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Making Environmental Education Meaningful

by Jeff Herbert

Bell Heath Study Centre is a part of the Birmingham Outdoor and Environmental Service. We offer a residential outdoor experience for primary aged children from Birmingham. Working with teachers we plan a weeks' residential course to suit the needs of the children. From teamwork to trading games, shelter building to settlement studies.

A lot of the work we do at the centre is environmental, covering aspects of the National Curriculum Science programmes of study, such as food chains in a pond habitat or adaptation in a woodland habitat. What we needed was a way to cover these aspects while making the activities fun and meaningful. We were also aware of the need to involve the children in taking responsibility for the environment around them. The problem was how to achieve this.

It was then we came across The John Muir Award. As we investigated this further we realised this was just what we needed. In a week of focussed environmental work we could cover what the schools needed and the children completing the course would be awarded a certificate from John Muir Award to show their efforts were worthwhile.

The Award covers four main challenges.

1. Discover a wild place
2. Explore its wildness
3. Help to conserve it
4. Share your experiences with others

We had no problems taking children out to discover and explore the local area. We do this with lots of groups; comparing the city with the countryside, looking for continuity and change in the landscape, discussing the Countryside Code, learning map skills, habitat studies, identifying and sketching what we find. Easy, we do this every week. Sharing experiences: no problem, the children could do presentations using Power Point on the computers, they could make posters, leaflets, write poetry, use art or drama to get their ideas across. We were covering so many aspects of the National Curriculum schools would need an extra week just to show what they had learned!

Then we thought about the third challenge. How could we get the children actively involved in meaningful conservation? This needed planning and organisation. To get all the children involved required small working groups with a skilled adult leader. Time to search through our list of contacts! The Woodland Trust helped out, taking groups of children into Pepper Wood to build wigwams to protect coppiced hazel from muntjac deer and to show them

Outdoor Education & Field Studies

traditional wood working skills. A retired Worcestershire thatcher came out and showed the children how to make hazel hurdles to fence off our ponds. Our groundsman is a skilled carpenter and guided the children through the process of making bird and bug boxes. We also had groups of children clearing nettles, brambles and other invasive weeds to make a wildflower bed on site. Other areas were cleared to develop our sensory garden, we visited a local nursery to buy plants, which the children chose for the garden and planted themselves. Litter blown in from the road was cleaned up and pathways were weeded. Our site has certainly improved since we started The John Muir Award!

The schools we have worked with so far have really enjoyed the award. For one school it gave the children something to focus on after finishing their Key Stage 2 SATs tests. For another school it was a way to get the children involved in planning a conservation project for their own school. In all cases the work has not finished when the children leave Bell Heath, it is the start of something to be carried on in their own school from putting up bird boxes to creating their own gardens for wildlife. Others have looked at forming their own group within school to continue the award up to the next level.

So what did the children get from their week at Bell Heath? They have discovered and explored the hills, valleys and the beauty of the Worcestershire countryside and the part they have to play to keep it that way. They have also worked in teams in their conservation groups and have seen that through teamwork real changes can be made that are worthwhile and long lasting. Through the presentations the children have been able to share their experiences with each other at Bell Heath but also with the children, staff and parents of their own school. They also had fun!

What did we gain from The John Muir Award? The four challenges that make up the award give a focus to planning, this means that nothing is taught in isolation, all the activities are linked, making a more holistic approach to Environmental Education. The presentations are on the final day; this gives the children a clear target and keeps them on task right to the end.

Teamwork is a major part of any week at Bell Heath but using the John Muir Award made the teamwork meaningful. The children were doing it for a reason and at the end of each activity they could see what they had achieved and wanted to know what would happen next, so we involved them in the decision making process. 'Where's the best place for the bird boxes we've made?' What are we going to plant in the area we've cleared?' 'What else can we do to attract more wildlife?' This gives the children ownership over the conservation side of the project, they see that not only is their work valued but so are their ideas. We have found this is a great way to show the value of teamwork and raise the self-esteem of the children.

