



Countryside Recreation Network

Education in the Outdoors

2010 Seminar Proceedings of the
Countryside Recreation Network

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"Education in the Outdoors"

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"Education in the Outdoors"

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Welcome and introduction

Mike McClure
Countryside Recreation Development Officer
Sport Northern Ireland

From the seminar a number of key themes emerged throughout the day:

Learning is a lifelong process and although focussed on children – learning in the outdoors should neglect the importance of opportunities to engage further with adults and especially parents.

Ensuring that teachers fully understand the many values of learning in the outdoors and that they are aware of the Manifesto for Outdoor Learning. Developing learning outdoors as a key element within teacher training would be a very helpful starting point.

It was felt that while learning outside the classroom has been given a certain status through the manifesto and the development of the Council – it is not as firmly embedded into the curriculum and if the inspectorate were to fully embrace this – the teaching fraternity would certainly take notice.

Why Indoors? The Value of Outdoor Learning

Prof Pete Higgins
Professor of Outdoor and Environmental Education
University of Edinburgh

Abstract

This article argues a case for a broad concept of 'education outdoors' as the natural corollary to 'education indoors'. In doing so it considers the complexity of learning and decision-making in modern society and argues that outdoor education/recreation should embrace this, providing learning experiences that address the capacities of learners and the value contexts in which they learn; and that taking responsibility for actions should be an important focus. Making such experiences relevant to significant contemporary issues (e.g. global climate change, personal health and citizenship) is an imperative that 'outdoor educators' are well equipped to address. However, action requires knowledge and therefore programmes require content. Practical environmental examples of significant enablers and limitations to our activities are provided. The contemporary significance of outdoor learning issues to policy makers offers important opportunities for those who teach outdoors to contribute meaningfully to mainstream education.

Introduction

Those involved in outdoor education/recreation with 'students'/'clients' of all ages generally do so experientially¹ (*the process*), whilst the outdoors is *the place*, and meaningful 'outdoor education/recreation' acknowledges that these are inextricably linked. Both matter. Potential learning outcomes may be thought of as 'in' (*learning skills in outdoor activities*), 'through' (*personal and social education, therapy, rehabilitation, management development*), 'about' (*environmental education*) and 'for' (*sustainability*) 'the countryside' or 'the natural heritage' (see Higgins, 1995 and Figure 1). To acknowledge the range of professional involved in the field and that educational experiences can be recreational and *vice versa* the term 'outdoor education/recreation' is used throughout this article. Carefully crafted education/recreation in 'the outdoors' also provides opportunities to address personal values and attitudes and for intellectual, physical, emotional, aesthetic and spiritual development.

Each aspect of outdoor education/recreation is not unique, but perhaps the wide variety and manner in which they are encountered is. Learning outdoors contrasts with the 'classroom' as the environment is influenced by weather, time of day/year, topography. Areas do not need to be 'remote' or 'wild'; a local urban environment can be equally valuable. The activities are often practical, interactive and reflective with the facilitator encouraging students to take responsibility for learning, with subjects being addressed holistically with emphasis shifting as opportunities arise. This has much in common with 'constructivist pedagogy' where 'the individual

¹ 'Experiential' education implicitly trusts the learner's ability to learn through experience and may engage both the teacher and learner in the same (learn/teach) process but in different roles, with learning taking place in intellectual, physical, emotional, aesthetic and spiritual ways.

constructs and adds to this knowledge by frequent visits to the real world' (Dahlgren and Szczepanski, 1998, p. 20).

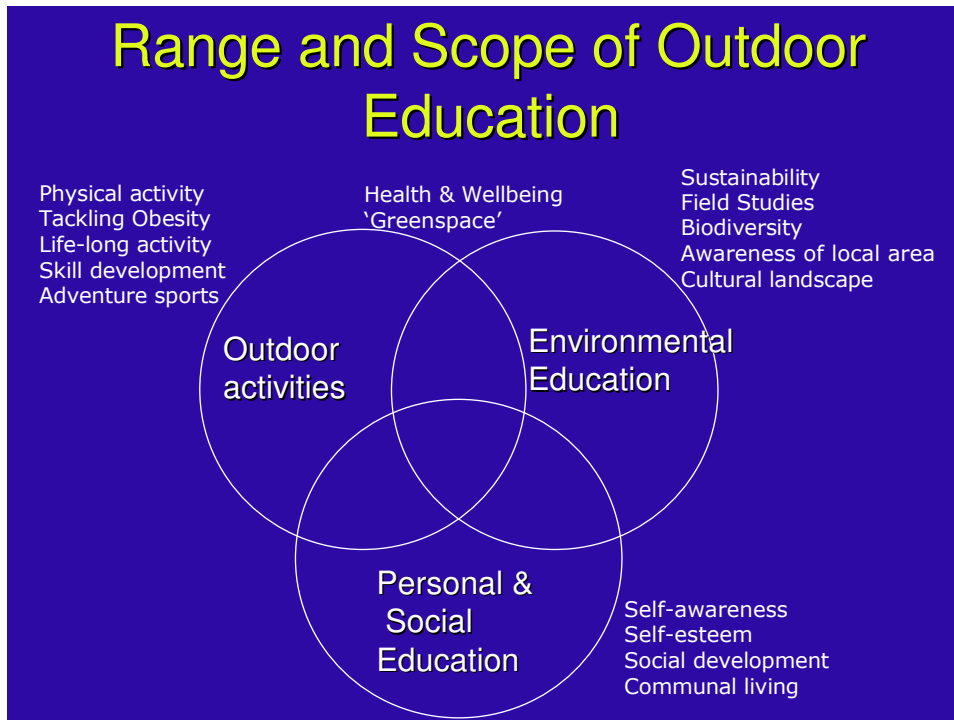


Figure 1

A focus on any or all of the aspects of education/recreation outdoors shown in Figure 1 is appropriate and this paper addresses each of the three domains. However, in light of the unique opportunities to understand the natural world offered by learning outdoors this article will emphasise environmental understanding and sustainability.

Personal and social education: taking responsibilities – learning ‘citizenship’

Personal and social ‘education’ has long been the focus of attention of many outdoor providers such as outdoor centres. For many, the benefits of such experiences outdoors (and in residential centres) have been self-evident. However, claims of significant lasting personal change should be questioned, and in recent years there have been a number of such studies. Several meta-analyses have drawn together a number of these studies but in doing so have either ignored the problems inherent in the range of studies used (e.g. potential cultural specificity) or misinterpreted by those in search of justifications for their programmes. In contrast, in one UK-specific study investigating the potential lasting effects a residential outdoor programme (a two year study of over 800 14-16 year-old pupils) Christie (2004) found that the Outward Bound course included as part of the North Lanarkshire’s Aiming Higher programme led to modest development in young people’s personal and social skills.

Outdoor experiences have also been a key feature of ‘therapeutic’ programmes for homeless young people, young offenders and those with alcohol or drug problems or at risk of offending. The Venture Trust in particular has commissioned studies on their programmes (e.g. Newman *et al.*, 2004) and the ability to show that their proposals are evidence-based has probably been a factor in their recent success

in attracting funding for a range of creative programmes. These and other such programmes focus on 'taking responsibility' as a central theme and then to promote this as an approach to other aspects of life.

Outdoor activities: physical activity, health, wellbeing and the role of 'greenspace'²

In the UK there is a long tradition of recreation through physical outdoor activities. Walking, mountaineering, cycling, canoe-sports, sailing, snow-sports etc. are widespread and pursued with varying levels of intensity by a substantial proportion of the population. Assisting others in developing these skills is of course a worthy aim for those in outdoor education/recreation. The benefits of such activities warrant comparison with the traditional sports provided by schools, and notably the fact that many outdoor activities are more suitable for continuing through later life than are team-sports.

There is a growing body of evidence that exposure to 'greenspace' can stimulate a sense of wellbeing but can also encourage physical activity leading to health benefits (see Bird, 2007; Bell *et al.*, 2008; Sustainable Development Commission, 2008; Munoz, 2009 and Pretty *et al.*, 2010). Many young people do not meet current physical activity guidelines suggested to benefit their health (Bromley *et al.*, 2005; Currie *et al.*, 2004). The long-term consequences of this are significant, so adult physical activity patterns are of obvious policy significance. In research for the Forestry Commission CJC Consulting *et al.* (2005, pp. i-iii) argue that 'people are more likely to engage in frequent physical activity (with a lower rate of obesity) in locations that have high quality greenspace', and they suggest tentatively that the potential health related economic savings are considerable (around £1.44bn).

Access to greenspace, especially for young people, has become a policy issue in Europe and for both the Scottish and Westminster Governments. In Scotland a Strategic Framework for Environment and Health (Scottish Executive, 2006) now links policy commitments on health, equalities, environmental justice and sustainable development (Morris, 2007). This interest has led to a public consultation on 'open space and physical activity' (Scottish Government, 2007) a 'Greenspace and health outcomes framework' (Greenspace Scotland, 2010) and an Economic and Social Research Council national network (Outdoors Health Network). Clearly there is potential for outdoor education/recreation to have a role in encouraging engagement with greenspace and developing appropriate skills.

Environmental and sustainability education: intimacy and dependence

The notion that direct experience of the natural world should be central to understanding environmental processes seems to need little justification, and yet much of such education takes place indoors. There is clearly an intellectual development argument that to understand the way the natural world 'works' we have to have some experience of it, but there appear also to be aesthetic and 'spiritual' dimensions. There is evidence that early 'significant life experiences'

² The term 'greenspace' is now widespread and often used to identify parks, play areas and sports fields as distinct from areas such as streets etc. However, clearly young people in rural areas also make use of greenspaces. CJC Consulting *et al.* (2005, pp. 2-3) suggest a broader view, namely 'those (spaces) that provide for frequent use in terms of physical activity and/or more passive use (including visual use)'. This is essentially all of the 'non-built environment'.

(particularly outdoors) are important in stimulating interest in greenspaces and in environmental orientation (e.g. Kaplan & Talbot, 1983; Palmer & Suggate, 1996; Palmer, 1998; Hungerford & Volk, 1990). There are several theories to explain what appears to be an innate desire to relate to the natural world - 'biophilia' (Wilson, 1984) (particularly noticeable in young children) and these are summarised by Bird (2007).

Extending understanding of environmental processes to 'sustainable development' is conceptually demanding. The argument that all life is dependent on natural processes such as the flow of energy from the sun and the cycling of nutrients, relies on well-established science. However, making the argument that our individual actions can collectively have an impact on the environment that may be felt elsewhere on Earth or at some time in the future (or both) is a significant intellectual leap. Whilst the reports of Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) are unequivocal many of us are reluctant to accept such 'responsibilities'. To properly address an issue of such complexity and significance should surely warrant application of every educational approach available and of every educator, outdoors as well as indoors. See below for a suggestion of a practical outdoor approach.

Creating opportunities for learning in the natural environment

Whilst of course each of the tree 'domains' of outdoor learning above make use of the natural environment to achieve their aims, the intrinsic qualities of nature seem to deserve particular attention – the *about* and *for*. A century ago the Scots polymath, and for many the originator of the concept of sustainability, Patrick Geddes made the point that '*by leaves we live*':

... this is a green world, with animals comparatively few and small, and all dependent on the leaves. By leaves we live. Some people have strange ideas that they live by money. They think energy is generated by the circulation of coins. Whereas the world is mainly a vast leaf colony, growing on and forming a leafy soil, not a mere mineral mass: and we live not by the jingling of our coins, but by the fullness of our harvests.

