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Making the Leap from Outdoor Instructing to Classroom Teaching and Back Again

by Glen Probert

"...alongside my NGB's and outdoor experience I have a qualification which has enabled me to fully appreciate professionalism and self analysis, true hard work and pressure to improve."

Professional
Development

*“Teaching? Ahh, that’s easy.
Home by half three and 12 weeks
holiday a year.....”*

I remember these conversations with visiting members of teaching staff very well. It all sounded so easy, sat in my staff room at the outdoor centre I had been working at for 4 years.

I knew everything there was to know about interacting with children. I had taught thousands of different children in some very difficult and dangerous activities over the years. I had a couple of NGB qualifications and thought of myself as a true outdoor ‘professional’.

Two years later, stood in front of my own class of 30 year 6 individuals on a cold September morning, I can look back on myself and realise just how naïve I was! I didn’t really know anything about children – their needs, psychology or how to really enhance their learning. And as much as I thought of myself as a ‘professional’, again I was way, way off the mark.

Making the move...

I needed to do something. I had been at the centre on and off for a while and I was comfortable. I knew the activities, I knew the staff, who had become some of my best friends, and I knew the ins and outs of the centre. However, I was restless. I had become stagnant and complacent with my work – I wanted more responsibility and to have a greater say in how the centre was run and the experience the children were having. I have heard of these feelings in other instructors I have talked to and know that this is a common feeling in the industry.

I knew I was capable of much, much more – but how? Looking around the centre, I could see my options in my colleagues and it looked like this: I could stay at the centre as an instructor, earning a pittance, and fight my way up to more senior positions by gaining more NGB’s. I could move around various centres doing the same thing, but again this would take time and involve moving away. Or I could become a teacher, as were the Head, deputy Head and assistant centre manager.



I already had my degree in Outdoor Leadership from what is now the University of Cumbria and with the funding and loans available I would be on the same wage as I was when I was instructing.

All I needed to do was to get onto the correct course. Again there were options for me; I could either take a four year degree course, a GTP which is based in and supported by a school who were willing to have me, or a PGCE which would entail one year of training with a balance of university lectures and classroom placements.

Due to my experience with teaching year 5 and 6 in outdoor education, I opted for a PGCE in Primary Education specialising in Key Stage 2 at Newman University College in Birmingham.

Learning the lessons...

My PGCE year was an eye opening experience and it was here that I first began to understand the term ‘professional’. As a teacher, everything you say or do is underpinned with years of pedagogical theory, research and Government initiatives. The academic side of the course was based upon the learning of all of this, ready to apply practically in the classroom.



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Furthermore, being a primary teacher requires a full and in-depth knowledge of Numeracy, Literacy, and Science as well as all the other curriculum subjects – none of which I had really used since I was at primary school!

This proved to be one of the more difficult parts of the course and continued to be throughout my NQT year. The subject knowledge required is substantial and delivered to you quickly, with a large amount of studying required outside of the lectures in order to absorb it all.

A recent Government initiative is to 'fast track' graduates with specific subject knowledge to gain QTS within 6 months, however based upon my hectic experience I feel that this will be ineffective for primary teachers as the curriculum is far too broad to be absorbed in such a short time and will only result in churning out significantly unprepared teachers.

In order to apply the vast amount of knowledge that the University was supplying us with, the course also required me to undertake three school-based placements; two with our chosen Key Stage and one with the other.

With my experience being mainly practical, I was hoping that this would be my time to shine and

for my years of outdoor education teaching to give me an advantage.

However, as with the rest of the course I was quickly finding out that the difference between instructing and classroom teaching is substantial. The way in which I addressed the children, the gestures I made, the use of my voice, the lessons I planned and differentiated – all were evaluated in detail and advised on.

Slowly but surely I progressed through the course, learning one vital lesson above all – to be a professional demands that you absorb and act on all advice given, and that self assessment and reviewing is essential for progression. It is incredible to think that for years I have been teaching this to children at the centre, yet I was not following my own advice!

Perhaps this is where my shortcomings as an instructor were based – for all my self confidence and self assessment of what I thought I was capable of or what I had accomplished, what I was not doing was reviewing what others thought I was capable of, or what I was not capable of doing.

Finding my Feet...

I am now coming to the end of my NQT year, where I have been teaching 32 year 6 children. I have found that training as a teacher is very similar to passing

your driving test: you practice to pass your test, but you really learn to drive through experience afterwards.

Alongside the application of all my PGCE knowledge I have also had to attend to the pastoral care of my class, continually assess and adapt to the attainment of the children in accordance with national guidelines and work alongside fellow professionals to ensure that the school is delivering the highest quality education possible – all of which lead to a busy, pressurising job where there is always room for improvement.

Despite all the hard work transforming into a teacher has been – there is a fruitful reward at the end. Now, alongside my NGB's and outdoor experience I have a qualification which has enabled me to fully appreciate professionalism and self analysis, true hard work and pressure to improve.

Full Circle

This has resulted in my recent appointment to assistant centre manager at a partner outdoor centre to the one at which I once worked.



To this position I feel that I will be taking a completely different instructor to the one I once was.

Becoming a teacher demands that you apply yourself in all aspects of your job and look for ways to progress your teaching. It requires you to fully understand and interact with the children and harness their ability to achieve. But most of all, it requires you to display yourself as a professional – to the children, to the visiting members of staff and to your colleagues.

Would I recommend becoming a teacher to all outdoor practitioners?

No, as I appreciate that what was beneficial for me may not be for others. What I would recommend though, is taking the time to think very carefully about your own strengths and weaknesses, where you want to go and how you could get there. Evaluate each session you teach to make sure that the next one is even better and remember; the whole reason for this is that the children we teach deserve the best possible experience from outdoor education.

Oh, and as for the three thirty home time? Not once – more like six thirty. And the 12 weeks holiday? I've spent six of them marking books, planning and recovering... ■

Glossary

- GTP - Graduate Teaching Programme
- PGCE - Post Graduate Certificate in Education
- NQT - Newly Qualified Teacher
- QTS - Qualified Teacher Status
- Key Stage - Primary schools are split into 2 Key Stages, KS1 being Reception to Year 2, KS2 being Y3 to Y6.

About the author

Glen Probert is currently a Year 6 teacher at John Wheeldon Primary School in Stafford and will start as the assistant centre manager of Shugborough Outdoor Education Centre in September.

Glen has a BA Hons in Outdoor Leadership, alongside a PGCE with QTS and is studying for an MA in Education. He holds a number of NGB's including ML and SPA, and has a range of outdoor experience in both the public and private sector as well as having worked as a practitioner in the USA.

Photos - all from the author.

Learning outside the classroom on your doorstep



Question: Can schools provide quality nature learning experiences in the urban parks on their doorsteps?

Teachers have traditionally visited a variety of places for learning outside the classroom experiences, but may increasingly be prohibited from travelling very far by rising transport costs. This short article explores our experience of providing learning in local urban green spaces very close to schools. We suggest that these spaces are often an underutilised resource and that through working closely with schools we can build capacity embedding a culture of learning and fieldwork within schools that will be sustained into the future.

In September 2010, conservation charity Plantlife launched a two year Local Schools Partnership initiative as part of their Wild About Plants project, and in association with Sefton Borough Council (Parks and Green Spaces) and primary schools in Sefton, Merseyside. The initiative links schools to local parks and provides school-based and family learning opportunities throughout the year. Seven schools are currently involved with three more signing up for the academic year 2011/2012.