By using the John Muir Award we are encouraging children to take responsibility for their environment, to value teamwork and see that they can make a difference. These are some of the most basic aims of outdoor education and the John Muir Award is an enjoyable way to achieve them. ■

For those who wish to know more about the award the web site is www.johnmuiraward.org

The web site for Bell Heath is www.bellheath.bham.org.uk

Jeff Herbert is a Centre Teacher at Bell Heath Study Centre, Birmingham.

Photos - submitted by the author

Hidden Messages - Teaching Fear

Fear can be a wonderful thing. Imagine trying to live without it. Fear switches on our ancient 'fight or flight' reflex and prepares the body for stressful situations. Fear can give the necessary stimulus we need to perform at our best and it can remind us when we are pushing our own personal barriers a little too far.

by David Crossland

Professional Insight

On the other hand fear can be destructive and corrosive, it can sap at our urge for adventure or paralyse activity. Fear can leave us, like the rabbit in the headlights, unable to respond in a positive and sensible way.

But where does fear come from? Or, more importantly where do our individual fears come from and how is our fear threshold set?

Many years ago, while training Duke of Edinburghs Gold expedition groups, I was given a powerful practical lesson in how easy it is to unwittingly teach fear to young people, to limit their sense of what is normal or acceptable and so prevent them achieving their potential.

There were several of us involved in training groups from across the county and we often teamed up to go away. On this particular weekend Nick and I had two expedition groups on Cadair Idris. We had walked up from the north to Llyn y Gadair in very wet and windy weather. The camping at Llyn y Gadair was pretty marginal given the wind but it was not cold. The group were capable and in good spirits and, if the worst came to the worst we could always descend in the night. So we decided to camp. After a reasonably wild night the staff awoke to find two of the group tents in a poor state and the young people sitting in the remaining tents singing and telling stories. They were still in good spirits. Some of the group thought we would have to go down because, for them, it had been such a wild night and it was still wet, windy and misty but we explained that if they felt OK it was still good enough for us to carry on with our plan to traverse Cadair. After a good day on the hill, during which the weather behaved itself and began to clear, we returned to the minibuses with a very exhilarated and happy group.

On the following weekend Nick was back in the same place with another colleague, Simon, and another two groups of young people. Simon got to Llyn y Gadair first and decided that conditions were far too bad to camp and they should descend to Llyn Gafr. The groups were already descending when Nick arrived and it was too late to change the decision without undermining the group's confidence in the staff. As far as Nick was concerned the conditions were just average for a night on the hills.

None of us thought any more about these events until the following summer when the groups were on expedition in North Wales. The penultimate day of the expedition coincided with the remnants of hurricane Charley, which hit Europe as an extra tropical storm. Charley's strong winds and rain caused structural damage to houses and bridges, along with large-scale uprooting of trees and abnormally large amounts of rainfall. As supervising staff we were camped near Capel Curig but had to leave the campsite in the late evening, along with the river rats, before it was inundated. We were obviously concerned for the groups. Two of them simply called it a day and gave up so were easy to pick up but two others remained on their routes. One of these I met at the Pen y Gwyrd where they were supposed to be camping. As I stopped the minibus it leant over at an angle with rain running horizontally across the windscreen. There was not a dry piece of ground in sight. I was relieved to see one of the group running from the shelter of the hotel and amused when the first thing they explained was that they weren't buying anything at the hotel but that they weren't sure where to camp! It transpired they had come over Bwlch y Rhediad on hands and knees, arms linked. I told them to go to the youth hostel at Pen y Pass and had to reassure them that this would be OK, given the weather - they thought I was giving them an easy option!

The final group also arrived in good order at their campsite with similar epic tales of knee-deep wades along paths and helping the lighter group members to stay on their feet. They too were relocated to a youth hostel and needed reassurance that this would not invalidate their expedition.

The following evening we were all reunited, two groups enthused, exhilarated and proud in their achievement in face of appalling weather and two groups rather dejected and flat. It was only later over a beer that Nick pointed out to me that these groups coincided with the training groups on the weekends described above. I believe we

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Some young people are able to grow up blissfully unencumbered by the fears of previous generations.

had taught two groups that foul weather could, if you were suitably equipped and prepared, be tolerated and, indeed, coped with, while teaching the other groups to be fearful of the weather. There were no other differences in the groups in terms of gender, age, background or ability.