Geddes (1919)³

Photosynthesis in plants absorbs the carbon dioxide (CO₂) we breathe out and produce through burning fossil fuels, and releases oxygen we need to breathe.



This equation represents one of the most fundamental processes sustaining life on Earth. Without plants (on land, in freshwaters and oceans) converting water and CO₂ into plant structure e.g. glucose (as above), cellulose and oxygen, we would have no air to breathe, and indeed would not have evolved. Despite the fundamental importance of this process few of us would recognise more than a

³ From 1888 to 1919 Geddes was Professor of Botany at the University of Dundee (Scotland). He was only required to lecture during the summer term of each year and he spent the rest of the time travelling and working all over the world. This passage is from his final lecture in 1919. It was published in a reprint of *Cities in Evolution* in 1949 (p. 216).

few plants; in stark contrast to global brands such as 'Nike', 'The North Face' or 'Snoopy'.

The great educational potential of dealing with such an issue experientially in the outdoors (carbon cycle, wood cutting and fire-making, tree-planting, prose and poetry etc) is obvious. For example in 'A Sand County Almanac', Leopold (1949, p. 9) writes:

Fragrant little chips of history spewed from the saw cut, and accumulated on the snow before each kneeling sawyer. We sensed that these two piles of sawdust were something more than wood; that they were the integrated transect of the century; that our saw was biting its way, stroke by stroke, decade by decade into the chronology of a lifetime, written in concentric annual rings of good oak.

Cutting through pieces of wood that may well be older than the people in the group, and then burning them on the fire can be both an aesthetic experience and provide material for a meaningful discussion on carbon cycle and our dependence on it, its role in global climate change and human impacts on it. Outdoor educators can make a significant contribution to understanding the carbon cycle and our dependence on it and help their students to develop a connection to place and to understand the consequences of their actions. But there is *knowledge* and *content* too, and we must not imagine we can engender real understanding through the 'affective knowing' alone. (For similar exercises see Higgins, 1996).

The extinction of experience?

The decline in physical activity in general and the use of the outdoors for educational/recreational purposes is not confined to the UK; for example Louv (2008) has written at length on the subject in North America. He points out that if the present generation of parents and educators don't engage children with the natural heritage they are unlikely to do so when they become parents. He calls this 'the extinction of experience'.

Despite such concerns amongst policy makers, strong positive encouragement from Government and arguments such as those outlined above, informal opportunities for young-people to be outdoors are minimal. Outdoor learning experiences are in decline (e.g. Higgins, 2002; OfSTED, 2004; Rickinson *et al.*, 2004; Amos & Reiss, 2004; Dillon *et al.*, 2005). In a recent study we found that some schools provided extensive and diverse experiences but many offered few or no opportunities (Higgins *et al.*, 2006). Whilst residential provision is still widespread, those school pupils who do have outdoor learning opportunities may experience just three to four days in their school career (Higgins, 2002). In a recent study of 51 Scottish Primary, Secondary and Pre-schools in the 2006 summer term (Mannion *et al.*, 2007) found that provision (opportunity, duration, location) was variable. Whilst generally Primary children's opportunities were greater than secondary pupils, many of the latter had no outdoor learning during the survey and the average for those that did was 13 minutes/week.

The politics of teaching outdoors

Paradoxically, across the UK there is increasing support for education outside the classroom. Political interest has been stimulated in part because of public

perceptions that children are increasingly separated from the natural environment, that they have little opportunity to learn to deal with risks, that they exercise less than they should, and that personal and social development as well as health and wellbeing would be enhanced by such experiences. Some of these arguments, but by no means all, are based on sound evidence. Such deficiencies exist because of the lack of research funding and effort in a field that is clearly more difficult to study than 'indoor education'. However, the evidence base is growing and it is now more possible to make informed arguments to policy makers than ever before. In doing so it is important to recognise the central role of schools in deciding to 'take learning outdoors'.

Overcoming barriers

A number of barriers to engagement with outdoor spaces have been identified including traffic and road safety concerns, fears of bullying, criminal threat and stranger danger, lack of investment, overcrowding and poverty (Thomas & Thompson, 2004). The perception that outdoor learning carries substantial risks to pupil health and safety seems likely has contributed to decline in school-based and residential outdoor learning provision (Higgins *et al.*, 2006). Other factors including changes in local government, funding and staffing have led to a decrease in qualified school-based staff (Higgins, 2002). Most Local Authority Outdoor Centres have reduced central funding and have taken a more commercial approach (Nicol, 2002).

Why indoors?

Despite the positive arguments and political support it remains difficult to make the case for outdoor learning. For example I have never heard of anyone involved in the education system in the UK being asked the question 'why do you want to teach indoors?' This is indicative of an assumption amongst teachers, teacher-trainers, Local Authorities, politicians and society that all teaching (except perhaps PE) always takes place indoors. If it simply does not occur to anyone to ask the question 'why indoors?' the implication is that it is not important. It becomes, as Eisner (1985) suggests, part of a *null* (i.e. not acknowledged and not valued) curriculum. Imagine the impact of every aspirant trainee teacher being asked at interview to explain why they want to teach indoors!

And yet teachers need to have the skills and confidence to take groups outdoors, so initial teacher education through university training, and continuous professional development are fundamentally important. There are also real benefits in collaborating for mutual skills development between schools and other outdoor providers. In a recent study (Higgins *et al.*, 2006) we found that (amongst other factors such as cost) many teachers were concerned about safety issues and lacked the confidence to take children outside the classroom whereas they were confident in pedagogy and relevant curriculum. Perhaps not surprisingly specialist 'outdoor providers' on the other hand were the converse (Nicol *et al.*, 2006). If these two groups were able to work more closely together and build staff-development partnerships there would be mutual programme design and teaching benefits, and potentially a stronger political consensus.

In summary

Since the development of the concept of 'outdoor education' it has been considered an innovative and creative approach to education. However, in the absence of any clear guidance from politicians, inspection by schools' inspectorate or professional organisation there is no guarantee of focus on specific learning objectives or quality of delivery. Surely the freedom many of us have to devise and deliver our courses and our responsibility to the young people we work with demand that we provide meaningful experiences focussing on important issues. It must be a central expectation of a professional educator that he or she is able to explain to a student, parent, teacher and politician *why I am doing this activity with this activity with each of these young people here now*. If outdoor educators and indeed the educational community can do so, there will in future perhaps be no need to have to routinely answer the question 'why outdoors?'

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Useful websites

Many of the documents referred to can be found on the University of Edinburgh outdoor education website. See:

<http://www.education.ed.ac.uk/outdoored/resources.html>

For publications on child and adolescent health in Scotland see Child and Adolescent Health Research Unit (CAHRU): <http://www.education.ed.ac.uk/cahru/>

For publications on inclusive access to outdoor environments see OPENspace at: <http://www.openspace.eca.ac.uk/>

For details of the ESRC Outdoors Health Network, see: www.outdoorshealthnetwork.co.uk

For the full PDF file of this information is available from the CRN Secretariat crn@shu.ac.uk / 0114 225 4494

The Manifesto for Learning Outside the Classroom

Beth Gardner
Chief Executive – Council for Learning Outside the Classroom

Introduction

The purpose of the presentation was to:

- Explain a little about Learning Outside the Classroom (LOtC) and the background to the LOtC Manifesto.
- Highlight how the Manifesto is relevant to the work of CRN members.
- Demonstrate support available to CRN members.

What is LOtC?

Learning Outside the Classroom is defined as:

“The use of places other than the classroom for teaching & learning.”

It is about getting children to apply what they have learnt *inside* the classroom to real life situations, and giving them the opportunity to see, hear, touch and explore the world around them.

The Council for Learning Outside the Classroom work aims to support all young people between the ages of 0-19. The terminology “schools” encompasses all schools, along with other organisations supporting the development of young people’s education, e.g. scouts, youth groups, etc.

Where does LOtC happen?

LOtC can take children on a voyage of discovery, and takes place in a variety of places, ranging between:

- Just beyond classroom in school grounds
- Venturing outside the school gate into the local community, e.g. museum, library
- Further afield e.g. field study centre or adventurous activity setting
- Residential stays, expeditions and cultural & language tours abroad

These can all enthuse learning with new experiences and adventure. Ideally, LOtC should include a variety of these examples incorporated into the school curriculum.

Why is LOtC a good thing?

When they experience the world beyond the classroom, there is no doubt of the benefits of LOtC for young people:

- attain higher levels of knowledge and skills
- improve their physical health and increase their motor skills
- socialise and interact in new and different ways with their peers and adults

- show improved attention, enhanced self-concept, self-esteem and mental health
- change their environmental behaviours and their values and attitudes

LOtC is proven to:

- Raise attainment and achievement
- Improve standards in schools and other establishments
- Decrease truancy
- Improve behaviour
- Contribute to the emotional, personal & social development of YP

The LOtC website (www.lotc.org.uk) has a wealth of research to enable educational professionals to make the case within their own organisations. Ofsted is also highly supportive of the benefits of LOtC. In its October 2008 report *Learning Outside the Classroom: How far should you go?*, Ofsted inspectors said that LOtC:

- Should be an integral part of the curriculum
- Contributed significantly to raising standards and improving pupils' personal, social & emotional development
- Also contributed to the quality and depth of learning

The full Ofsted report is downloadable from the LOtC website.

Other findings from the report included:

- LOtC objectives should be well defined & integrated into the curriculum and be evaluated for effectiveness
- *Even when it was not delivered particularly well* LOtC still resulted in major learning gains for the young people taking part!

Barriers to LOtC?

There are some perceived barriers to LOtC, which include

- Risk
- Red tape
- Cost
- Lack of confidence
- Lack of support for organising LOtC

These barriers have led to a 'cotton wool culture' where people are scared to undertake LOtC activities.

The LOtC Manifesto

The Learning Outside the Classroom Manifesto was launched in 2006, and aims to try and overcome some of these barriers. The action plan was written with the aim of ensuring all young people experience the world beyond the classroom as an essential part of growing up.

The range of support for the Manifesto for LOtC and its aims is far reaching:

Almost 2000 organisations have signed up so far including:

- Providers of LOtC experiences
 - e.g. National Coal Mining Museum
 - RSPB
 - Royal Opera House
 - Birmingham Botanical Gardens & Glasshouses
- Education organisations and teaching unions
 - e.g. NAHT
 - NUT
 - National Governors Association
- Local authorities
- Individuals
- Schools

Chris Keates, General Secretary of NASUWT – endorsed the Manifesto:
“Learning outside the classroom can make a significant contribution to the development of children and young people. When it is well organised and responsive, pupils become more engaged and enthusiastic learners, giving teachers another resource to help bring the curriculum to life.”

The Council for Learning Outside the Classroom

Support for LOtC has been gathering pace since the Manifesto was launched in 2006 by the Secretary of State.

