

3.0: High quality outdoor learning in practice

What makes a 'high quality session', and who is qualified to make a judgement? Bringing together various standards related to teaching and youth work, it is possible to identify a common core of elements that are likely to lead to positive outcomes for participants.

The following overview is intended to inform practice and can also be used to inform observations. It has been developed from a variety of sources including:

- » Teachers' standards (England¹, Scotland², Wales³, Northern Ireland⁴, Ireland⁵, New Zealand⁶, Canada⁷, USA⁸, Singapore⁹ and Australia¹⁰)
- » UK Youth Work standards¹¹
- » National Governing Bodies qualification syllabi^{12 13}
- » The **Level 3 Outdoor Activity Instructor Apprenticeship** standard¹⁴
- » The **Level 5 Outdoor Learning Specialist Apprenticeship** standard¹⁵
- » Practitioner conference workshops¹⁶

It also draws on teaching and instructing frameworks, including Barak Rosenshine's 'Principles of Instruction'¹⁷, Robert Gagne's '9 steps of instruction'¹⁸ and Alistair Smith's 'Accelerated Learning Cycle'.¹⁹

The role of academic theory

The wide variety of approaches to outdoor learning is underpinned by an equally broad range of theories²⁰. This guide, with its cross-field scope, cannot reflect all the theories that may form key foundations for specific approaches to outdoor learning. Instead, learning about relevant theories should perhaps be an essential part of the practitioner's make-up, helping to uncover assumptions while providing explanations of how and why some things work and some things don't, and prompting the discovery of new aspects of practice. Theory is not just limited to headline academic theories, as numerous models have also been developed through practice and small-scale research projects (see, for example, the IOL's Horizons publication). Any model that practitioners draw on to inform their practice constitutes a theory, and there are a great many of them – e.g. the comfort zone, Maslow's hierarchy of needs, Kolb's learning cycle etc. All theory should consider the context in which the learning takes place, as some will be more appropriate than others depending on circumstance.

The role of the practitioner

The field of outdoor learning includes many practitioner identities including, for example, teachers, facilitators, coaches, instructors and tutors. Being a practitioner involves continuous reflection and personal commitment which, for many, can be lifelong. Practitioners are also, at times, participants themselves, engaging with others as they develop their experience, skills, knowledge and qualifications.

Just as the practitioners have multiple identities, so do the beneficiaries. Whether they are regarded as (or regard themselves as) participants, peers, students, guests, clients, customers or patients, they all share a common goal of moving further along a desired path than they would otherwise do without the facilitated experience offered by the provider/ practitioner. The role that practitioners adopt and how effective they are is therefore critical to success.

The components of a high quality session

Outdoor learning sessions can be isolated or part of a longer sequence.

The context of the programme or session will have a significant influence on the design of the learning, how it is approached, the outcomes that can be achieved and the activities themselves. From an observation point of view, this means that different aspects of quality will be observed in different settings.

High quality outdoor learning involves planning, initiating, delivering, assessing and consolidating learning. Although there may be some organisational involvement, beyond the structural aspects outlined above, the responsibility for the delivery of safe enjoyable outdoor learning experiences rests with the practitioner.

See also

- 3.1 Planning and initiating
- 3.2 Session delivery
- 3.3 Assessing and consolidating learning
- 3.4 The 21st Century Practitioner – Behaviours
- 3.5 The 21st Century Practitioner - Characteristics

References

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