In our first year more than 2000 pupils have experienced multiple learning experiences in their local parks – some of these have taken a traditional environmental education route for example exploring nest building materials, taking

part in nature awareness activities and surveys, whilst others have had a more cross curricular dimension, for example poetry of place. At an interim workshop held in June partners identified positive outcomes for schools and the wider community. Some of their comments are shown in the table on the right.

Plantlife's Wild About Plants Liverpool Officer, Kate Deane, worked alongside park rangers and teachers delivering a variety of different activities to school pupils in Sefton parks. She noted that even within a year attitudes of pupils and staff have changed. "Pupils are more ready to go outside and know what to expect. They have gained more independence as learners." In addition benefits being transferred to the home environment have been noticed with pupils reporting that they have walked to parks in the evening or at weekends with their parents to show them what they have been learning. "I am really pleased about the legacy that this initiative will leave – we know that schools will continue to use these places for learning well after the project is completed, as the teachers now have the confidence to take groups there and run interesting sessions for their classes. I really enjoy the work too as it enables me to see pupil progression over a longer period of time."

Teachers have reported greater confidence in facilitating learning in outdoor environments, in some cases have stated they wish to adopt part of their local park and identified how great it is to have a new classroom on their doorstep. In terms of the wider community, other park

FOR SCHOOLS

- Children build up a relationship with their local green spaces and gain a greater appreciation of their benefits for the whole community. Children will be much more likely to see them in a positive way.
- Low no cost resources. Increased attitudes towards environmental care.
- Involvement with nature; improve and extend learning environment to outside spaces; increase sense of achievement and ownership; pride and confidence in pupils.
- A free natural resource based in the local community where the pupils live which will foster guardianship in parks and green spaces.
- Opportunities for less academic children to shine; more ownership of schools and local environment.

FOR THE WIDER COMMUNITY

- Seeing local children in a positive light. Being able to see at first hand what children are doing to support and protect local green spaces.
- Local communities united against anti-social behaviours within park area.
- Community spaces used – increased involvement (children using parks with family members) community environmental care.
- Parental involvement in non academic spaces may gain more support than normal.
- Children being more responsible; taking ownership; working together with wider community.
- Children interacting with nature – peer sharing of enthusiasm – they grow up and share experiences of these spaces with their children.



users are generally positive about spaces being used for learning and in one park, students from a local secondary school walking through the park showed interest in what the younger pupils were doing. Kate believes this community interest is reducing the likelihood of pupils' work and parks being vandalised.

Tony Hearn, Head Park Ranger at Sefton Borough Council says "The Park Ranger Service is very keen for local schools to play a major role in the parks as both a learning environment and a place for recreation. We are keen for local schoolchildren to take ownership of their local park, and if we engage them in their parks now, they and their families are more likely play a part in the park's future. We would like all schools to adopt their local park and turn them into outdoor classrooms, places to learn, play and grow up in."

Year 5 pupils from one school completed their John Muir Discovery Award through the initiative and in June shared their experiences in a whole school assembly. In talking about what they had learnt pupils felt that being involved in the scheme had made them "wildlife mad", they had "learnt that nature was right under their nose" and that they had "learnt to respect for and care for our environment and be grateful for our wonderful places in Bootle". For one pupil, a favourite activity was bird watching "because you got a chance to know what it is like to see different kinds of birds".

Whilst local urban green spaces do not always offer the wealth of biodiversity found on nature reserves or in the wider countryside, we should not underestimate the value of these spaces for starting a journey for many young people in their connections with nature. We should also recognise the importance that learning locally provides in terms of giving children meaningful experiences and helping to embed understanding about their natural world. This work has shown us not to underestimate what an adventure is for a child unused to playing and learning outdoors, and

it has opened our eyes to the potential adventures on the doorsteps of so many schools. These experiences have convinced us that urban parks are underutilised, and can be used extremely effectively offering scope for frequency of experience, with benefits for the schools and the local community.

A full evaluation report from two years of local schools partnership work will be completed in August 2012 and we are keen to hear from anyone involved in similar work to compare experiences.■

NOTES

The Wild About Plants project is a national project led by Plantlife (www.plantlife.org.uk), which received a grant through Natural England's Access to Nature grant stream funded by the Big Lottery Fund's Changing Spaces programme. The project aims to support people access and enjoy their local natural spaces and learn about their local environment with a particular emphasis on wild plants. The project runs a mixture of activities and opportunities for children (aged 4-11) and adults, particularly parents and older adults. Many schools and organisations have participated in project activities through being able to download resources from the project website www.wildaboutplants.org.uk. The project team also works directly with schools and community groups. The project is managed by Felicity Harris with Kate Deane coordinating the work in Liverpool described above. Felicity Harris is now on maternity leave and any thoughts or comments should be addressed to Rachel Jones – Rachel.jones@plantlife.org.uk who is now managing the project.



Author's Notes

Felicity Harris has worked in education and outdoor learning for over 10 years, starting as a geography and outdoor learning teacher in secondary schools before moving to run environmental learning projects in the charitable sector. She became an APIOL in October 2010 and currently manages Plantlife's Wild About Plants project.

Photographs: Diane Whitehill

"LOtC.....sparkling or still?"

by Lynsey Melhuish

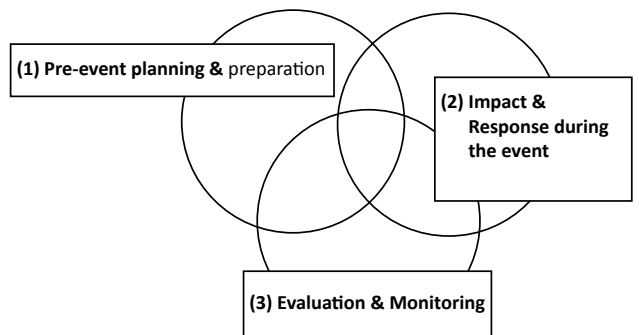


doors were opened and the children were literally, 'released' into the forest. Worksheets were forgotten and instead, sixty over-excited explorers disappeared into the undergrowth (followed in hot pursuit by ample adult helpers in bright neon jackets).

For the whole of the session I observed this behaviour. Free of worksheets the children were able to 'play' and explore, and to observe and consume every element and to engage with every sense that nature's classroom was exposing to them. This resulted in a dizzy headiness and a metaphoric 'explosion of bubbles' (the children) as they departed the coach (the lemonade bottle), darting through the forest, jumping on logs... jumping off logs...shaking braches, collecting pine cones, listening to rustles in the hedges, watching birds in the trees... and so it went on... all without a worksheet. So... the inevitable question... how would the experience have compared IF the worksheets had been in place....and does it matter? This and related questions proved fundamental in the research and subsequent outcomes, providing 'fuel for the ever burning fire' (yes I know...another analogy!), which rages on when researchers^{1,4,7,10,12,15,17} outdoor practitioners and teachers discuss and philosophise over LOtC experiences, benefits, outcomes.

This analogy, introduces the three themes which emerged from the research (illustrated in Fig 1). Having met with the school at the 'pre-planning' stages for the trip, I had a clear understanding of the learning strategies planned and which were being led directly by the teachers (ie no ranger involvement). However, as I discovered, what happened on the day bore little resemblance to the original plan and raises the further conundrum regarding the impact/influence of 'formal' or 'informal' LOtC.