The Manifesto states that:

“Every child should experience the world beyond the classroom as an essential part of learning and development, whatever their age, ability or circumstances”

One of the key things coming out of the Manifesto Partnership was the clear message that the Manifesto itself is not enough, and that partners wanted a **national voice** to drive forward the LOtC agenda.

The Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF), working with the National Advisory Group, supported the setup of an **independent** Council to take on the mantle for LOtC.

The Council took over this responsibility as the national voice for LOtC on 1st April 2009.

The Council has the responsibility for taking forward the 14 aims of the Manifesto Action Plan.

To:

- *Act as the leading voice for LOtC*
- *Influence & challenge policy & practice*
- *Raise the profile & promote benefits of LOtC*
- *Consult and represent LOtC partnership*

- *Act as a consultative body for LOtC policy development*
- *Drive LOtC action plan*
- *Maintain cohesion of LOtC partnership*
- *Communicate with stakeholders, incl. via website*
- *Maintain overview of LOtC*
- *Improve quality of learning through Quality Badge scheme*
- *Provide support, aiming for high quality LOtC*
- *Commission / undertake research*
- *Access funds to improve accessibility to LOtC opportunities*
- *Operate as the awarding body for the LOtC Quality Badge and provide strategic direction*

Essentially, this involves:

- Acting as THE leading voice for LOtC challenging policy & practice
- Raising the profile and promoting the benefits of LOtC
- Driving up the **quality** of LOtC provision undertaking all of this by working in **partnership** with a wide range of stakeholders.

The Council is a membership organisation, representing all the key organisations involved in LOtC. Since it opened its doors to members in October 2009, 250 individuals, schools and other organisations have joined in order to demonstrate their commitment to providing high quality LOtC experiences and to throw their support behind the Council's aims.

The Council is promoting **frequent, continuous** and **progressive** LOtC experiences, i.e. to enable more YP to be able to participate in more LOtC

Getting "Out and About"

To help schools incorporate more LOtC into the curriculum, the Council, working with the DCSF, has developed key products to help deliver the aims of Manifesto.

'Out & About' is a package of web-based support, advice and guidance. The package helps schools (and others involved with the education of children and young people) to plan, run and evaluate exciting and challenging LOtC experiences.

As part of this, the 'How to' guidance provides practical support to help schools deliver more LOtC. It contains downloadable CPD modules for the whole school workforce, which can also be used by providers working in the field. It also includes advice on

- Making the Case
- Planning a Curriculum
- Working with Stakeholders

And a multitude of useful links and resources.

The LOtC Quality Badge

Consultation with stakeholders showed there was a plethora of marks and awards, which was confusing for schools. The aim of the LOtC Quality Badge is to provide

ONE badge which is recognised right across the range of sectors involved in LOtC. This will help to remove red tape for schools to make it easier to get young people out and about.

Being awarded the LOtC QB signifies that an organisation

- Offers good quality LOtC opportunities
- Manages risk effectively

To obtain the LOtC Quality Badge the provider has to demonstrate:

- LOtC is understood & valued within the organisation
- There are processes in place to establish and maintain an effective partnership with schools and other groups of young learners
- Structures are in place to support and enable effective learning.

The LOtC Quality Badge is aimed at users (i.e. schools and other establishments). There are 2 Routes by which providers can acquire the Quality Badge.

The Assessment Process

The LOtC Quality Badge is awarded by the Council for Learning Outside the Classroom (CLOtC).

Route 1 is aimed at organisations offering LOtC activities perceived as low risk, for example museums, heritage centres, some natural environment centres, etc. Organisations sign up to a code of practice, and complete a Self Evaluation Form (SEF) giving evidence against each of the six quality indicators, which is then assessed. There is a random sampling assessment visit to 10% of providers. The Council has found that this is a robust process which is cost effective – especially helpful for those providers operating under very small budgets.

Route 2 is aimed at organisations offering LOtC experiences which are perceived as higher risk, for example those organisations offering adventurous activities, overseas expeditions and cultural tours. There are five Awarding Bodies operating the Quality Badge on behalf of the Council, taking into account the specific needs of these sectors, and operating assessments.

More info, including the detail of the quality indicators, the two Routes to the Quality Badge and the differences between them, and the application process, is available on the CLOtC Quality Badge website – www.lotcqualitybadge.org.uk

Real life examples – Macmillan Academy

Macmillan Academy in Middlesbrough has a unique specialism in outdoor learning and pursues an experiential educational approach to learning that is practical, dynamic and exciting. The experiences are challenging and powerful learning opportunities.

Their outdoor learning programme emphasises enterprise skills such as collaboration, problem solving, decision-making, and self-assessment; with these skills successfully transferring into the classroom

Real life examples – Ethelred Nursery School

Based in central London, Ethelred Nursery staff established an outdoor classroom on the only space available – a flat roof. Parents painted murals on the walls,

local businesses funded covered space for wet weather play, and a local community artist created mosaics with the children.

The nursery has a quiet garden area where children grow herbs and berries that they are encouraged to smell and taste, while the area encourages children to experience challenge in a safe outdoor environment.

Conclusion – how to help deliver the Manifesto aims

The delivery of the LOtC Manifesto aims is a huge task. The Council for Learning Outside the Classroom has gone a long way to take forward the aims and provide support for partners and wider stakeholders. However, the Council itself can only do so much. In the end, the **real** impact on Children and young people will stem from work undertaken on the ground, by both providers and users.

Whether by:

- Becoming a signatory of the Manifesto or making a pledge
- Advocating the benefits of LOtC
- Promoting the importance of integrating LOtC into the curriculum
- Ensuring LOtC is embedded into the strategic plans of your organisation
- Signing up to the Quality Badge
- Joining the Council for Learning Outside the Classroom

We can all work together to ensure the aims are met.

Only by working in partnership can we ensure **frequent, continuous** and **progressive** LOtC experiences to enable *more* young people to be able to participate in *more* learning outside the classroom.

References

www.lotc.org.uk

www.lotcqualitybadge.org.uk

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Learning in the Outdoors: Research Themes and Findings

Dr. Sarah-Anne Muñoz
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Introduction

"...children are disappearing from the outdoors at a rate that would make the top of any conservationist's list of endangered species if they were any other member of the animal kingdom..." Gill (2005)

This quote from Gill highlights a thread that runs throughout our discourses about modern childhood – concern that children are now spending less and less time in the outdoors. Yet at the same time, debates about the developmental and health benefits of being outside are becoming more prominent within our media and public sector. The research community has engaged with these debates on the nature of modern childhood – examining the “spatially segregated” (Visscher and Bouverne-de Bie, 2008) lives of children, attempting to understand the importance of different types of play in the outdoors and of natural features within educational development. This paper presents some of the main research themes relating to children and learning in the outdoors. It highlights some of the main pieces of work carried out in the field, describing methods used and conclusions made. Thus, the paper gives an overview of the types of research, and research evidence that are currently available on the relationship between children, learning and the outdoors.

The Links between Nature and Learning

There is recognition within most research on children's outdoor use of a link between the outdoor experience and learning. This is often conceptualised in terms of a link between nature, or natural features, and educational and other developmental benefits. Therefore, research has often looked at not only the learning benefits of being ‘outside’ but of being in contact with nature. Research has looked at the educational benefits of contact with nature both within, and outside, the school day:

"...it is obvious that outdoor play experiences contribute to children's physical development, in particular motor development. Less obvious is the learning that happens as children test their strength, externally and internally: how high can I climb? Why does my heart pound when I run? Am I brave enough to jump from this platform?" Hewes and McEwan (2005)

As Hewes and McEwan (2005) illustrate, research has shown that being in contact with nature, and natural features, not only facilitates children's learning about the environment but about themselves. Research links spending time outside with learning skills vital to successful development into active and integrated citizens.

The Developmental Benefits of Contact with Nature

Many developmental benefits have been linked to contact with nature, such as creativity, cognitive functioning, language development and memory. Murray and O'Brien's (2005) evaluation of Forest School in England, for example, links contact with nature to increased creativity and language development and Wells (2000) suggests that the "greenness" of a child's everyday environment is linked to levels of cognitive functioning.

Concern at an absence of nature within childhood

Much evidence suggests that there has been a reduction in the amount of time that children spend outdoors over recent decades (Gaster, 1991). Researchers have, for example, asked parents to reflect on the amount of time that they spent outdoors as children in comparison to the current behaviour of their children (Tandy, 1999); observed children's play behaviours and quantified the amount of time spent outside during the school day (Clements, 2004). A reduction in the amount of time that children spend outside has been observed within the school day (NFER, 2004) and play context (Karsten, 2005). Some research has shown an associated reduction in children's physical activity levels (Armstrong and McManus, 1994), whilst other research has examined the implications of an associated reduction in children's levels of contact with nature (Kahn and Kellert, 2002). Concern is raised that our children know less and less about nature and that many facets of their development, e.g. intellectual, emotional, social and physical, suffer from a lack of contact with nature. Some research has examined this in relation to the importance of particular nature features such as trees (USDA Forest Service, 2001).

Some research has sought to examine the benefits of changing children's play and educational environments to include more natural features. Moore and Wong's (1997) action research, for example, highlights the wide range of benefits afforded to both children and teachers through the transformation of a tarmac school playground into a space filled with natural elements and subsequently named the "environmental yard" that provided formal and informal learning opportunities.

Research Reviews of 'Natural Classes'

One response to concerns over a lack of nature within children's educational settings has been a growth in the number of Forest school days, kindergartens and nature kindergartens. The links between nature and learning within such 'natural classes' have been subject to evaluation and review, particularly within the UK and the Scandinavian contexts. This strand of research has responded to increased policy interest in Forest schools and kindergartens. The Danish *Udeskole* for example, provides a web-based repository of knowledge and ideas related to engaging children with nature through the educational context. Forest Schools have been reviewed by Robertson (2008) and Mikitz (2001) and kindergartens by Kollner and Leinert (1998) and Fjorft (2001).

Increasingly research is looking at the benefits of incorporating time spent outdoors throughout the curriculum – not just in terms of facilitating opportunities to learn about the environment or participate in organised sports. Tunnicliffe

(2008), for example, investigates the merits of the pond as a site of “biology and science education”. Research shows that educational attainment in a variety of subjects can rise if learning outside the classroom is incorporated into the curriculum.

Health Benefits of Education in the Outdoors

Research has investigated the physical and mental health benefits of learning in the outdoors. In general, access to greenspace has been shown to be associated with better health at various life stages (de Vries et. al., 2003; Mitchell and Popham, 2007). Research has focused on some health benefits in particular for children. Strands within the research include the effects of contact with nature and time spent outside on ADHD, the health benefits of outdoor play and the affect of contact with nature on the alleviation of teenage anxiety and depression.

Several pieces of work have looked at children’s levels of physical activity whilst they are outdoors – through play and within the school day. This research links amounts of time spent outside with physical activity levels (Veitch et. a., 2005). Thus, learning and playing outside are often presented as part of the solution to increasing levels of childhood obesity (Ebberling et al., 2002).