Our fear threshold must, in part, be triggered by what we consider normality. Our sense of what is normal depends on our formative experiences. Our sense of acceptable and unacceptable weather or our sense of what constitutes bad conditions depends on what we know, and what we know, in this context, is what we have experienced. My early mountain experiences were in Scotland in winter and I still remember a slight feeling of disappointment on my first visit to the Lake District to do what Poucher describes as 'one of the most spectacular mountain walks in Lakeland' - Striding Edge. I was naively expecting a Mamores day out!

It follows, therefore, that those who provide formative experiences for young people (parents, teachers, outdoor instructors etc) need to be watchful about the 'hidden' messages, the sense of normality that they inculcate in the young through their actions. The great danger is that we instil a timid sense of what is normal in the young and, therefore, teach them to be unnecessarily fearful. It is very easy for young people to learn it is not normal to walk to school, or to play outside on your own, or with friends, without adult supervision. The need for a responsible adult to supervise can all too easily translate into a need for a responsible state to look after us. On a residential, or during an outdoor activity session it is, sadly, easy for the hidden message to be that adults always supervise and make decisions while 'we do as we are told'. Teachers, in my experience (and I am one) can be poor at standing back and letting young people make a complete botch of something. But, if this never happens, what does it do to the young person's sense of what is normal?

Young children are far more aware than many give them credit for. They know all too well, for example, that when they are on a 'shadowed' walk someone is likely to come and help them if things go wrong. It is easy for them not to take real responsibility. It is fascinating, if you can, to watch such a group from a position of concealment. They may begin by simply waiting – 'someone will catch us up soon'. When this doesn't happen they start

to get concerned, then someone will remember bits of the briefing and the instruction sheet or map, then the group will begin a debate before, possibly a leader emerges and they eventually head off (sometimes, after all this, in completely the wrong direction!). Sadly, all too often they are never allowed to head off, to take ownership and responsibility, to make a real decision.

Some young people are able to grow up blissfully unencumbered by the fears of previous generations. There are extreme examples: it would have been all too easy for Ellen MacArthur's parents and family to gainsay the idea of an 18 year old sailing a small boat alone around the UK. When Tania Aebi's father, concerned about her lack of ambition, offered to buy her a 26ft boat to sail round the world in lieu of a college education, he gave her not only a boat but also a powerful and empowering life message.

Many, however, are not so lucky and grow up burdened by the fears of their elders. Here then is a challenge. Examine the courses you plan or deliver, examine your teaching style and, most importantly, examine your own personal philosophy. Identify and reflect on the hidden messages about 'normality' contained in them. Identify what picture of the world, and their place/role in it, you create for young people by your actions. Consider what fears you are passing on to young people. Ensure that the hidden messages within your personal style and your programmes/courses are empowering and liberating, not fearful and restrictive.

Hopefully from a good outdoor experience young people will take away a sense of empowerment, a sense of their freedom and responsibility, a sense of the possible, a sense that fear, like failure, can be healthy, important and useful. As practitioners in outdoor learning you are in a powerful position – use it well and wisely. ■

Author's Notes

David has worked in Outdoor Education for many years as a teacher, lecturer, manager and licensing inspector. He believes strongly that the natural world, and especially wild places, provide powerful learning environments and that the 'hidden curriculum' plays a major part in outdoor learning.

Photos: All from the author

by Roger Hopper

Excluded and Challenging but Able to Learn

Working with young people who are socially excluded is challenging but with personalised outdoor learning, young people are able to change their behaviour and reengage.

This article outlines a personalised learning approach which has been used to successfully help young people with behavioural difficulties reengage with learning and reintegrate into a mainstream educational setting. Many aspects of this approach will be familiar to practitioners and the techniques can be used beneficially with a whole range of children and young people in a variety of settings. However to bring about real change for disengaged young people the personalised learning approach needs to be holistic in two ways: it requires all the methodologies described here to be used all of the time and all of the staff to use the same approach all of the time.

Key elements of the personalised learning approach are:

- Teaching core values and having schemes of work based on behaviour competencies as outcomes.
- Interacting with the young people based on the concept of mutual respect and shared rights & responsibilites.
- Having a pre-defined set of consequences for poor and good choices.
- Using 'describing reality language as a non-confrontational method of challenging challenging behaviour.
- Using a highly reflective and learning-to-learn approach.
- Considering the comfort, stretch and panic zones associated with both the social behaviour and the activity.
- When on session using "top tips" all contribute to a successful day.
- Good quality initial assessment data, personalised planning and detailed record keeping all support the young people's progress.