Fig 1. Investigation Themes



So what do I mean by informal/formal learning? Well you have already heard about the "exploding bubbles" (let's call it the 'sparkling' option); sessions observed, usually without worksheets or formal planning and demonstrating a very natural, organic and 'informal' learning experience; less adult intervention (ie child centred) and with more of a 'nurturing' style to foster an uninhibited and creative learning environment^{2,5}. In contrast I observed a number of other LOtC experiences which were more 'formal' in delivery ie 'target-driven' and with recognition of a more influential adult figure (through instruction and guidance) to propel learning^{2,5}....and here is where the potential offence could be caused – ie suggesting that the latter may result in a less 'bubbly' (dare I use the word 'flatter' or 'still') atmosphere in the learning environment. Through the research, no preference was concluded yet there is definitely evidence to suggest that the way in which LOtC sessions are planned and delivered, does effect the behaviour and impact of experiences on the learner and the ability to provide meaningful post-LOtC experience evaluations. This formed the basis of my research outcomes as illustrated through Fig 2.

Thoughts on the inter-relationship between LOtC planning / delivery and evaluation and its influence on more formal/ informal approaches to the learning experience...

... "I can only describe the children as bubbles from a lemonade bottle that had been vigorously shaken and then opened"... I wrote this in my observation journal having spent the afternoon with a class of effervescent primary school children whilst researching for my MA in Education a few years ago. When I read it now, it takes me straight back to that afternoon and to the reader I hope, describes in one sentence a level of exuberance that I could have taken an entire page to capture. I love an analogy... I find it provides the invaluable mechanism for 'getting through' to a learner, when every other explanation/method has failed. Teaching bowline knots for instance: "rabbit comes up the hole, runs around the tree and goes back down the hole" or sculling in a kayak..."imagine buttering a giant piece of bread..."; the list is endless.

On the particular day in question, the school I had scheduled to observe arrived late to the country park. This resulted in a m el e of activity and a rather 'tense' atmosphere initially, particularly with the early realisation that the 'worksheets' which had been so painstakingly created to link to specific curriculum objectives, had been left behind!! The looks of 'what do we do now' were plain to see albeit fleeting as the classic contingency procedures (teacher auto pilot) started to kick in. So a safety/logistics briefing between staff/helpers followed, whilst a coach full of children remained safe and secure... although close to bursting point with eager anticipation. Then it happened... the coach

THEME 1 – Pre-event planning and preparation

Themes did not work in isolation, and overlapped throughout a whole LOTC experience. However, theme 1 had the most influence; based around four areas covering staffing (role and influence), purpose of trip/activities, clarity of learning objectives and health and safety / logistics. Planning was seen as integral to the success of LOTC. Forest Schools clearly recognised this through the self-assessment toolkit^{8,11} and whilst this focuses on evaluation and monitoring, its design recognises that getting the preparation right, such as identifying and establishing all stakeholder objectives, is crucial to ensure that they are then later achieved, and just as importantly (though some may argue more), are ‘measurable’.

Ranger or School-led?

At this early stage of planning, schools must make decisions which, as the research revealed, are significant to the success of the LOTC experience. In relation to ‘staffing’ in particular the decision for schools to book a ranger-led session as opposed to a school-led session, was seen to affect the type of learning delivered ie whether more formal/ informal as well as the level and type of learning achieved. Arguably, to be expected, ranger-led sessions observed were far more structured and controlled in comparison to school led sessions, due to the specialist skills, and repetitive nature of the rangers programme. This was not to say that school led sessions did not have ‘control’ but the research reinforced more consistency with the ranger-led sessions, being more rigid in delivery.

Communication

‘Communication’ between the school and the rangers, was also seen to have a significant effect on the LOTC experience. Some schools who chose to utilise ranger-led activities, failed to communicate their requirements in detail, ‘pre-event’ and thus impacting on the quality of delivery of learning objectives, key stages and curriculum links. This demonstrates that even when ranger sessions are booked it still does not guarantee a ‘smooth ride’. Furthermore, this poor communication at the planning stages creates problems in being able to successfully monitor and evaluate measurable outcomes (theme 3).



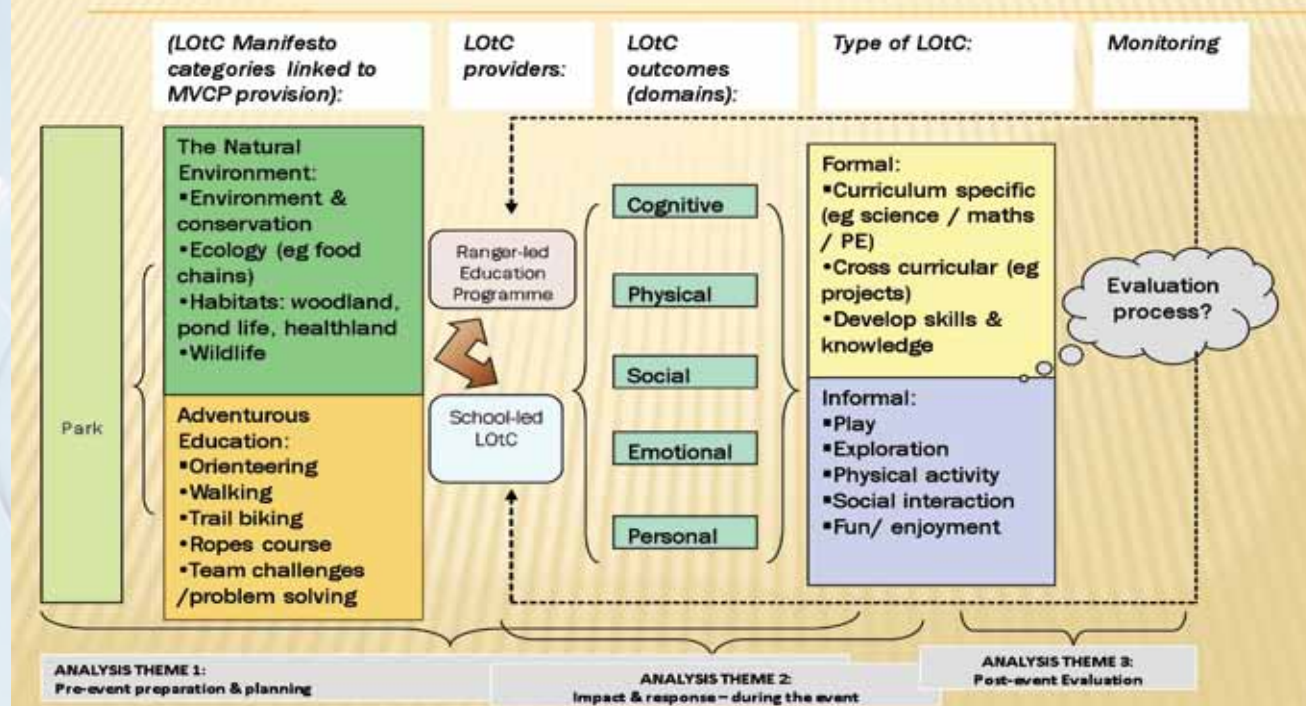
Preparation of Learning Objectives

Effectiveness of learning objectives was mixed. One school had quite clear objectives prior to the event, comparing similarly with ranger sessions regarding cross curricular activity and the development of ‘enquiry and investigative skills’. However the actual session observed was less structured and it was impossible to ascertain any level of formative assessment for the majority of learners who tended to forget the worksheet and instead were distracted by the sound, smell, touch, sight of nature. Whilst many would argue that this is not a bad thing and that organic learning in the natural environment should be encouraged, research suggested that the potential for this was often stifled by the need for trip justification ie to fit the curriculum combined with additional pressures of continually changing educational policy, targets, finances etc.