Research has also suggested increased wellbeing from the outdoor experience for children. There are links to the literature on “therapeutic landscape” (Gesler, 1992), restoring negative mood and helping recovery from attentional fatigue (Bell et. al., 2003). Martensson et. al., (2009) show that types of natural features within a pre-school playground impact on children’s levels of attention; highlighting the particular importance of elements such as trees, shrubbery and varied terrain. Taylor and Kuo (2008) found that outdoor activity as simple as a walk in the park has benefits for children with ADHD by increasing their concentration levels and generally easing symptoms. In particular, contact with less- or un- structured outdoor spaces are seen as beneficial for child health and development (Burke, 2005).

Activity Monitoring

Several pieces of recent research have used forms of activity monitoring to measure the health benefits of time spent outdoors by children, such as pedometers and accelometers. Key pieces of work include those by Groves and McNish (2009) and Lovell (2009). These studies suggest that Forest School days increase levels of physical activity, particularly for girls.

Changing Models of Education in the Outdoors

Research has looked at how certain models of education within outdoor, ‘natural’ settings have grown in usage in recent years, often as a response to concern over reductions in the amount of time spent outside within the school day. Forest School days have been shown to be particularly beneficial for children who otherwise have limited contact with nature (O’Brien, 2009). Research has examined the benefits of contact with natural features within these settings, for example, Grahn’s (1997) Swedish study contrasted the concentration capacities of children in traditional nursery with those in Forest Nursery. It was found that those in Forest Nursery were significantly more focused and experienced other developmental benefits. A similar study by Fjortoft and Sageie (2001) found

nursery children with regular access to the outdoors not only had greater levels of understanding about the environment but better motor skills.

Recently, work has started to look at how technology can be used to enhance the outdoor experience for children. The Ambient Wood project looked at the role of mobile technologies to provide learning experiences outside of the classroom, in particular to learn about ecology.

Learning from Outdoor Play

Research suggests outdoor learning does not just have to be done through the structure of the school or nursery but can also come from outdoor play. Research by physicians (Burdette and Whitaker, 2005) for example has linked outdoor free play with benefits such as problem-solving, focus and self-discipline.

Links between Childhood Experience and Adult Behaviour

There is increasing evidence that our childhood experiences in the outdoors effect how we use the outdoors as adults, as well as our attitudes towards the environment. Chawla (2007) shows the importance of being taken outdoors by an adult "mentor" and Wells and Lekies (2006) link wilderness experiences in particular as children to adult environmental attitudes and behaviours. Ward Thompson et. al. (2008) show childhood experiences of the outdoors affect adult behaviours and attitudes towards woodland.

Maximising the Benefit from Outdoor Learning

It is possible to summarise some of the main suggestions from the literature for maximising the benefits from learning outdoors:

- **Facilitate outdoor play:** at the policy level, this includes understanding access issues to greenspace and design processes, as well as putting the mechanisms in place for educators to allow periods of quality, outdoor play within the school day.
- **Including children in design processes:** research has considered that children's voices are under-represented and greater inclusion in the planning of their own play spaces, school yards and even neighbourhoods could help maximise the benefits they get from using them.
- **Recognising the importance of un-designed spaces and less controlled time:** research on, for example, outdoor environments and attentional fatigue/ restorative effects suggests in particular unstructured areas of woodland, open greenspace and varied terrain are important. The importance of the 'wild' within the creation of pro-environmental attitudes and adult use of the outdoors also suggests a role for more unstructured natural experiences within the educational context.

Acknowledgements

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Afternoon Workshops

Adventuremark - Outdoor Education in the broadest sense

Bob Barton
Adventure Activity Associates

No paper available

**Forest Kindergarten
A Natural Approach To Learning
Forest Kindergarten: A Natural Approach to Learning**

Karen Boyd
Forestry Commission Scotland

Our Forest Kindergarten Project presentation, provided an introduction into and a case study example from Forestry Commission Scotland's, Forest Kindergarten Pilot Projects. It provided a breakdown of what the project is, how and why it was created, and provided a details of all the elements of one of the pilot projects; from the set up of the project, to the child led, child centred leaning opportunities. The presentation also included our educational psychologist's findings for this project.

Forest Kindergarten is a child led; child centred natural learning opportunity, specifically for early year's children. It adopts a holistic approach, which is responsive to each child's changing developmental needs, knowledge and skills. Sensitive adult support encourages the children to make choices, and to share and take responsibility for their own learning. This is enhanced by the freedom to learn through exploratory play within a stimulating natural environment.

The following paragraphs provide a breakdown of the Forest Kindergarten Project presentation, but first a bit of background to put the project into perspective.

Nature/Forest Kindergarten has been established within Scandinavian, notably Sweden, and other countries for many years, and more recently within Scotland. These countries provide evidence that such experience is beneficial to children's health and well being, their self-esteem, confidence, perseverance and acquisition of knowledge and skills. There is a high ratio of adults to children, but learning though play is child centred, and enhanced with the freedom to explore using multiple senses.

There are clear curriculum links to two of our Government's curricular education frameworks ***The Early Years Framework*** and the ***Curriculum for Excellence***, both of which support why we should be using the Forest Kindergarten approach to provide young children with this type of learning opportunity. The Early Years Framework states that ***"Children are entitled to take part in physical activities and to play, including outdoors, and have an opportunity to experience and judge and manage risk"***. The Curriculum for Excellence - Building the Curriculum 2 states that ***"The outdoor environment offers motivating and different opportunities for learning... All aspects of the curriculum can be explored outside. The sights, sounds and smells of the outdoors, the closeness of nature, the excitement most children feel, the wonder and curiosity all serve to enhance and stimulate learning."*** These statements are then further supported by the Early Years Framework which encourages trying out innovative approaches such as forest school initiatives, and nature kindergartens, as short, then medium, term priorities to improve learning outcomes and children's quality of life through play.

Our Forest Kindergarten Project, was jointly funded by Forestry Commission Scotland (FCS) and the Glasgow and Clyde Valley Green Network Partnership and structured into two phases.

December 2008 and March 2009 saw the implementation of phase 1, by Creative STAR Learning Company who conducted a Forest Kindergarten feasibility study, including a questionnaire, which was sent out to the local authority early year's establishments, across Glasgow and the Clyde Valley.

The study aimed to identify and gain a better understanding of factors to explain the under-use of local woodlands by early year's establishments, to recommend solutions to overcome real, and perceived, barriers, provide options of how to implement recommendations, that would enable Forest Kindergarten to move forward within Scotland. The study also identified at least one suitable woodland area, matched with at least one early year's establishment, within each of these local authorities to create our Pilot Projects.

These proposed establishments, and woodland areas, provided the backbone for the implementation of phase two of our Forest Kindergarten Project.

One of the pilot establishments was, '***Our Lady and St. Josepchs Nursery Class***' from Glenboig. This nursery was chosen to develop Forest Kindergarten as it was already a health-promoting nursery, achieving Eco schools flags, and had developed a bio-diversity garden. As well as these attributes, the nursery was also working with the local Community Neighbour House in extending their children's learning outdoors through the introduction of woodland fairy walks. The involvement in Forest Kindergarten, as a child centred way to learn, was a natural progression for this nursery class and led to them being chosen as the exemplar Forest Kindergarten project within North Lanarkshire Council.

The Glenboig Forest Kindergarten project involved two very diverse groups of children, who were chosen by the nursery for various developmental reasons. These ranged from support needs for the children's communication and listening skills, social interaction, and health and wellbeing concerns, to some who needed challenged in different ways to support their development.

Each week two groups of children were taken out into local woodlands, where they were encouraged to choose a site to become our base camp, and the area for our activities and sessions. This choice in itself introduced the children to the skill of risk assessment. The children had to risk assess their site at the four canopy layers, and problem solving how to overcome identified risks. In the end the children assessed their original choice of site, and decided, as a group, to choose another site. Every week the children developed their skills and knowledge, risk assessing the route to and from the site, and the site itself. When new people came to our sites, to join our sessions, the children were able to tell other children, staff, and adults of any risks ahead, and how to manage them. These skills proved invaluable, and proved to be transferable when out on walks with the rest of the nursery, and their families. This has shown that the development of risk

assessment skills, and the ability to apply them, is a quality that will continue to be used by children throughout their years.

Working with the same group of children, on the same day and at the same site, developed the children's confidence and sense of ownership of their site, and the living things within it. This led to sessions to being truly child centred, and child led, and was enhanced with the freedom to explore safely using their multiple senses. The children led the way to and from site, every week for a 10-week period, (which continues to be extended with more irregular sessions), in all weather conditions. This provided the children with natural learning opportunities to experience and explore in all weather and seasonal conditions, and to see how the changes in season, and weather, resulted in changes to their site, the environment, and in turn their activities and learning experiences.

A result of the children's natural exploring, at the initial stage of the project, during autumn, meant the children discovered a site inhabited with lots of different coloured dragonflies. These experiences not only provided the children with exposure to maths, and colour recognition within the outdoor environment, but also provided the children with a unique opportunity to experience and observe, first hand, dragonflies in their natural environment, which would not have been possible within the nursery environment. This unique learning experience proved a crucial element in the future of this project for these children. The children problem solved, and discovered, through trial and error, how to track the dragonflies, and to observe them close-up without causing harm to them.

Spending time carefully tracking them proved successful when three of the children were able to sit directly alongside one of the dragonflies, without it flying away. Over the weeks one of the children developed a Mother Nature attitude, and respect for the dragonflies, and the rest of her new environment. She sat down beside a dragonfly and embarked on a very friendly, and in depth, conversation with it, which to observers appeared to be almost a two-way conversation. This level of interaction lasted for approx. fifteen minutes. At the end of the conversation the dragonfly flew up onto one of the children's arm, where they were able to observe the fine details of body and wings close-up.

With the involvement of other children, filming this first hand experience, as an introduction to ICT, a theme of dragonflies and butterflies developed throughout our sessions. This long running theme developed interest and a caring attitude within the children towards, plants, wildlife and insects, resulting in **Responsible Citizens** with a promoted sense of belonging. This level of care and interest however took longer to develop within some children than it did others, but provided opportunities for all the children to become **Successful Learners** by end of our Forest Kindergarten block.

Throughout our Forest Kindergarten sessions, children continued to shape their own learning, and the benefits from this continued to develop. These benefit where recorded, under the four capacities of the Curriculum for Excellence. Each different Forest Kindergarten activity experienced by the children resulted in different holistic benefits. The children developed a sense of teamwork, with unique friendships, which were never initially there within the nursery setting,

being born between some of the children. It was recorded that level of teamwork, and friendships, resulted in a ripple effect which flowed back into the nursery setting.

Working in an outdoor environment, full of new, uneven, unknown risks and obstacles, meant that the children had to work together as a team in order to simply climb over a fallen tree, or playing on their tree swing, engaging in free flow exploring, or setting up base camp. As well as having to work together to source firewood to use within their kelly kettles, in order to make hot water and fire to keep themselves warm, when the weather included heavy rain, cold temperatures and even snow. The children also combined their new found love for the dragonflies and their interest in art, into our natural art activities, which resulted in very expressive, site sourced, clay dragonflies, natural dragonfly paintings hung in their outside gallery, within their den, and also resulted in natural willow weave dragonflies, which the children then took back to their nursery garden.