The Personalised Learning Approach

Young people cannot access the National Curriculum if they do not share the values upon which the National Curriculum is based.

The National Curriculum Statement of Values underpins the entire National Curriculum and states that children and young people should value themselves, others, society and the environment. Young people with challenging behavioural difficulties generally have very little regard for either or all of themselves, other people, groups or the natural world.

Therefore the aim of the personalised learning is to:

> Teach young people to learn the value of themselves, others, society and the environment.

Once the young people share these values they are then able to reintegrate with mainstream education.

These values apply to every child and young person in the country and can form the basis of a purpose for any outdoor learning programme.

The Every Child Matters (ECM) Outcomes and the National Curriculum Aims of enabling young people to become confident individuals and responsible citizens, can also all be mapped back to these core values. Competencies or behaviours can then be identified which relate to each of these values. In other words "If a young person values themselves they would behave like this …behaviour competency".

CORE VALUES	National Curriculum Statement of Values
1. Self – Value ourselves as unique human beings	
Values	**Behaviour Competency**
a) Understand own strengths & weaknesses	Actively participate in programme
b) Develop self respect & self discipline	Being able to do the right thing when others are trying to lead you astray
c) Clarify the meaning & purpose of our life	Able to enthusiastically discuss which school they want to go to
d) Exercise our talents, rights and responsibilities	Take responsibility for own actions
e) Strive for knowledge, wisdom & understanding	Ask questions without being prompted
f) Take responsibility for our actions	Say sorry without being asked

2. Relationships – Value others as themselves	
Values	**Behaviour Competency**
a) Respect others	Use appropriate non abusive and non discriminatory language
b) Care for others	Being able to do the right thing when others are trying to lead you astray
c) Give others value	Congratulate the success of others
d) Earn loyalty, trust & confidence	Do what you say you will do
e) Work cooperatively with others	Help by sharing
f) Respect other people's privacy & property	Ask before touching or borrowing other people's property
g) Resolve disputes peacefully	Accept other people's opinions and do not gossip

3. Society – Value for families as a basis for a caring society	
Values	**Behaviour Competency**
a) Be responsible citizens	Recognise that your rights have associated responsibilities
b) Refuse to support harmful values or actions	Discourage smoking
c) Support families	Use positive language about own parents
d) Support marriage	Understand own gender role
e) Recognise the diversity of family types	Discuss family values
f) Knowledge of law & legal processes	Understand that breaking rules has consequences
g) Respect the rule of law	Follow rules
h) Respect religious & cultural diversity	No racist comments
i) Promote opportunities for all	Help others to achieve
j) Support others to sustain a dignified life style	Encourage others to do the right thing
k) Participate in the democratic process	Discuss choices and accept the decision
l) Contribute to economic & cultural resources	Create something for others to use
m) Be truthful & honest and show goodwill	Tell the truth

4. The Environment – Value the environment as the basis of life and a source of wonder and inspiration.	
Values	**Behaviour Competency**
a) Maintain a sustainable environment	Support recycling processes
b) Understand place of humans within nature	Do not damage the environment
c) Understand responsibilities for other species	Do not harm or attempt to harm or talk about harming other species
d) Ensure development can be justified	Plant something.
e) Preserve balance and diversity in nature	Leave things as you find them
f) Preserve areas of beauty & interest	Do not drop litter
g) Repair damaged habitats	Pick up other people's litter

These behaviour competencies can be re-worded and grouped under ECM Headings of "SAFE, HEALTHY, ACHIEVE, POSITIVE and ENTERPRISE" (S.H.A.P.E. Form) and become the basis of a Scheme of Work.

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Scheme of Work

Date:.....