Logistics

Issues regarding logistics suggested that pressure and responsibility of co-ordinating the whole trip, could at times take over the focus of the actual LOTC objectives. Schools have much more added responsibility beyond the LOTC experience itself whereas a ranger-led session has only the ‘delivery’ itself to think about. Logistics begin back at the school, in terms of preparing risk assessments, booking transport, collecting money, gaining parental consent etc. By the time the trip actually arrives and children and parents/ helpers are co-ordinated onto the bus, the actual objective of the session often takes a back seat. This resulting in a less structured

Fig 2 Research Framework (adapted through works of 1,3,8,11,12,13)



and informal session, unless, ranger-led sessions are utilised, and even then poor communications and/or logistics on the day can still hinder delivery, such as the impact of traffic delays / loss of worksheets / limited resources/staffing etc.

THEME 2: On the Day Delivery (impact)

Numerous observations were carried out to assess the impact and response of learners during the event and it was here that the most differences appeared when comparing ranger-led and school-led activities.

Staff impact

Apart from consistency in the level and standard of instruction, supervision and control, it also became apparent in ranger-led sessions, that alternative instructors ie those not in any way linked to the group, appeared to captivate the attention of the learners, more effectively than school/college staff leading their own sessions. Parents/trip helpers, although integral (to satisfy adult/child ratios) also appeared to influence learner behaviour/activity dependent on the level of engagement – ranging from direct involvement to merely crowd control. I cannot help but think back to a particular observation where one ‘competitive’ parent-helper, pretty much took over a group’s activity to ensure that they won the ‘squirrel challenge’, demonstrating that ‘over enthusiastic helpers’, can impact just as much as those not engaged/skilled.

Formal vs informal learning

School led sessions at times could be seen as quite dysfunctional with the children exhibiting far livelier, uninhibited behaviour and inspiring the “exploding lemonade” analogy. In contrast a ranger-led session appeared calmer, and as suggested, this is most likely due to having no responsibility for transport/logistics, only taking responsibility once the schools have arrived. Therefore they can concentrate on applying their specific specialist skills and extensive LOTC experience on setting up/managing the session and utilising repeat lesson plans/task sheets. Obviously there were still some external factors that could impact on the session, eg weather/ different ages/numbers of children etc, but it appeared activities could be more easily adapted by rangers.

Application/Achievement of Learning Objectives

Ranger-led sessions appeared more successful in attempting to deliver and achieve specific and measurable learning objectives. They had very clear, well prepared tasks which enabled objectives

to be met utilising the natural environment and with a range of techniques including interactive tasks / simple worksheets etc to provide formative assessment such as leaf recognition/collection & mini beast spotting. It could be questioned as to whether they provide as much opportunity for more generic/ informal learning ie play, exploration, social development as the activities were task based, potentially stifling ‘the ‘lemonade bubbles’. However through the observations it was evident that learners were still able to experience their environment more informally through play and exploration albeit as part of a more formally structured task.

School-led sessions, tended to have less clarity in meeting learning objectives on the whole. Despite some cross-curricular objectives being recognised prior to one particular trip (applying mathematical shapes to a play park), the actual session itself was the most unstructured I had observed, with children very much involved in ‘play’ on the apparatus, but not in relation to the worksheet or pre-trip activities that had been proposed. This is not to say that the session was unsuccessful but unlike the ranger-led sessions it would be difficult to measure exactly what each child gained from the experience and whether mathematical learning had been gleaned. The only outcome I could state with confidence was scuffed knees (I am sure the parents/guardians were pleased when they got home...).

To give a more balanced reflection, some other school/college-led sessions observed did exhibit formality, although the nature of the learning objectives were more generic falling into the personal/social development domains (Fig 2) as opposed to curriculum specific. However these sessions demonstrated the impact of ‘competition’ (quizzes / games etc) and really engaged learners of all ages and abilities (in both ranger and school-led sessions). For key stage 3/4 this might be an activity such as the ‘hibernator’ where teams had to successfully hide a cylinder of hot water as if it were a hibernating creature (the winning team being the one that kept their dormouse (cylinder) the warmest, or pretending to be squirrels racing through the forest to collect enough nuts and berries to see them through the winter (...the parent helper won...!). For older college students this involved following a nightline through the woods (blindfolded) with successful communication and teamwork or effectively mastering navigational skills through an orienteering course.

What became apparent was that whatever the age/level, a clear goal or objective is important to maximise learning. This does not have to be specific or curriculum focused but requires some task related activity to captivate learners. However the investigation also reinforced that not all learners gain the same experience ^{1,4,7,10,12,17}. This was clearly observed in one session with a boy who appeared disengaged from the main task but responded jubilantly when shaking a branch and watching leaves fall. This further demonstrates the difficulty in measuring the success of LOTC when some informal and quite insignificant event can impact upon a learner but in a way that is not measurable and nor does it meet a task or objective which has been set.

THEME 3: Post-event Evaluation

Post-event evaluation was found to lay dormant within themes one and two. The level of planning/preparation and subsequent formal/informal delivery on the day, not only influenced the quality of the LOTC experiences but also had a direct correlation with the potential for evaluating the quality and success of achieving learning objectives and therefore being able to provide any tangible measures regarding its effectiveness. At a time when schools/colleges providing LOTC must justify the significance, importance / impact, whether for financial, curriculum, health and safety or other political reasons, post-event evaluation cannot afford to be missed.

Interestingly though, and counteracting some arguments for more ‘formal’ learning to aid effective evaluation, the original school, that led me to the sparking/still analogy, did manage to achieve some measurable outcomes. Despite the lack of structure /formality





during the actual trip, post event activity back at the school demonstrated how teachers were able to create classroom tasks retrospectively to enable formative assessment to be measured. This involved children comparing their woodland experiences with the contrasting habitats of the rain forests. This would suggest that even if learning formality 'goes out the window' on the day, then it can still be rescued back in the classroom to ensure that post event evaluation can be undertaken effectively.

Concluding Thoughts

The research raised the question as to whether LOTC experiences should be more or less formal. According to the LOTC Manifesto³ its ambiguity suggests that any experience out of the classroom can be a valuable one, in which case how structured or formalised it is may not be an issue. Should it matter if on the day the experience is far more fluid and holistic as opposed to structured and curriculum based? Surely the 'fizz and bubbles' are more important – and particularly ensuring every individual learner is engaged in some way. Many outdoor researchers are likely to support such a notion, recognising that the individual experience can be just as important^{1,4,7,10,12,17} and reflecting on the more 'magical' atmosphere that children and adults can be exposed to within a natural environment^{6,9}.

The difficulty as practitioners/teachers however, is not just about engaging individual 'bubbles', but it is responding to the interconnecting themes from planning & delivery through to the importance of effective evaluation and monitoring. As has been observed through the investigation, the contrast between ranger/school-led activities are arguably significant, with school-led sessions tending to lack formality....but not necessarily the 'bubble and fizz' factor! Therefore schools may need to consider more the implications of school or ranger-led activity, and spend more time during the planning stages considering logistical issues and weighing up the pros and cons of investment in ranger-led sessions. Meanwhile rangers and other outdoor practitioners may wish to consider the potential benefits of less structured/controlled activities at times and how a little more 'freedom' can still offer measurable learning outcome but with a little added 'fizz'!