All of these child initiated learning experiences helped produce **Confident Individuals, Successful Learners, Effective Contributors** and **Responsible Citizens**, who acquired new skills and knowledge such as risk management, safe fire making, safe tool use, map reading skills, problem solving skills, sense of the world and increased level of confidence in all area's of holistic development, to name but a few.

In order to assess the benefits and impact that Forest Kindergarten had on these two diverse groups of children, the Local Authority's senior educational psychologist, and her team, were asked to participate in this project. They conducted a comparative study, which will continue to run over a longer period of time. Phase one of the studies, focused on the developmental aspects of motivation and concentration, knowledge and understanding, language and communication, health and wellbeing, confidence and self-esteem, and social skills. The study also involved a control group of nursery children who were not involved in the forest session. Observations, PIP development charts, schedules of growing skill 2, and parent and staff interviews were all used in order to chart the benefits and findings.

Initial stage one findings show small increases in developmental benefits for each of the areas in favour of the forest group, proving that forest education in pre-school children does provide them with holistic, developmental benefits. This study will be extended and looked at in more detail in the future.

From the outset of this project involving the parents, and community, were of importance in order to show the ripple effect this can have. Two very different parents, one very confident outdoors, and the other not so confident outdoors, were asked to help support the staff and children during the sessions. This resulted in the second parent becoming more confident, and the first wanting to continue this line of work, in supporting the nursery, and other children, using the outdoors for learning. The project has also caused a ripple effect into the wider community, with more of the children's parents taking them out to the site at the weekends, and resulting in the Community Development Officer from the local neighbourhood house undertaking Forest School Training alongside a member of

the nursery staff, in order to make the community woodland learning opportunities sustainable. The nursery's Forest Kindergarten project will also become sustainable, providing more children in the nursery with experiences, benefits and fun from Forest Kindergarten, not only in the near future but in the long term.

**Without Walls project
Oxfordshire County Council & Learning through Landscapes
partnership**

Julia Sargent
Oxfordshire County Council

Without walls – is a partnership initiative between Oxfordshire County Council and The national schools charity 'Learning through Landscapes' , The project supported 8 Oxford city children's centres and community groups to work with families who had children under the age of five to create, develop and use their outdoor spaces for high quality and valuable play and learning

"It's every Child's right to have access to outdoor play and learning as part of the Early years Foundation stage"
EYFS www.dcsf.gov.uk

Why did we want to do this?

- Experience and research evidence confirms that families are leading increasingly sedentary and indoor lives
- The benefits of outdoor activity and access to nature for physical and mental well being have been demonstrated and well researched
- The outdoor environment gives children and families a range of opportunities to gain new knowledge and skills in a fun environment with less pressure and more space

Funding was secured to support the project and, key to its success has been the appointment of a Landscape development worker who has practical skills and experience working in the outdoors and who was able to engage with staff and families in a very positive and sympathetic way.

Engaging with parents and children was essential to our project and, according to the needs of each group, consultation with children and staff was done in a variety of ways, .one to one conversations, discussions, questionnaires, and meetings. Following this, the Landscape development worker organised practical workshops in the Centres as well as in a community garden creating physical landscapes changes such as sandpits, mounds, water features and wildlife areas. and, in the garden ,a tandoor which has been well used by the Asian women's community groups. Their cooking has been shared and enjoyed by all!

The development worker has run supported sessions to demonstrate the value of the activities – and where appropriate how they can support Centres to achieve the outcomes set out in Every Child Matters and links to the Early Years Foundation stage curriculum.

Working in this way has allowed us to gain a better understanding of the barriers faced by families in accessing outdoor activity and the natural world.

Parents and carers gave a variety of reasons why they didn't go out or why they don't let their children play outdoors, and no doubt these are the same throughout the country.

These include stranger danger, too risky, fear of injury, dogs, cars, no where to go and, of course bad weather!

What we have learnt

Working, playing and learning outdoors has helped families form friendships, improve communication, allowed parents to learn more about their own children in a different environment , improve and use their own skills and often through Dads groups given them more opportunities to be with their children in a fun environment

Throughout this pilot phase of the project we were able to identify ingredients for successful practical sessions to develop the outdoor space, these include, Ownership of the project by all involved using the ' Learning through Landscapes' model of consultation

Allowing time for observation of children in the outdoor space, and planning through the results of the observations

Staff being enthusiastic and prepared to make and adapt to changes but also noting that some people do not want to be or like to be outdoors,

Staff acting as good role models outdoors -actively engaging with the children, and being appropriately dressed

Suitable training and visiting places where staff have embraced being outdoors and have recognised the value for high quality play and learning

Effective communication at all levels

Funding to help make the changes – however small!

And most of all we have learnt that families have had fun and want to do more.

We are very pleased that we are able to continue this project in new Centres through out Oxfordshire for at least another twelve months.

A publication to support the project "Without Walls- creative work with families developing and using outdoor space" has been produced as a resource for Children's centres managers and staff.

References

This is available from earlyyears.publications@oxfordshire.gov.uk or email Learning through Landscapes enquiries@lfl.org.uk

As the project comes to the end of the 2 year pilot phase which began in March 2008 the process of reflection and evaluation has revealed the successes , what has been learnt and what could have been done differently or better.

The Not So Great Outdoors? Lost Opportunities for Experiential Learning?

Debbie Pearlman Hougie

University of Hertfordshire

The extant literature demonstrates that children derive a plethora of benefits from both playing outdoors and learning outdoors (for example, Kellert 2002; Cole-Hamilton et al 2002; Kahn 2002; Lester and Maudsley 2007; Sustainable Development Commission 2008). However what do children gain from family outdoor recreation? Is there a learning experience to be gained from simply going for a walk or a bike ride?

Informal Experiential Learning in middle childhood

Beard and Wilson (2002) state that "experiential learning can take on many appearances in life, such as recreation or leisure activities, exhilarating journeys or adventures, experimentation or play" (p??). But there is more than just 'experiencing', there is the emotional reaction that a person has to a place or an experience. Kellert (2002) believes that it is emotional reactions to the outdoors that can be important prompts for learning more about a place or environment. In learning situations "affect precedes intellect" (Kellert 2002). Therefore the concept of 'affective learning' needs to be examined. 'Affective learning' relates to two concepts. First the notion of an emotion or feeling attached to an object or place. Secondly, the notion that these feelings and emotions can often affect the acquisition of attitudes and values (Roberts 1992). Affective learning (right brain) is often contrasted with Cognitive Learning ie. that based on verbal and information based learning (left brain). Our surroundings have a strong influence on our emotions and these emotional responses affect our preferences and attitudes for places and activities. Thus the key concept that was examined was that from every outdoor experience a child has the potential to 'learn' something (in its broadest sense). Academic work has shown that middle childhood is a vital time in a child's developmental journey and attitudes and preferences are set during this time (Eccles 1999; Ward-Tompson et al 2008; Sebba 1991; Korpella 2002). Interestingly Kellert (2002) states that "contact with the natural world, especially during childhood, occupies a surprisingly important place in a child's emotional responsiveness and development" (P126)

Various emotional responses can be seen from children undertaking outdoor recreation activities. These include (the list is not exhaustive)

Delight
Elation
Wonder
Enthusiasm
Anticipation
Fear
Risk
Excitement
Surprise
Freedom
Alive
Uncertainty
Danger
Anxiety
Determination
Nervous
Vulnerable
Apprehensive
Proud
Courageous
Happy
Resentful
Worried
Proud

Having experience of such emotions whilst undertaking outdoor activities can lead to a number of gains and outcomes (again the list is far from complete but just give examples that were raised during the workshop).

Team work skills
Social
communication skills
Problem solving
Friendship
Sharing
Turn taking
Respecting others
Self control
Resilience
Negotiation skills
Sense of Challenge
Sense of Achievement
Personal
accomplishment
Confidence
Pride and pleasure
Cooperation skills
Perseverance skills
Reliability and trust

Self Discovery Self efficacy Creativity Environmental appreciation Overcoming adversity Overcoming fear

Family Outdoor Recreation

This is an evolving area of study (it mainly emanates from the USA and there is limited data on family outdoor recreation in the UK) however academics acknowledge the importance of 'quality' family recreation time per se. Shaw and Dawson (2001) note that family recreation is often purposeful in nature. Families set out to achieve certain goals such as enhancing family cohesiveness, improving communication skills and creating a strong family identity. Interestingly in the evaluation of the Walk for Life Project in Barrow in Furness, Milton et al (2009) found that "Parents stressed the importance of having a destination to reach as part of the walk, as this is viewed as a "goal" by the children". Cherney and London (2006) believe that family recreation in the outdoors is a vital time and place for learning life skills. Du Lee et al (2006) discovered that parents chose recreational sites for their educative value. Natural England's (Henley Centre 2005) background research for their Outdoor Recreation Strategy describes children and young people as the 'lost cohort' and suggests that there may be limited success in even attempting to engage with such a disaffected group that is so unconnected to the outdoors. If children are increasingly spatially restricted and supervised by their parents' they will have less contact and experience of the outdoors and the valuable opportunities that it offers. The longer term consequences could be that the 'great outdoors' may be lost from their memories and lost from future political agendas, it will no longer be phenomena at the forefront of their everyday experiences and formative recollections. As Ward Thompson et al (2008, 135) state, "the implications for the future relationship between recent generations of children and the outdoor environment are potentially striking".

The Not So Great Outdoors? Project (June 2009)

This project set out to examine whether or not outdoor recreation can fill the void left by the disconnection of children and nature in middle childhood? It wished capture in depth qualitative and quantitative data on primary school children's perception of the outdoors and their lived experience of outdoor recreation. Two data collection tools were used; a questionnaire survey and a focus group involving parents of children at a school in an affluent part of Hertfordshire. The aim was to triangulate the information derived using these different methods to explore the perceptions and meanings of outdoor recreation. In total 53 children were questioned from years 1, 3 and 5.