SAFE	HEALTHY	ACHIEVE	POSITIVE	ENTERPRISE
Have I kept myself and others safe?	Have I eaten properly & been physically active?	Have I had a go at a new challenge?	Have I been polite and respectful?	Have I looked after my environment and possessions?
Have I made the right choices?	Have I been organised?	Have I asked questions?	Have I helped at Voyager?	Do staff agree I have been honest?
Have I resisted peer pressure?	Have I stayed out of arguments?	Can I say what I have learnt today?	Have I made a positive difference today?	Have I been creative?
Have I kept hands feet and objects to myself?	Have I looked after my body?	Can I say what I need to learn next?	Have I helped others to make a positive difference?	Have I kept going the whole time?

Total Score:.....

Today my tutors want me to learn:	I will do this by:
Today I did well by:	Next Time I will:

Every day each young person is given a behaviour target taken from the Scheme of Work. At the beginning of the day the young people personalise how they are going to achieve this target. So the member of staff might take a target from the Scheme of Work as "today my tutor wants me to learn to keep myself safe". The young person then might choose to achieve this target by saying "I will do this by "wearing my bike helmet". At the end of the day the young people reflect on what they did well and what they will do next time. In this way the young people are developing reflective practice and learning how to learn.

Having identified a purpose for the personalised learning programme, staff and the young people need a set of guidelines as to how they are going to interact together. These guidelines are based on the concept of mutual respect and shared rights and responsibilities.

Rights & Responsibilites

The basis of working with young people is mutual respect with shared rights and responsibilities. These are established with the group "before going out the door" as they detail how you are going to treat each other as a group of human beings interacting together. If the young people don't agree to these rights and responsibilities then you have no basis with which to "go out the door!"

Rights & Responsibilities:

- The right to be safe and the responsibility to help others to feel safe and secure. For example everyone has a responsibility to not bully anyone or threaten others.
- The right to be respected and the responsibility to treat others with respect. For example everyone has a responsibility to listen and not put others down.
- The right to learn and the responsibility not to interfere in others learning. For example everyone has a responsibility to not interrupt.

Having established how the staff and young people are going to respectfully work together, a pre-defined set of consequences for poor and good choices teaches that how we behave can make things worse or better.

Choices & Consequences

A key principle when working with young people with challenging behaviour is to have a pre-defined set of consequences. However the emphasis is on the "persistent certainty" of the consequence as opposed to the "severity". These consequences need to be made specific to each establishment. The example here is the one used at Voyager but can be easily adapted for other Outdoor Providers.

"Whatever we have the power to do, we have the power not to do"

Aristotle

For every choice made there can be either a positive or a negative consequence. This helps young people to understand that they are responsible for their own behaviour and it is they that must choose what to do and then accept the consequences of that choice.

Recognise both positive and negative consequences equally and ask young people if the choice they are making will help them to make things better or worse.

Good Choices Make things Better

Certificate of Achievement

Group Reward Point

Quick Note Home

Use of Privileges

SHAPE Reminder

Have your behaviour pointed out to you

B.O.D.O.R.*

SHAPE Reminder

Loss of SHAPE Points

Loss of Privileges

Reflective Conversation

Reflection Form

Poor Choices Makes things Worse

"B.O.D.O.R."

(Blatantly Obvious Description of Reality)

The language of "Rights & Responsibilities" ("you do not have the right to....") and Choices & Consequences ("the consequence of you doing that is.....") should be used in a holistic way by ALL staff in every situation, so that the young people have persistent consistent boundaries.

(Rogers, W. A. (1998) You Know the Fair Rule (2nd Edition) London. Pitman Publishing).

Describing Reality Language - B.O.D.O.R.

This is a non-confrontational strategy which can be used to deal with any and every form of challenging behaviour.

The process is:

a) Give a "B.O.D.O.R." (Blatantly Obvious Description of Reality) to Challenge the "Primary Behaviour" (the main inappropriate behaviour you want to address).

b) "Tactically Ignore" the "Secondary Behaviour" (other inappropriate behaviour which normally follows the Primary Behaviour).

c) Give "Take Up Time" for student to STOP, THINK, and CHOOSE to do the right thing. During this time you ignore and divert to carry on with the session.

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As an example:
If someone has taken their bike helmet off.

You give them a B.O.D.O.R. – Blatantly Obvious Description of Reality. (the non–confrontational challenge).

You say: "You have taken your bike helmet off"

You do not say "Put your bike helmet on". This is taking responsibility for their behaviour away from them, putting it onto you and is confrontational.