Fig 3. Structure of Learning

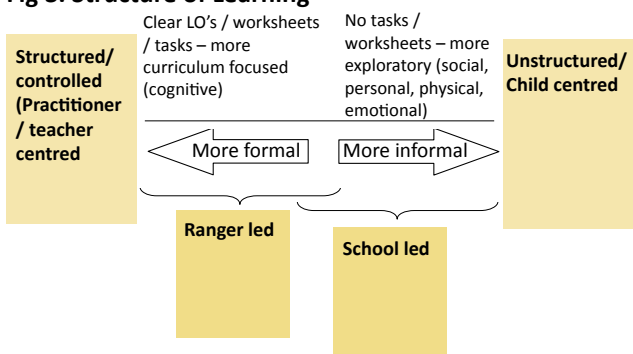


Fig 3 illustrates these different perspectives. You will note that I have not suggested adding where the 'sparkling or 'still' atmosphere is created, as it was apparent from the observations that it is not one factor that can influence this! However this fluid continuum does reflect the patterns observed through the research and can allow schools, rangers/outdoor practitioners to consider where best they fit and/or whether they wish to move along this continuum, depended on the LOTC experience being planned.

In conclusion, the themes which emerged from the investigation (illustrated through Fig 1-3) have demonstrated the complexities of measuring the achievement of the LOTC philosophy on the ground. Whilst the investigation recognised that it is still a 'grey area' it does clarify the need for schools and rangers/outdoor practitioners to consider their own responsibilities within the emerging three themes and recognise how all three inter-relate and impact on the learner experience. Ultimately it is hoped that the research outcomes, inspires outdoor practitioners/teachers to reflect again on the impact of the LOTC on the ground and consider how the issues raised can help inform practice.....and in deciding whether you prefer your LOTC experiences 'sparkling.....or still....'. ■

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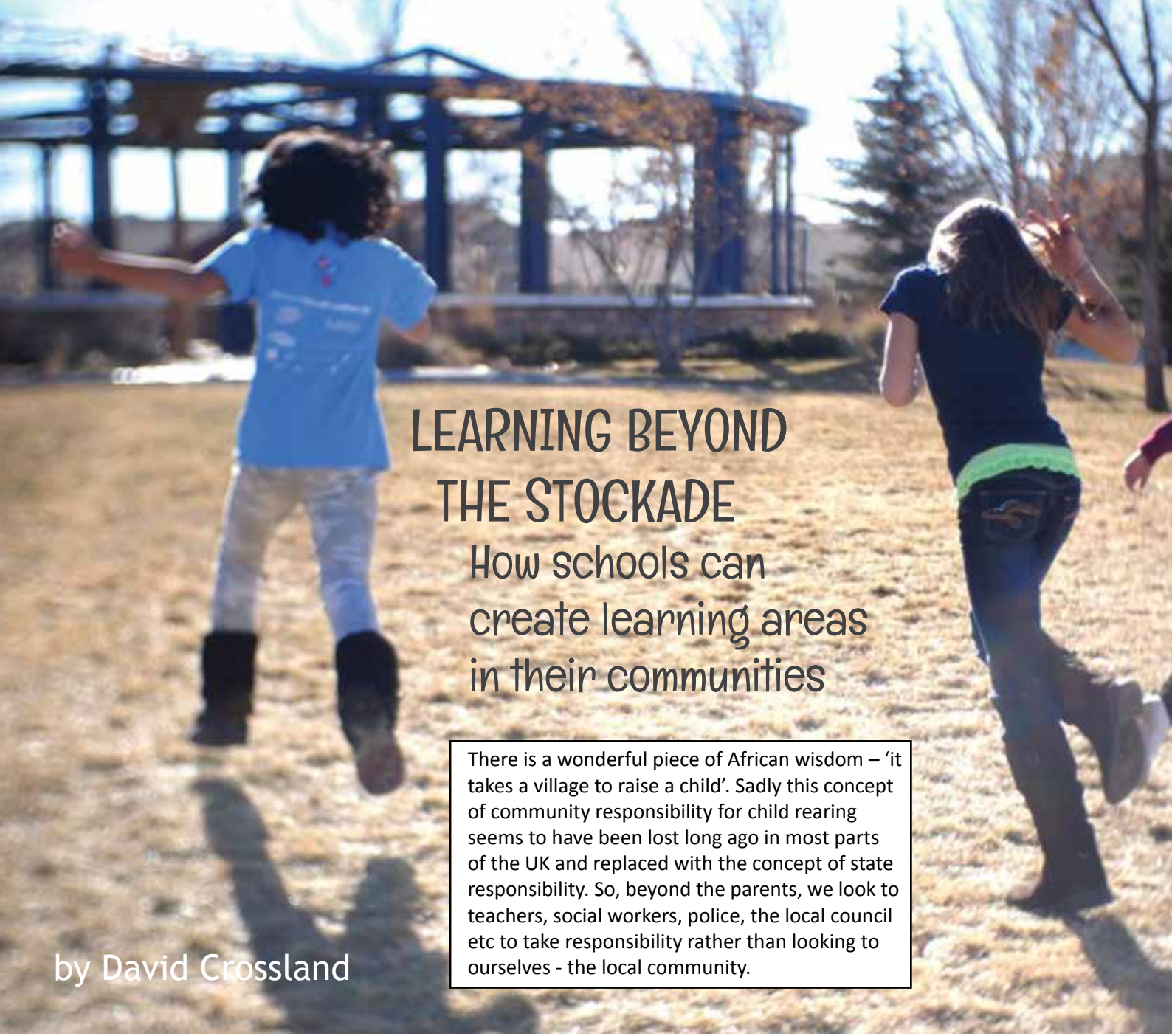


About the Author

Lynsey Melhuish is a Senior Lecturer in Outdoor Education and Events Management at Southampton Solent University. She has a First Class Honours Degree in Leisure and Human Resource Management, PGCE in Post Compulsory Education and a Master's in Education (specialising in Outdoor). The diversity of these qualifications reflects her personal and professional experiences, spanning coaching and instruction, facilities, programming and events management in the 'early days' through to senior management roles in local government and education

establishments. For the last twelve years Lynsey has been fortunate to combine her passions of the outdoors, leisure and social, health and welfare industries through teaching and programme management and development in further and higher education.

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LEARNING BEYOND THE STOCKADE

How schools can create learning areas in their communities

There is a wonderful piece of African wisdom – ‘it takes a village to raise a child’. Sadly this concept of community responsibility for child rearing seems to have been lost long ago in most parts of the UK and replaced with the concept of state responsibility. So, beyond the parents, we look to teachers, social workers, police, the local council etc to take responsibility rather than looking to ourselves - the local community.

by David Crossland

The factors leading to this are too complex to unravel here but two tragic events are relevant. The Dunblane massacre of 1996 and the Soham murders of 2002 were dreadful events, which still scar the families and communities involved; but these were strange, rare and peculiar events not common occurrences. The reality was then, and is now, that children are much more likely to be at risk from the bad relative, the bad friend, the bad person in a position of trust, than they are from the bad stranger. Dreadful as these events were, some of the things put in place afterwards, from the best of motives, led to unintended consequences that, in the long run, are unhelpful and create divisions between generations and within communities. Following Dunblane, schools started to become fortresses with security fences and locked gates/doors.

These fences were designed to keep strangers out - not to confine teaching and learning within the stockade, nor to cause teachers or parents to fear going outside the fence. Soham led to vetting and barring checks, which were designed to reduce the risk of the bad person getting into a position of trust, but which threatened to sow so much suspicion that we became frightened to let a child speak to someone who was unchecked. The reality is that a child is safer being watched over by the multiple eyes of a caring community than by leaving all responsibility to parents and professionals, within a community that stays silent and does not get involved.