Results

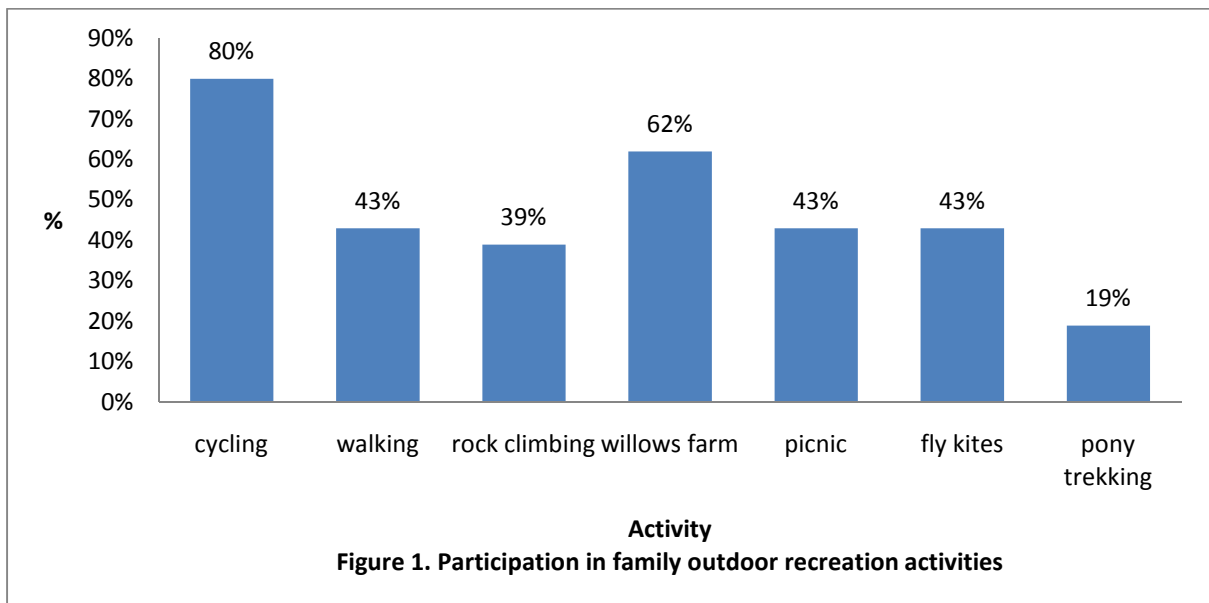
Issue 1 – Asking the right questions

There are methodological limitations to working with children, mainly based on children's cognitive ability children to fully understand concepts of perceptions and beliefs. Cognitive and social development depends on age, thus questionnaires should be modified to account for this (Scott 2007). Two interesting issues arose

from this. First, when children were asked "Do you prefer to play inside or outside", 59% replied positively. However, when the question was phrased slightly differently, "Overall would you prefer to (a) stay inside and play computer games? Or (b) play games and do activities outside?", the degree of positivity fell to 46%. Although the results were not statistically significant, it can be inferred that the pull of the screen is strong. Secondly, when the children were asked "Out of school do you ever go for a walk in the countryside with your family – by a river, in the woods or in the hill?" 53% replied positively. However, when the children were shown a photo of a family hiking in the countryside, wearing boots and wearing fleeces and waterproofs, and then asked if they "Go walking in the countryside with your family?", the degree of positivity fell to 43%. Again the results were not statistically significant but could be accounted for by the fact that the picture in the visual cue clearly showed something they did not do, wearing waterproofs and hiking boots and walking in open countryside, whereas by simply asking a question, walking in the countryside could be interpreted within their cognitive frame of reference and experience.

Issue 2 – Children are doing activities out of doors but they are highly supervised – and they probably prefer hyerreality.

Nearly half of the children reported that they undertook family outdoor recreation activities. Figure 1 demonstrates the range of activities in which they participated. The fact that 80% reported that they went cycling with their parents is very positive. Two-thirds of the children visited the local open farm attraction (Willows Farm). This was viewed as a safe and easy place to take children as it has good facilities (such as toilets and cafe) and multiple activities to entertain children.

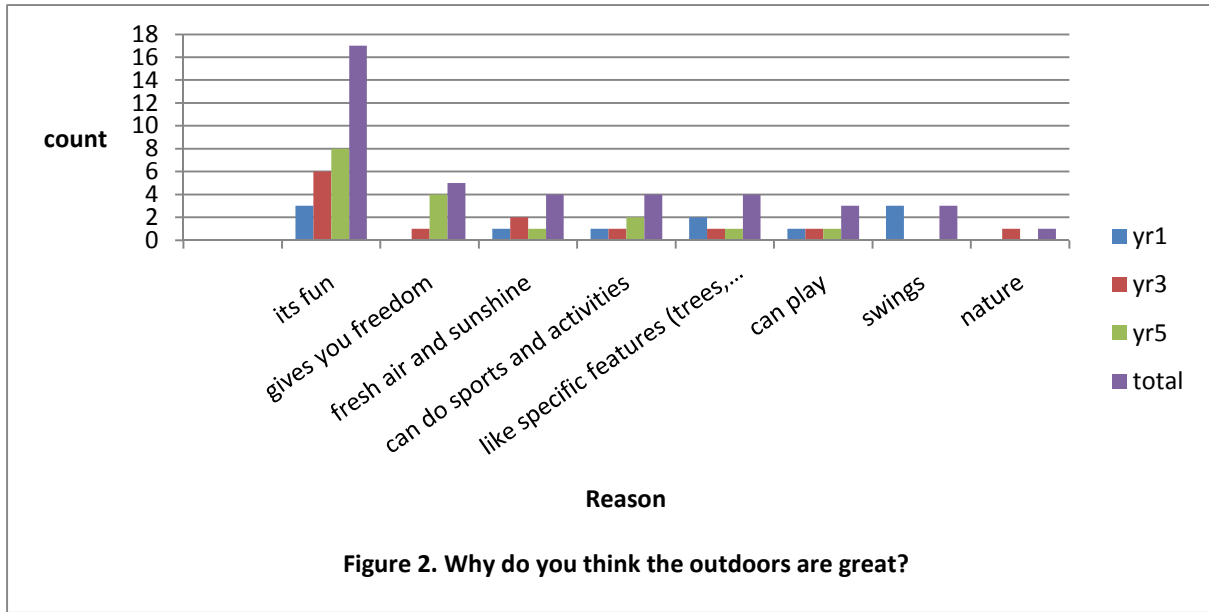


Issue 3 – Children aspire to do more with their families

For the activities where the children did not participate, the vast majority aspired to take part. The activities that they most wanted to undertake were to fly kites (58%) and have a family picnic in the countryside (43%).

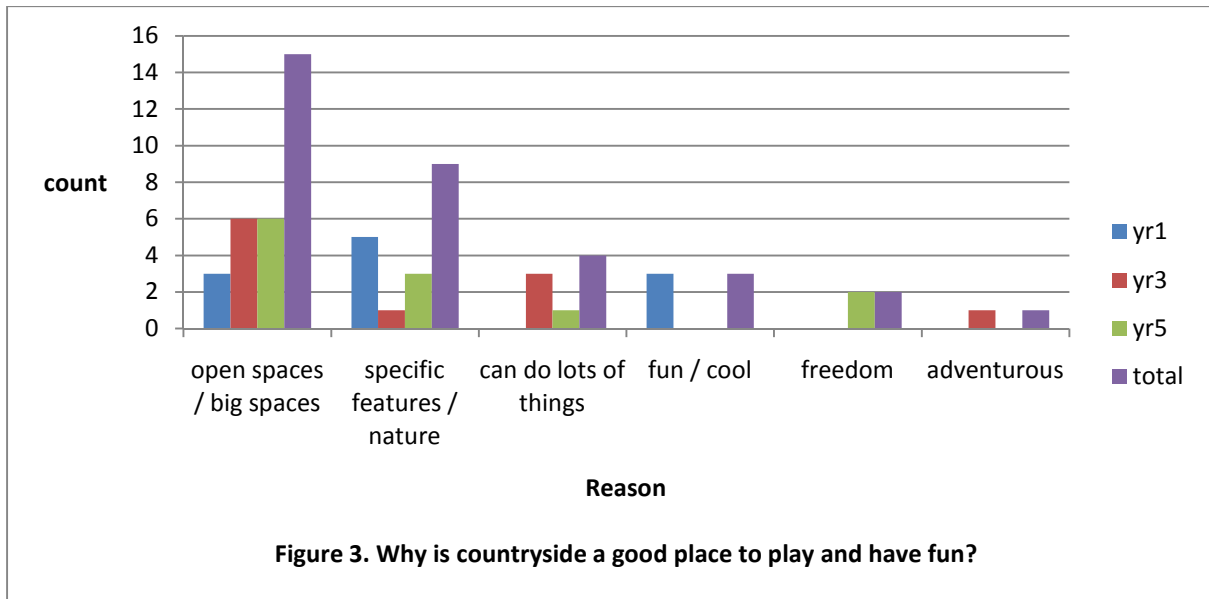
Issue 4 – The Affective Outdoors?

When the children were asked “Do you think the outdoors are great?”, 80% replied positively. Figure 2 shows the reasons why.



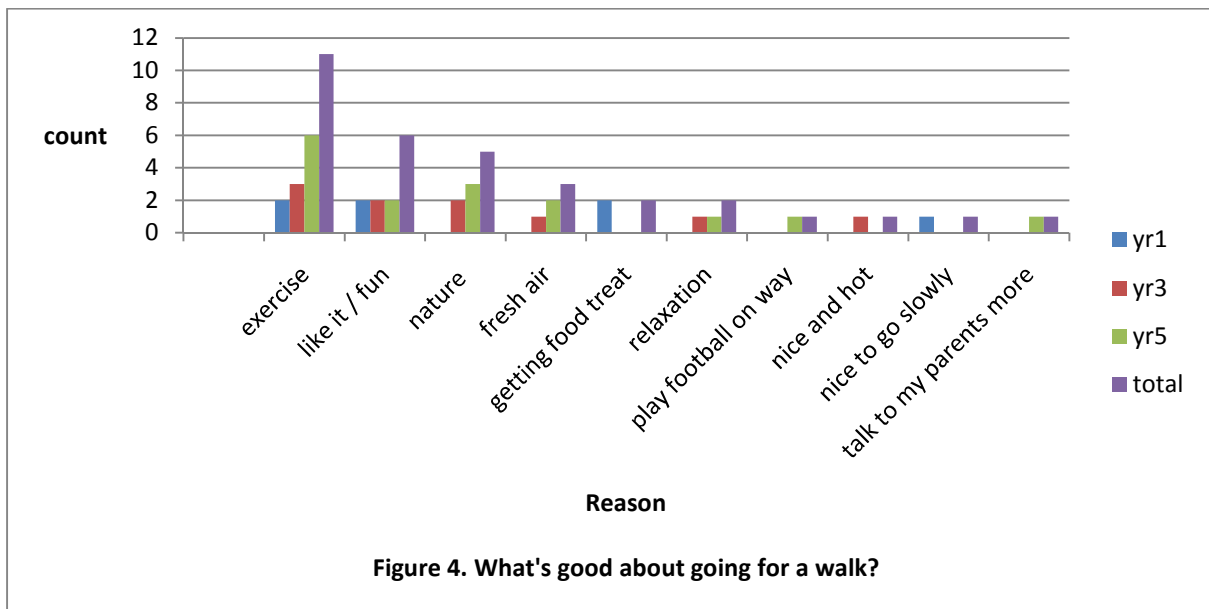
The reasons why are important. The ‘fun’ element was consistent with data collected by Natural England (2009) and Play England (2007). The older children used the more abstract notion of ‘freedom’, thus confirming increased cognitive ability brings a greater understanding of less concrete concepts (Rasmussen 2004). Contact with nature (including fresh air and sunshine) was also a prominent response.

There was a 70% positive response to the question ‘is the countryside a good place to play and have fun?’ and when asked ‘why’ (Figure 3), a particular response was prominent.



