities for peer learning.</i></li> <li>• <i>Engage local experts and organisations in the teaching team to provide deeper interpretation of a topic and opportunities to develop social and economic capital.</i></li> <li>• <i>Involve mobile technologies in outdoor teaching.</i></li> </ul>
<b>Academic achievement:</b>	
<b>Learn that ...</b>	<b>Learn how to ...</b>
<p>1. Outdoor learning can improve academic achievement and learning competencies. Students transfer knowledge gained in the outdoors to 'real life' situations.</p> <p>2. The outdoors allows children to connect and integrate knowledge across subject areas and disciplines leading to new knowledge acquisition and learning.</p> <p>2a. Learning in natural environments gives students more motivation for studying science.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Allow students the freedom to engage with 'living' environments without a focus on learning for assessment or without fear of giving an incorrect answer.</i></li> <li>• <i>Use outdoor learning as an integrated, cross-curricular approach.</i></li> <li>• <i>Maximise opportunities for example, in creative writing and through creativity.</i></li> </ul>

<p>3. It can be the ‘pedagogical ignition’ to students’ critical thinking through opportunities for an open-ended, student-led, enquiry premised approach.</p> <p>4. A kinaesthetic, sensory and experiential approach enables students to access more diverse ways to engage with their work.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Use outdoor learning as an approach to vary learning methods</i></li> </ul>
<p><b>Knowledge:</b></p>	
<p><b>Learn that ...</b></p>	<p><b>Learn how to ...</b></p>
<p>1. Outdoor learning builds on or improves environmental understanding and sustainability.</p> <p>1a. Knowledge gained locally to inform a place-based environmental view can be expanded to encompass the biosphere.</p> <p>1b. Experiences of nature boost environmental stewardship.</p> <p>2. It builds new knowledge and skills and can develop a strong level of students’ commitment to expanding their knowledge and skills.</p> <p>3. Students’ understanding of the natural environment is deepened through outdoor experiences.</p> <p>3a. Outdoor learning improves connectedness to community, nature and environment.</p> <p>4. Older students (KS4) can benefit from viewing their classroom as a community, discovering new aspects of their locality and becoming agents of change in their own school and community.</p> <p>4a. A community can help to develop collective knowledge of place, building diverse personal/professional identities that are respectful of culture and societal needs.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Increase own subject knowledge.</i></li> <li>• <i>Use and develop appropriate resources.</i></li> <li>• <i>Provide opportunities to improve biodiversity in local areas.</i></li>   <li>• <i>Build in regular opportunities for outdoor experiences in outdoor, local spaces, particularly school grounds.</i></li>   <li>• <i>Encourage opportunities for local natural history observations, imagination, memory and contemplation.</i></li>   <li>• <i>Use placements, collaborations and partnerships with local employers to enable students to connect to the local environment and to support increased social and economic capital.</i></li> </ul>

<b>Mental and physical health:</b>	
<b>Learn that ...</b>	<b>Learn how to ...</b>
<p>1. Outdoor learning improves students' health and wellbeing outcomes particularly in respect of mental health benefits (mental, social, emotional) and greater physical activity.</p> <p>2. Outdoor play and access to nature improves children's physical health. It reduces obesity, time spent sedentary, myopia and increases immunity. It helps to prevent long-term health issues into adulthood.</p> <p>3. Healthier, happier children are more likely to reach higher academic achievement, maximise their achievement and employment prospects. 3a. An outdoor curriculum can reduce health inequalities.</p> <p>4. It allows children to gain a better understanding of their own bodies through physical movement in living environments through kinaesthetic and experiential learning through physical activity.</p> <p>5. Play/nature-based learning builds resilience to cope with life and minimise potential health issues as children are physically active and taking risks, which strengthens their mental health and wellbeing.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Include opportunities for multisensory experiences and motor and sensory stimulation that contribute to improvements in motor development.</i></li> <li>• <i>Enable young people to be physically active every day.</i></li> <li>• <i>Re-evaluate further potential for natural areas around the school.</i></li> <li>• <i>Promote an inclusive approach to opportunities for nature connection.</i></li> <li>• <i>Include opportunities for encountering and interacting with people and places that are novel, including residential experiences.</i></li> </ul>
<b>Social competencies:</b>	
<b>Learn that ...</b>	<b>Learn how to ...</b>
<p>1. Outdoor learning enhances children's social and emotional competencies. 1a. An outdoor curriculum can reduce social inequalities.</p> <p>2. There are benefits for students' practical skills, sense of efficacy and confidence, improving future employment prospects.</p> <p>3. Outdoor learning improves students' interpersonal skills and resilience. It improves social competency and social relations such as self-esteem, a sense of</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Include opportunities for problem solving, risk taking, risky play, imaginative play.</i></li> <li>• <i>Enable students to experience a familiar place in a new way, perhaps through ingenuity and curiosity.</i></li> <li>• <i>Provide opportunities: for students to practise their communication skills and build social spaces with adults.</i></li> </ul>



belonging and building trusting relationships.

- Create spaces and time for teachers and students to learn together.
- Facilitate students' sense of belonging and unity.

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