Schools cannot hope to resolve this societal problem (too often have schools been seen as the cure for ills well beyond their ability to solve).

But schools can do something to start to reclaim the concept of community involvement in child rearing. They may not be able create a world in which the community plays a part in raising the child but they can start to educate children - in the community. Schools can refuse to allow the education of their pupils to be constrained by fences and fear and can, metaphorically at least, dismantle the barricades. They can change from buildings bound by fences to learning entities sitting within environments and communities, which they use to educate their children.

Schools are required to deliver a broad and balanced curriculum and governors are responsible for ensuring that children are educated in the most appropriate place. There is plenty of evidence that the most appropriate place to educate children is very rarely



There is nothing to stop teachers from choosing to 'do' mathematics in the local shops or English in the park or woods or theatre.

the classroom but is more likely to be the outdoors, the grounds, the park, the shops, the museum, the theatre, the local and wider community, the real world.

Because schools are empowered to deliver the curriculum in the way they choose they do not require consent from parents to take children off the school premises during the school day. There is nothing to stop teachers from choosing to 'do' mathematics in the local shops or English in the park or woods or theatre. Those of us who grew up years ago may well have enjoyed 'nature walks' on fine days at school and there is nothing to prevent these from happening today. Maybe if more primary children enjoyed regular nature walks we could reverse the current situation where children can talk about global warming and the Amazon rainforest but are unable to name the trees, flowers, bugs and birds which fill their local environment. There is nothing to stop these things apart from fear or bureaucracy and if this is what holds your school back there is a simple starting point – create a 'learning area'.

A 'learning area' is that area where your school has standard operating procedures to allow you to use it whenever you choose with no (or very little) preparation. It is that area where, 'at the drop of a hat', you can choose to respond to a question or comment from a child by saying 'lets go and look', 'lets go and find out' and moving your lesson off-site to harness the power of the real world and children's curiosity. Learning areas may be any shape or size and might include the use of public transport routes for those blessed with useful, and even free, ones. They can include all sorts of environments: countryside, parks and open spaces, leisure and cultural facilities, historic buildings and sites, sacred spaces, shops, businesses, care facilities.

Learning areas are not 'instead of' educational visits, they are simply one particular form of visit. The Outdoor Education Advisers Panel (OEAP) National Guidance www.oeapng.info uses a 'Radar' model to help judge the complexity of planning required for various types of outdoor learning and off-site visits. At the lowest end of the complexity scale are visits not too far away that involve an 'everyday' level of risk and which should be covered by standard procedures or policy – in other words the vast majority of what you would do, on a day to day basis, in your learning area. The aim of the 'learning area' concept is to help those schools,

that do not already do this, to overcome any barriers. The idea came from a comment made by a mature head teacher who said "I miss the days when you could simply choose to go to the local park for the lesson because it was a nice day". My response was that those days have never gone away – we just forgot them and then imagined they were too hard to bring back – which they are not.

Steps to creating your own Learning Area:

1. Take some time to explore the community and environment around your school to discover its learning possibilities. Many teachers commute to work and so do not know the area local to the school. Spending a training day identifying the learning possibilities and considering how they will need to be managed is the first step.
2. Go through a risk-benefit assessment process to identify what the problems are going to be and how you will manage them. This involves considering what the OEAP National Guidance describes as the SAGED variables (Staff, Activity, Group, Environment, Distance) in order to arrive at a way of managing the safety and learning of your children in your chosen locations with your staff team. Remember you are not trying to make things as safe as possible but as safe as they need to be. If children are working in an area of nettles and brambles they may get scratched and stung, this is not necessarily a problem just experiential learning and part of growing up. You will compile a 'to do' list that might include things like: staff training, training for the children, discussions with local people and stakeholders, access arrangements, equipment, communications, first aid and emergency procedures.
3. Go through your 'to do' list and formulate and document your standard operating procedures for using your learning area. Share this with staff, parents and children. Schools do not need parental consent but it is good practice to ensure parents are informed about where their child may be educated. Also you may need parents to help by providing things like Wellington boots and waterproof coats to be kept at school (remember there is no such thing as poor weather, just poor clothing!)
4. Ensure all staff using the learning area are competent and fully aware of the standard procedures and what to do in an emergency.
5. Start using your learning area and enrich the learning and lives of the children at your school while at the same time getting much more fun and excitement from your work.

An example of a Policy/Procedure for a School Learning Area

General

Visits/activities within the 'School Learning Area' that are part of the normal curriculum and take place during the normal school day follow the Operating Procedure below.

These visits/activities:

- do not require parental consent (*state if there are any situations where you would like parents to be informed in advance, e.g. via a slip sent home*).
- do not normally need additional risk assessments / notes (other than following the Operating Procedure below).

Boundaries

The boundaries of the School Learning Area are shown on the attached map (optional). This area includes, but is not limited to, the following frequently used venues: e.g.

- Mirkwood Park
- Mirkwood Library
- Little Whinging Pool and Leisure Centre
- The Durmstrang Shopping Centre
- Fanghorn Forest, up to the boundary with Lonely Mountain Road
- Etc.

Operating Procedure for School Learning Area

(The below is simply a generic risk assessment for routine activities).

The following are potentially significant issues/hazards within our School Learning Area:

- Road traffic.
- Other people / members of the public / animals.
- Losing a pupil.
- Uneven surfaces and slips, trips, and falls.
- Weather conditions.
- Activity specific issues when doing environmental fieldwork (nettles, brambles, rubbish, etc).
- Etc. - add anything else specifically relating to your School Learning Area.

These are managed by a combination of the following:

- The Head, Deputy or EVC (*delete as necessary according to your circumstances*) must give verbal approval before a group leaves. *Not strictly necessary if you have clearly identified competent staff, and are confident in your operating procedure, and the fact that staff will follow it.*
- Only staff judged competent to supervise groups in this environment are approved. A current list of approved staff is maintained by the EVC and office.
- The concept and Operating Procedure of the 'School Learning Area' is explained to all new parents when their child joins the school.
- There will normally be a minimum of two adults. *This statement is probably appropriate for all primary schools, although in benign locations it may be appropriate to relax it for year 6s. Decisions should be based on the area and the age / maturity of the pupils - the key determinant will always be 'what would the pupils do if the only adult collapsed?'*
- Staff are familiar with the area, including any 'no go areas', and have practiced appropriate group management techniques.
- Pupils have been trained and have practiced standard techniques for road crossings in a group. *For primary schools this is easy to do with some simple road markings in the playground – with a little practice this can become drilled and slick, as everyone knows what is going to happen.*
- Where appropriate, pupils are fully briefed on what to do if they become separated from the group. *This needs a decision and will depend on the area you are in – return to school, wait where they are, go to x and ask for help, etc).*
- All remotely supervised work in the School Learning Area is done in 'buddy' pairs as a minimum. *There may well be times when this is not appropriate and it is perfectly acceptable for pupils to work individually – you need to decide when and where and at what age/level of maturity lone working may be right for your school.*
- Pupils' clothing and footwear is checked for appropriateness prior to leaving school. *If children, and parents, expect to have wellies and a decent coat at school everyday this becomes really easy. In terms of the staff carrying spare stuff, when appropriate, you can just make up a couple of small rucksacks with bits in – cost is negligible and they can live in the staffroom ready to go.*
- Staff are aware of any relevant pupil medical information and ensure that any required medication is available.
- Staff will deposit in the office a list of all pupils and staff, a proposed route, and an estimated time of return. *Consider a 'signing out' board or sheet in the office. Also consider the office using SIMS to create a bespoke visit report format.*
- A school mobile is taken with each group and the office has a note of the number.
- Appropriate personal protective equipment is taken when needed (e.g. gloves, goggles) *If you have a local issue, e.g. with drug needles, etc, in any area, then you can mark that bit as no-go, or add here how you will educate the pupils to deal with it – it is their home after all, so they need to be able to cope with it!*
- PLUS
 - Add any specifics relating to your local area – e.g. 'When crossing Bimble Street everyone must use the toucan crossing by Baguette the Bakers'.
 - Etc.



