

2.7: Continuity and progression

The idea of continuity and progression in learning is a cornerstone of learning practice¹. In many settings, learners are viewed as individuals who already possess a range of prior knowledge, skills, attitudes and behaviours which influence how they relate to and interpret the world. New experiences lead to new learning as learners build on their previous knowledge and experience. Learning is not a series of unconnected events, rather it is pathway of development that links related knowledge and skills.

“To benefit from a progression of outdoor learning, participants and providers need to be aware of (and agree) what progression looks like”

Progression is inherent in many outdoor learning contexts and can be viewed from content, outcomes or opportunity perspectives. It can be considered over the course of a single session or over many years. National Governing Body awards and the Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme, for example, provide opportunities to develop levels of commitment, skills and knowledge. Formal curricula offer varying opportunities for outdoor learning progression, often dependent on government policy and teacher training and education, and where policy explicitly supports outdoor learning, teachers are encouraged to build on existing outdoor learning experience.

In learning settings other than formal education establishments, for example residential centres, environmental venues, care farms, etc., practitioners can encourage continuity by considering the place of the session(s) within a wider context of past and future participation and the context within which the programme is situated.

Underlying the idea of progression is a sense of purpose that links decisions about content, delivery and assessment, all of which can be articulated through a theory of change. To benefit from a progression of outdoor learning, participants and providers need to be aware of (and agree) what progression looks like, and what the opportunities and benefits are. Providers should be aware of their participants' start points, their needs and intended outcomes, and understand how they fit into a progression model and what they can contribute to it.

Gauging progress

The integration of assessment and progression depends on being able to recognise the things that are either hindering or blocking progress as well as being able to assess where a learner has got to on their particular journey. It is possible, of course, that where provision is limited to a single session or sequence, the programme might finish with the intended outcomes desired by the client. Responsibility for continuity may then rest with the person who organised the course, although it does not prevent practitioner input to at least signpost to further opportunity or thinking. For providers or practitioners, the question then becomes one of what they can do to help their participants build on the learning post-session.

Underpinning the idea of effective learning transfer is being able to help learners who are achieving their goals with next steps. There is also value in practitioners helping their participants become empowered to evaluate, judge and make their own choices, ultimately making their, i.e. the practitioner's, initial role redundant. For children, participation is likely to be influenced by adult notions of desired outcomes, but as they age, participants gain greater capacity to influence what and how they participate. Practitioners should be aware, however, that availability of opportunities does not necessarily lead directly to access, as there may be multiple intersecting factors that prevent or hinder engagement.



Where high quality outdoor learning practice is taking place

Practitioners:

- » Understand the purpose of the session they are delivering.
- » Consider how their input relates to participants' previous experience and what might come next.
- » Are aware of the opportunities available to participants to develop their learning further.
- » Are able to help their participants to carry learning forwards.



Questions to ask to develop practice

- » What is the purpose of the session(s) you are delivering?
- » What opportunities exist for progression? E.g. staff continuity, activity/ challenge progression, opportunities for skill development, to be involved in planning, or leadership, etc
- » How does your practice contribute to continuity / progression? What can be done to improve it?
- » How can you link what participants are doing with what came before or could come next, in the programme itself, or with life at home, in the community?
- » What additional knowledge and skills do you as a practitioner need to develop your participants' autonomy with regard to accessing future opportunities?
- » What opportunities and support systems need to be in place to enable participants to capitalise on future opportunities?

Further reading

Harvey, D. (2022) *Progression into outdoor learning*. Horizons (98)

Natural Resources Wales **A Natural Progression**

See also

- 2.0 Understanding quality in outdoor learning
- 2.1 Underpinning structures
- 2.2 Safety management and safeguarding
- 2.3 Equity diversity inclusion and belonging
- 2.4 Developing relationships
- 2.5 Outdoor learning the environment and sustainable practice
- 2.6 Theory of change

References

- 1 Dewey, J. (1938). *Experience and Education*. Toronto: Collier-MacMillan Canada Ltd.