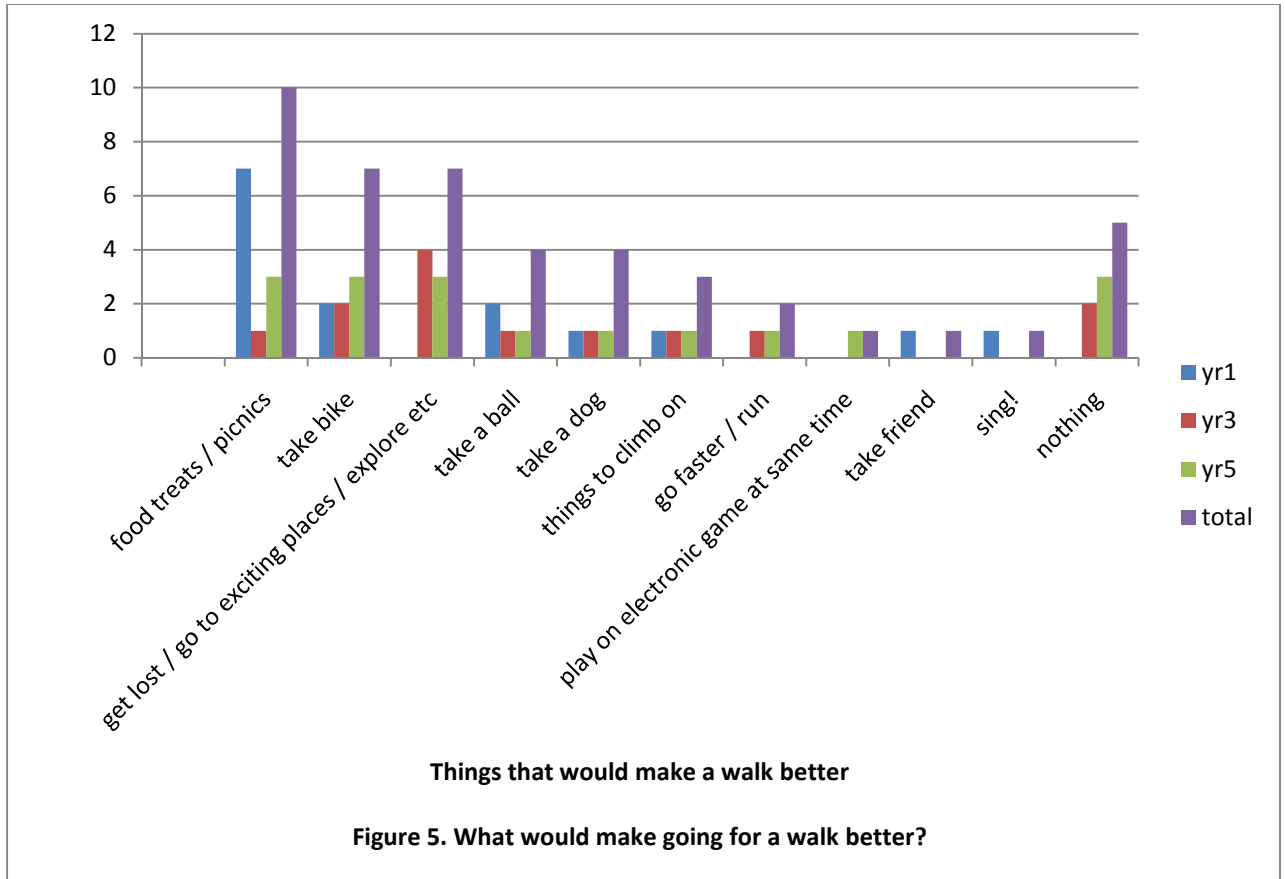
The children (n=15; boys = 6, girls = 9, increased with age) liked the fact that the countryside had big and/or open spaces. Interestingly, in this study, more girls than boys liked the big and open spaces.

Perceptions of family outdoor walking gave rise to much rich data. A number of points arose from the question 'what do you think is good about going for a walk?'(Figure 4)



Firstly, the older children are more aware of the health benefits of walking. This bodes well for the health agenda amongst the affluent. Only the girls (n=6) noted the benefits of contact with nature, with one girl writing "I like to pick flowers and make daisy chains". The older children recognized the restorative benefits in the context of relaxation (Hartig et al 1991; Kaplan 1995; Korpella and Hartig 1996; Korpella et al 2002). In terms of the negative responses (boring, get tired and hungry, too lazy), these are recognized as common motivational barriers for

children to participate in physical activity. One child gave a lengthy explanation of why he didn't like walking and it offers a fascinating insight into outdoor walking through the lens of childhood. The child did not see the point in "just walking there and walking back". The children offered some resourceful and insightful approaches to making walks better for them (Figure 5)



The most compelling category was 'getting lost / go to exciting places / go to magical places' (n=7). The trend for this answer veered toward the older children but was common across both genders. This relates to children's need for adventure. Outdoor adventure and stimulation can energize, enthuse and create connections with the natural world (Loeffler, 2004). Indeed the children were asked in a closed question for an alternative name for outdoor walking. 36% wanted to go on 'an adventure' and 36% wanted to 'go exploring'. A further 20% wanted to 'go hiking'. The desire to 'get lost' may also represent the desire for novelty, solitude, rule breaking and a problem- solving challenge (Cornell and Hill 2006). Chawla (2002) discusses magical experiences of nature amongst children in middle childhood, saying that they have the ability to enter a different kind of reality where they can become transfixed by the oneness of self and nature.

Issue 5 – Parents lack outdoor knowledge and confidence

The analysis of the focus group showed that parents are constantly struggling with conflicting messages relating to being a good parent, protecting children from traffic and strangers, and keeping them fit and healthy. They were well aware of the problems and issues and aspired to increase their children's contact with the outdoors. However most only felt comfortable using 'safe', organized outdoor

recreation places (for example the local farm attraction or country park) in an effort to make this connection. It was clear that they lacked confidence and knowledge to use the wider countryside for recreational activities. Unbeknown to the parents they are failing to satisfy their children's needs for adventure.

The feeling was that the women present were not equipped with the skills (navigation, understanding of access laws), or the equipment, to cope with the unpredictability of the outdoors beyond the 'safe site'. The countryside presented a place where these affluent suburban women felt out of their comfort zone – the very idea of it seemed to place them in their 'stretch/panic zone' (Prouty et al 2007).

The parents aspired to do more outdoors but their outdoor self-efficacy (ie. the "beliefs in one's capabilities to organize and execute the course of action required to produce given attainments". Bandura 1997, 3) seemed low. As parents (mothers) act as the chief mediators of children's everyday leisure lives it is parents who should "act as active collaborators committed to providing more opportunities for children to explore their world" (Furedi 2008, 4) but this cannot happen unless self-efficacy can be improved. The Henley Centre (2005, 22) claimed that "outdoor opportunities are there and the recreation will follow" but this is not possible for the same reason. Bandura (2009, 505), commenting on his Social Cognitive Theory, says that "Failure to address the psychosocial determinants of human behaviour is often the weakest link in social policy initiatives. Simply providing ready access to resources does not mean that people will take advantage of them. People need to be taught how to use them".

Conclusions

The main emerging discourse from this study is that children *want to* do more things outside and parents *would like* to do more activities outside as a family but they do not have the outdoor recreation self-efficacy to remedy the situation. The main constraints are lack of time (because affluence affects family time), lack of knowledge about where to go and what legal rights they have. Thus they feel impotent to change, preferring to stay within their comfort zone and generally feel safer in their everyday, familiar spaces. In middle childhood, children are dependent on their parents for leisure experiences. However despite the increased levels of democracy within families the children themselves may not be pestering for picnics and kite flying adventures simply because it is not 'cool'; these activities do not create the 'playground buzz' of Wii or PSP games. Outdoor recreation is thus perceived with negative connotations by children whilst their parents are not equipped with the mastery skills or motivation, to change their leisure habits. It is an idyll that they aspire to, *but not enough* to actually leave their comfort zones and learn what to do, to negotiate the constraints. It is vital that the agencies involved in recreation policy and provision in the UK engage not only with families with young children, but also with psycho-social models. Using electronic media (DS, xbox, Wii games, internet games sites such as a 'club penguin', and popular TV programs), technology (hand held GPS units for navigation, geocaching, internet based GIS for route finding, internet social networking) and children's toys (eg. a hiking Barbie and Action Man), together with social marketing or a social diffusion model, may help create a positive reaction to outdoor recreation in children and embed the concept into their everydayness. But we also need to engage more with children, finding out what is important to them and how they communicate with each other. The aim is to make family outdoor recreation 'cool'

and 'trendy' so that it becomes the 'thing' that children talk about. The need for having positive role models for children to follow is also very important. In terms of adult outdoor recreation self-efficacy, national policy makers and local providers should consider the USA model of the 'family outdoor adventure program' but adapted for the UK, in a non patronising manner. Locally based programmes in the countryside close to urban areas, teaching basic outdoor recreation mastery skills (map reading, understanding countryside access laws, equipment, routes) are perhaps required to give adults confidence in the great outdoors. If the adults know where to go and what to do then they can help fulfil the aspirations of their children. Badura (2009) believes that for change to occur people need to make strong emotional bonds with the phenomena concerned. If children and their parents could be taught outdoor recreation skills in 'magical places', whilst having 'adventures' and perhaps 'getting lost', emotional bonds are made between self and place and between families themselves. We, the academics and professionals, need to enable this situation, as it will not occur automatically.

The study showed that parents preferred 'safe' outdoor sites (local park, country park, farm attraction) where there were sufficient facilities (toilets, restaurants etc) and entertainment. The enclosed nature of these sanitized sites gave them peace of mind and kept parents within their comfort zone. However these sites are not necessarily satisfying the adventure needs of the children. This concept was duplicated in terms of UK holiday destinations – Center Parcs was mentioned by both adults and children as a 'safe place'. Once again the national agencies and local providers need to consider using their sites for outdoor skills training and using them as gateways to the world of adventurous possibilities in the countryside beyond the boundary fence. If this is the degree of countryside recreation participation amongst affluent suburban families, those without financial and mobility constraints, then the prospects for families in more deprived areas may be very limited.

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Appendix A

Programme

09:30 *Registration and Refreshments*

10:00 Introduction and welcome by Chair

10:15 **Why indoors? The value of outdoor learning.**

Prof Pete Higgins, Edinburgh University

10:45 **The manifesto for outdoor learning.**

Beth Gardner, Council for Learning Outside the Classroom

11:15 *Refreshments*

11:30 **Learning in the Outdoors - Research Themes and Findings**

Dr Sarah-Anne Munoz, Sustainable Development Research Centre

12:00 Q&A with morning speakers

12:30 *Lunch*

13:15 Welcome back from the Chair and introduction to workshops (delegates to attend 2 out of the 4 workshops)

1. Safety and Quality assurance for outdoor education.

Bob Barton, Adventure Activity Associates

2. Forest Kindergarten.

Karen Boyd, Forestry Commission

3. Without Walls project.

Julia Sargent, Learning through Landscapes/Oxfordshire County Council

4. The Not So Great Outdoors?

Debbie Pearlman-Hougie, University of Hertfordshire

13:30 **Workshop session 1**

14:30 *Refreshments*

14:45 **Workshop session 2**

15:45 Feedback from workshops & summary

16:15 Close

Appendix B

Speaker Biographies

CHAIR

Mike McClure - Sport Northern Ireland.

Mike McClure has a background for over 20 years in outdoor and environmental education. He has worked in Scotland and Northern Ireland both in the voluntary sector and the Education sector. He has been Warden of an Environmental Education Centre and Deputy Warden of one of Northern Ireland's largest Outdoor Education Centres.