Clearly the size, scope and ease of use of a learning area will vary between primary and secondary schools but the concept can be applied and work in both sectors. The main stumbling block is will or commitment. As in so many things Health and Safety can be a convenient excuse for inaction but it is not a valid excuse. There are no insurmountable health and safety or child protection barriers to educating children, on a daily basis, in and around their own local community.

Hopefully very many readers will be thinking 'what is this guy on about – we already do much more than this'. I know this will be the case in some schools and some areas but I fear there are still many schools where the 'normal' day will see children confined within the stockade, if not within the building itself, and thus confined within a limited and impoverished learning area.

This article is based on work done as a Local Authority Outdoor Education Adviser. Any merit it may have has been greatly enhanced by input from colleagues in schools and among fellow advisers. I am very grateful for having been able to share and benefit from their belief in, and passion for, outdoor learning. Any faults, of course, remain entirely mine. ■

As in so many things Health and Safety can be a convenient excuse for inaction but it is not a valid excuse.



Authors Notes

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David has worked in outdoor adventure learning as a teacher, lecturer, head of centre, AALS inspector and LA adviser. He is now retired from full time work but maintains an interest

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“This isn't PE, it's not physical enough”

Reflections on Adventurous Activity training for Primary Teachers

“Learning outside the classroom should be at the heart of every school's curriculum and ethos. Children can gain valuable learning experiences from going on cultural visits overseas to teachers simply using their school grounds imaginatively”.

These were the words of Alan Johnson, then Education and Skills Secretary as he launched the Manifesto for Learning Outside the Classroom in November 2006. At the time I was a Centre Manager of a third sector Outdoor Centre in West Wales. With this enthusiastic political agenda ringing in our ears we decided to support the work of the Outdoor Education Advisors Panel (OEAP) and put ourselves forward as course directors to deliver the inset course for teachers and youth-workers wishing to use the Outdoor Adventure Activity (AA) Cards produced by the panel.

The OEAP, through its regional advisors supports the delivery of high quality outdoor education across England, Wales and Northern Ireland in schools and outdoor centres.

The one day training course is divided into four sessions, each representing a subject area represented by the cards 4 activity areas: orienteering, bouldering, team building and journeying. The activity cards are available in either English or Welsh and are designed to be a powerful visual aid-memoire for teachers to deliver sessions from within or close to their school grounds. Each card is sequential and builds a progression in each activity area, signposts safety issues or concerns and offers ways of delivering different curriculum outcomes using the same session (cross curricula learning). The cards are very well thought out, have inclusive portrayals of children engaged in activity and are easily accessed by children themselves with clear child-friendly pictorial representations of each activity and most importantly are “wipe clean”. The activities are presented in an experiential style with opportunity for group work and review of learning. The accompanying handbook and CD ROM for teachers incorporates a brief chapter on



<< reviewing and shows diagrams of an experiential learning cycle and sites Greenaway (1996) as a body of work to explore for further information.

As a small provider in a community-based centre we were particularly pleased to deliver this training to local teachers during a time of change in the Welsh National Curriculum.

Recently the Welsh education agenda has been a hotbed of development and change in all areas, from foundation phase through primary and onto further education. At a conference for Education Leaders in October 2008 entitled "Governing in a time of rapid change" Professor Danny Saunders from the University of Glamorgan

asked whether Wales was in a period of 'Reformation, Transformation or Renaissance' and referred to the 12 consultation and five policy documents regarding education, published by the Welsh Assembly Government in the preceding year!

It was during the autumn term of 2008 our Centre was asked to run the courses for teachers from local schools. Having the opportunity to coach classroom teachers to deliver experiential, outdoor and adventurous learning activities proved to be an interesting experience with much cause for personal reflection and our own staff development throughout. There is a plethora of educational research that demonstrates the value of outdoor learning (McKenzie, 2000; Rickinson et al., 2004; Hattie et al., 1997) and it is on the back of these accepted benefits that the title of "Adventurous Activities" has found itself as a compulsory part of the Welsh National Curriculum. 25% of Physical Education at KS 2 & 3 is designated as Adventurous Activity, and it is a recommended aspect of the PE curriculum at KS 4.

" We are placing more emphasis on learning by doing, exploiting children's natural curiosity to explore and learn through first hand experiences"

(Skills That Work for Wales, WAG. P.24)

This standpoint pushes back at the traditional stance of formal school practice and shows the way towards a method for learning that allows for the "artistic, intuitive processes which some practitioners do bring to situations of uncertainty, instability, uniqueness and value conflict".



The reflections we had on delivering the three separate days to nearly 40 teachers

were a superb opportunity for us to examine our own practice and reflect on the changing culture for Welsh schools.

Reflections

After pondering and reading around the concept I have begun to see 'Experience' as a metaphysical concept, related philosophically to 'reality' and how we, as human animals, perceive our world. As an experiential educator I often mess with reality and I am comfortable with the idea of 'suspension of disbelief'. I find myself using this as a methodology for de-personalising situations, or creating a unique space to generate discussion, fun or focus. How readily participants will swap their actual reality for an obvious construct (Have you ever seen real shark-infested custard?) is intriguing, especially as this of course creates a new 'experience'. This willing suspension of disbelief is a part of what Luckner and Nadler (1997) call the "experiential learning laboratory" and this, through reflection and de-construction of reality is what may make experiential learning

effective. It places emotions, learning styles and of course the complex nature of learners' realities at the fore of our facilitation practices.

However, despite my philosophical musings and a bit (too much if I'm honest) of 'staring at my navel' it was evident that the perception of the course from the participants' point of view was that of formal Continued Professional Development training (CPD). As mentioned earlier the training was divided into four practical activity sessions, each focusing on an area covered by the Adventure Activity Cards with a fifth and sixth section spent exploring the accompanying CD Rom and the course handbook, and progression/transfer of learning respectively. Each session was experiential in its design with participant activity centred around small groups working together to deliver aspects of Adventurous Activities to each other using the cards, as they would in school with their pupils. At the end of each session a short review was elicited by facilitators to allow any learning points to be shared.

At the end of the first training course teachers all scored a maximum when asked for their "confidence to deliver AA sessions" on "Score from 1 to 5" style evaluation continuum. This high score and high level of satisfaction was wonderful, but we as a group of trainers were very concerned with the learners' inability to interact with each other. This made the sessions very formal in nature and, to our minds, limited opportunity for shared learning and serendipitous outcomes.

This formality made us uncomfortable. We decided to alter our delivery for the coming course to invoke more interaction/discussion

in order to reduce the "Existential anxiety" (Heron 1999) we perceived our participants to be experiencing. This aspect of groupwork felt very important to us as trainers, and we felt that this level of student involvement was important in the delivery of the activities we were championing.

This strategy seemed to work. We had some excellent group discussions around some quite philosophical points of delivery and curriculum. We were starting to get the picture. CPD is also a team-build for teachers away from the classroom. However delivering team building as an activity through problem solving games generated this comment from one of the delivery staff.



"They [teachers] still don't get the idea of reviewing"

Course Facilitator

Another quote from a Teacher during the bouldering session starts to paint a picture regarding the confidence of teachers to step away from their standard teaching practice. The session was taken from an AA card, and as such was exactly as the session would be run by a teacher for pupils, with the students having to go to the bouldering wall and decide for themselves in which direction/orientation the climbing holds worked best.

"Please, just teach me to boulder, then I'll know"
(Frustrated)

Teacher

The same participant also commented during the session on journeying..

"This isn't P.E! It's not physical enough" (Concerned)

Teacher



<< Of course from our facilitation point of view these were pennies from heaven! We generated some excellent discussion from these comments on experiential learning at the bouldering wall. For example - "What is PE???" These discussions ranged through examining how to include less able children, to nutrition and how to work with outdoor centres to deliver this curriculum during the annual school residential.

Interestingly the evaluation forms from this day still showed a high score for satisfaction but lower scores relating to "confidence to deliver AA sessions".

On the back of this feedback other changes were decided on. On the next course we started the bouldering session inside the training room, passing around 'holds' so teachers could examine them and relate to them in a kinaesthetic sense. This would allow us to demystify bouldering

(some had not heard the term before and leapt straight to 'rock climbing' in their understanding) before the visual/ emotional stimulation of being presented with a climbing wall.

Our changes to the bouldering session made a huge difference, combining kinaesthetic experience with the visual aspects of the OAEP Teachers Pack worked! The evaluations for this day were again generally excellent with the important "Confidence to deliver" question getting higher scores than the previous session.

Conclusions

To explore the methods of facilitation and the values of experiential education through the medium of the OEAP's Activity Cards was a complex task. Intriguing on one hand but also frustrating on the other. The overriding sentiment that I draw from this experience is the complexity that governs our interactions and ways of knowing in this field. As an outdoor educator that rarely has opportunity to involve himself in the face to face delivery of learning, but spends more time using the same philosophies, rationales and methods as a manager, marketer and organisational development worker, I have gained much understanding through the experience particularly as it relates to our relationships with school teachers as outdoor educators.

In conclusion, I believe that the data we produced through cycles of evaluation gave us a paradoxical result. The sessions which we felt gave the most valuable 'learning experience' seemed to generate the least 'feelings of confidence to deliver AA' from the teachers. I tentatively suggest that this disquiet was generated from their feelings of being outside their comfort zones in areas requiring facilitation skills as



educators. The group that involved themselves the least in inter and intra personal situations during training gave the highest scores of confidence, the group that was most interactive, both physically and through modes of speech and kinaesthetic learning gave least satisfactory self perception evaluation scores relating to personal confidence.

This paradox is an emergent theme from our evaluation. I still consider the courses to be successful and we have achieved "high customer satisfaction." However the assumption that good feedback equates to good experiential outdoor education and facilitation has been shown to be any area requiring some critical thinking in terms of deciding on how we as practitioners evaluate our work. ■



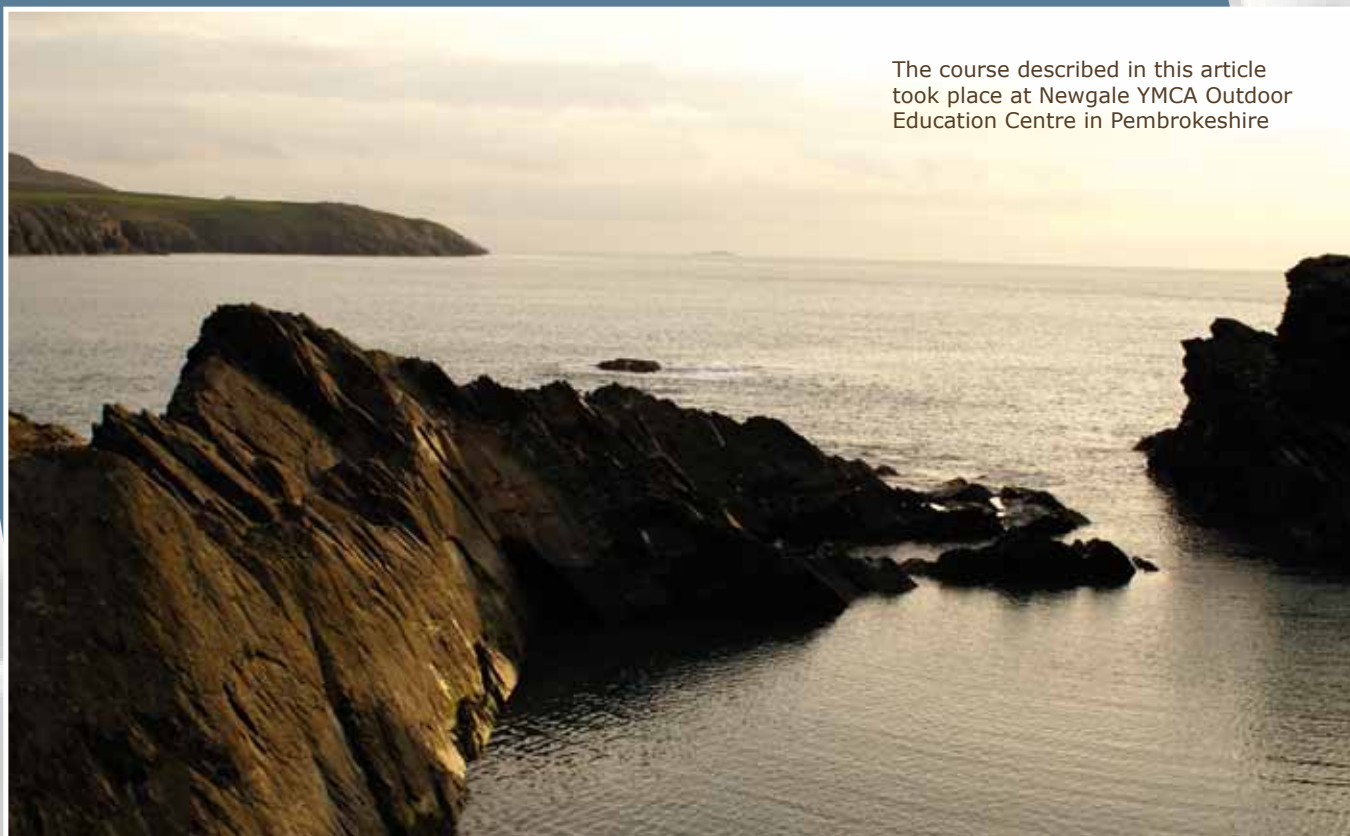
Author's Notes

Matt Healey has been involved in outdoor learning since 1993 where he started his career in a small centre in the Eden Valley in Cumbria. Since then he has worked for The Outward Bound Trust, The YMCA for Wales, 2 Local Authorities and currently manages a newly opened Centre for Kingswood Learning and Leisure Ltd at Grosvenor Hall in Ashford, Kent.

Already an APIOL mentor/assessor Matt is currently working towards LPIOL status whilst studying at Trinity College, Carmarthen for a MA in Outdoor Education.

The course described in this article took place at Newgale YMCA Outdoor Education Centre in Pembrokeshire www.newgaleymca.co.uk and represents a synopsis of research undertaken for a module of the Masters Degree Course at Trinity College.

Photgraphs: all from the author



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