His current role within Sport NI is to develop countryside recreation and adventure activities through providing support and liaison to various Governing Bodies for Sport including canoeing, mountaineering and orienteering in N. Ireland. SNI is one of the co-funders for Countryside Access and Activity Network and Mike works closely with CAAN and the other funders including the NI Environment Agency and the NI Tourist Board to increase opportunities for countryside and outdoor recreation in N. Ireland.

CAAN has established an Activity Tourism Forum and an Outdoor Learning Group which bring together the activity industry providers in N. Ireland for forums and information sharing. Over the past 3 years Mike has supported these forums and provided information to the industry on current issues such as health and safety, activity licensing and latest legislative changes.

As a British Canoe Union Level 5 coach in both sea and inland kayak, he is an active canoeist and still involved in coaching and leading in a local canoe club.

Mike also works closely with the staff of Tollymore National Outdoor Centre which is run by Sport NI and is currently undergoing a major redevelopment programme.

SPEAKERS

Peter Higgins - University of Edinburgh

Peter Higgins is head of outdoor and environmental education at the University of Edinburgh. He holds the only Personal Chair in this field in Europe, awarded by the University for achievements in both student learning and research.

His early career was as an environmental scientist and freshwater and fisheries biologist (responsible for the re-introduction of salmon to the River Thames) before he trained as a teacher of outdoor education and biology. He is highly qualified in a range of outdoor activities (notably mountaineering, canoe-sport and skiing) and has taught at several UK outdoor education centres as well as in New Zealand.

He is a member of a number of national and international panels and advisory groups on outdoor and environmental education and is a national representative on the UNESCO programme to 'Reorient Teacher Education Towards Sustainable

Futures', and holds/has held advisory positions for the DfES and Ministers of the Scottish Parliament.

Peter's current research interests are in the theory, philosophy and practice of outdoor education, particularly in relation to environmental and sustainability education; international comparative approaches to outdoor education; land use issues in upland Scotland with reference to recreational, social, economic and environmental aspects of 'highland sporting estates'. He is the author of about 100 articles and author or editor of several books in these fields.

In his current post he is responsible for a range of postgraduate outdoor education and environmental studies programmes, and MSc and PhD students. He teaches outdoor and environmental education on these courses as well as other programmes in the university and elsewhere, and supervises 10 PhD students from the UK and overseas (Norway, Canada, Japan, Zimbabwe).

He has recently given evidence to a Westminster Parliamentary Education and Skills Committee Inquiry into 'Education Outside the Classroom' and during the preparation of the Land Reform Scotland Bill gave evidence to three Scottish Parliamentary Committees. In 2008 he was the Minister for the Environment's appointed external assessor of the review of the National Parks Act (Scotland), and is currently a member of the Minister for Education's advisory committee (the Outdoor Learning Strategic Advisory Committee) and several national and other advisory panels.

He has extensive experience of consultancy work through a number of UK and European Union projects, all of which relate to issues of education, outdoor education, outdoor recreation and the environment, and has been awarded over £1M of research and consultancy funds to carry out this work.

Beth Gardner (MBA, DipIM, MloD) - Council for Learning Outside the Classroom

Employed as Chief Executive with the Council for Learning Outside the Classroom at the start of January 2009, Beth has a strong background in LOtC-related areas supplemented with generic business management skills. She began her working life on a pig farm, having initially aspired to becoming a vet!! Things often don't quite go to plan, so after a degree in environmental biology her true career path began working in the library service. A subsequent move took her into further education colleges after which she spent several years with the careers service in what is now Connexions. She then moved into local authorities and was involved with, amongst other things, working with schools and youth groups facilitating LOtC opportunities across the environmental spectrum, giving her direct and broad experience within the user sector.

An ecologist by training she progressed into the voluntary sector, gaining experience within the provider field, working in partnerships alongside a variety of partners spanning arts and creativity to farming and countryside. She spent several years as Director of Conservation and Marketing with Warwickshire Wildlife Trust – an organisation with a very strong education department committed to providing a wide range of high quality LOtC experiences for young

people. Following a brief sojourn to live and work in Poland, Beth returned to the UK to take up a senior management role in a national health and social care charity, where she assumed responsibility for business development, which included strategy formulation, organisational development and fundraising.

Alongside her employment history Beth studied marketing, achieving Chartered Institute of Marketing (CIM) postgraduate qualifications; and an MBA, specialising in strategy, creativity and change management. She has a keen interest in the outdoors, and particularly enjoys running, walking and playing hockey. She loves to travel, is planning her next ski trip and is currently learning Spanish after a stint in Central America.

Dr. Sarah-Anne Muñoz - UHI Millennium Institute Centre for Rural Health

Sarah-Anne joined the UHI Millennium Institute Centre for Rural Health in June 2009 as a research fellow. Her background is in Human Geography with a PhD from the University of Dundee that relates to her research interests in migration, residential geographies and community formation. Sarah-Anne also has interests in Third Sector studies and undertook 2 years post-doctoral research with SDRC on this theme, including work as a researcher on the ESF-equal funded Best Procurement Programme (Benefiting the Economy and Society through Procurement) which examined the relationship between social enterprise and public sector procurement. Sarah-Anne is extending her research interests in Third Sector work in her current role with the centre for rural health. She is interested in bringing a stronger focus on social theory and spatiality into research of this type. Sarah-Anne is also interested in the relationship between individual's use of outdoor spaces and well-being. In particular, the interaction between individual, society and the state in the use of outdoor and public spaces and the links between human health and the use of particular outdoor spaces. This interest began when Sarah-Anne noticed in her doctoral fieldwork how different outdoor spaces were related to issues of social networks and feelings of community for some BEM groups. With SDRC, Sarah-Anne helped to set up the Outdoors and Health Network which is currently funded by the Economic and social Research Council (ESRC) and the Medical Research Council (MRC) to investigate interdisciplinary approaches to uncovering links between use of the outdoors and health outcomes. She was also funded by the Forestry Commission to write a literature review on children's use of outdoor spaces.

Bob Barton - Adventure Activity Associates

No biography available

Karen Boyd –Forestry Commission Scotland.

Karen previously worked for her Local Authority, within the Early Years Education Sector for twelve years. During that time Karen worked as an early year's practitioner, then progressed to early years team leader and acting head of centre for a short period of time.

Karen's personal interests in the outdoors influenced her practise within her early year's work. This then lead to the natural progression of joining Forestry Commission Scotland as Forest kindergarten officer, in spring 2009, based within their Central Scotland Conservancy.

Karen leads the Forest Kindergarten Pilot project, which involved conducting the Forest Kindergarten feasibility study, and implementing the second phase of the project.

As part of phase 2, Karen is developing, delivering, monitoring and evaluating Forest Kindergarten activities within the Glasgow and Clyde Valley area's eight local authorities early years establishments. As part of the project's development, Karen is also working with local authorities to develop a forest Kindergarten DVD, birth to three conferences and vision and value statements for early year's outdoor education.

Julia Sargent - Oxfordshire County Council

Years of experience as an environmental educator and trainer across the whole age range. Passionate believer that connecting with the outdoor environment has wide reaching emotional and physical benefits for everyone. Have seen the positive benefits that children have gained through regular visits to the countryside, and more recently the benefits of Forest School which I helped introduce into the County in 2000.

Now working for Oxfordshire County Council as Oxfordshire Outside 'Without walls' project coordinator -working with and training Children's Centre workers, childminders and early year's professionals to realise the value and potential of the outdoors for high quality play and learning, especially engaging with families. Farmer's wife, teacher and Mum to 2 young men who tell me how much they benefited from being brought up on a remote island in Orkney!

Debbie-Pearlman Houghie - University of Hertfordshire

Deborah Pearlman Houghie is a Senior Lecturer in Rural Geography at the University of Hertfordshire, UK. She originally qualified as a Planner from the Universities of Birmingham and Sheffield but after a few years of practice was drawn back to academia. Her main love and research area is countryside recreation; practicing, teaching and researching. She has published papers on the 'right to roam', 'quiet enjoyment' and the meaning of the 'second purpose' of UK National Parks. Her recent focus on children and countryside recreation emerged when she wondered if she was the only crazy person who dragged her two small children on long walks and adventures in the British countryside and why they complained so vociferously.

Appendix C



Countryside Recreation Network

Marcus	Sangster	Forestry Commission
Suzanne	Leckie	Sheffield Hallam University
Julie	Swift	Calderdale Metropolitan Borough Council
Janet	Canning	Natural England
Susanna	Perkins	Natural England
Mike	McClure	Sport Northern Ireland
Carl	Atkinson	Countryside Council for Wales
Debbie	Pearlman	University of Hertfordshire
Beth	Gardner	Council for Learning Outside the Classroom
Peter	Marshall	British Association Shooting & Conservation
Fiona	Sunners	Sefton Coast & Countryside Service
Julia	Sargent	Oxfordshire County Council
Judy	Rogers	Yorkshire Dales Millennium Trust
Peter	Higgins	University of Edinburgh
Karen	Boyd	Forestry Commission
Sarah-Anne	Muñoz	Centre for Rural Health
Simon	Hunt	Lee Valley Regional Park Authority
Andrew	McGuinness	Wakefield Council
Helen	Plant	Wolverhampton City Council
Mike	Downey	Natural England
Claire	Scott	Natural England
Bob	Barton	Adventure Activity Associates
Julie	Doherty	Avon Wildlife Trust
Adrian	Collins	The National Trust



Countryside Recreation Network

Carole	Fieldman	Kirklees Council
Val	Lingard	Kirklees Council
Clare	Bryan	Children's Links
Alison	Peters	Natural England
Alex	Benoy	Borough Council of Wellingborough
Vicky	Belcham	Groundwork
Jane	Burdass	Bransholme Enterprises
Jason	Cole	ROSPA
Michael	Hancock	Newcastle City Council
Sarah	Capes	Newcastle City Council
Gabriel	Kaye	Land Based School
Daniela	Ubsdell	Land Based School
Andrew	Battye	Peak District National Park Authority
Ann	Flower	North Lincolnshire Council
Adele	Taylor	Sheffield Hallam University
Joanna	Kemp	Student Force for Sustainability
Angela	Martelli	South West Lakes Trust
Stephen	Green	Moulton College


Appendix D

Beth Gardner's presentation slides



The Manifesto for Learning Outside the Classroom – an overview

Beth Gardner, Chief Executive



Dr Sarah Anne Munoz' s presentation slides



UHI Millennium Institute and The University of Aberdeen working in partnership

Learning in the Outdoors Research Themes and Findings

"...children are disappearing from the outdoors at a rate that would make the top of any conservationist's list of endangered species if they were any other member of the animal kingdom..." Gill (2005)

Dr Sarah-Anne Munoz
Research Fellow
UHI Centre for Rural Health

Sarah-anne.munoz@uhi.ac.uk



Bob Barton's presentation slides



Karen Boyd's presentation slides



Julia Sargent's presentation slides



Without Walls

Working with Families Outdoors



Debbie Pearlman - Houghie's presentation slides

CRN Education in the Outdoors 23rd February 2010 –
Sheffield

**The Not So Great Outdoors? Lost
Opportunities for Experiential
Learning?**

**Debbie Pearlman Houghie
University of Hertfordshire**