The "primary behaviour" that you want to deal with is the fact that they have affected the instructor's Right to keep them Safe and their Right to stay Safe.

They will then normally give a denial/excuse/confrontation (eg: "no I haven't" or "I needed to scratch my head" or "so"). This is the Secondary Behaviour which you tactically ignore. A common mistake is that staff then pounce on this and end up in an argument about why you should or should not be wearing a bike helmet – all of which is irrelevant and the student has successfully diverted you away from dealing with the Primary Behaviour.

You then give the student **Take Up Time, to STOP, THINK, CHOOSE**. Stop and think about the fact that they have taken their bike helmet off and then choose to do the right thing (put their bike helmet back on). During this Take Up Time you both tactically ignore and use diversion and diffusion tactics to keep things moving along.

If the student refuses to put their bike helmet on, you repeat the loop, but begin to highlight some of the consequences of their actions and whose rights they have affected – more B.O.D.O.R's. Start with the least intrusive - becoming more intrusive.

You would say things like (not all in one go):

"You still have your helmet off, "
"You have taken away your right to keep you safe,"
"The consequence of what you are doing is that it will affect your SHAPE scores….."
"What should you be doing?"
"The responsible thing for you to choose to do is to put your bike helmet on"

The young people themselves must choose to change, rather than be told to change. Therefore self reflection rather than staff assessment is used to help young people reflect on their choices.

Self Reflection

Key principles for getting young people to make a good choice is to first make them aware that they have made a poor choice and then to take responsibility for their choices.

Twice a day at lunch-time and at the end of the day the young people go through a reflection process where they complete their S.H.A.P.E. forms. Against each Behaviour Competency they mark themselves as either a Green – "Yes I've done this" (2 points), Amber – "I haven't done this a few times" (1 point), Red – "I haven't done this at all (0 points).

The total scores they get then dictate whether they go home with a Green, Amber or Red slip. This is a certainty of consequence principle. It also ensures that there is still a certainty of consequence for all the Secondary Behaviour that was tactically ignored while trying to deal with the Primary Behaviour.
At some point you have to plan what you are physically going to do. At this point thinking about comfort, stretch and panic zones helps set the challenge at the appropriate level.

Safe **H**ealthy **A**chieve
Positive **E**nterprise

SHAPE slip

Name:_____

Date:_____ Score:_____

Today my tutors want me to learn:

_____

I will do this by:

_____

Today I did well by:

_____

Next time I will:

_____

...self reflection rather than staff assessment is used to help young people reflect on their choices.

Comfort, Stretch and Panic Zones

When working with young people with challenging behaviour in the outdoors it can be helpful to think of them as having two comfort, stretch and panic zones – one is associated with the activity and the other is associated with the social behaviour within the group. In other words, for most of the young people they are already in their social stretch/panic zone just by trying to exist within the group. Even if you are working with just one young person this still applies as they may be in their stretch zone just trying to interact with you. Understanding this concept is essential when planning the activity. The purpose of the activity is primarily as a "hook" – it has to be something that they want to do and needs to be set at a challenge level which is within their comfort/stretch zone. If you put them too far into their stretch zone with the activity, they can all too easily end up in their panic zone in both the activity and their social interactions.

The other reason why setting the right challenge level is critical is because it is very important/essential that the young people have success in the activity. Not just some success but lots of it. In addition, this success needs celebrating. Verbal praise, notes, certificates, photos phone calls home – you can't overdo it on the praise. For most of these young people they have spent most of their lives feeling like failures. The success that needs celebrating is not only associated with the activity but also associated with their social interactions/behaviour. So when they choose to do the right thing and behave appropriately celebrate this as much as having completed a climb.

On Session - TOP TIPS

The young people need and like boundaries so get a daily routine going.

Staff need to have the flexibility of choosing an appropriate activity for that day. A programme written weeks in advance is too inflexible. Staff need to be able to factor in the weather for that day and the individual needs of the young people. Staff therefore need to have qualifications and experience to be able to choose both the activity and the venue that will promote a successful day.

Building relationships and becoming a significant other for the young people is a key element for success. The same staff, working with the same young people over the longest length of time possible promotes success.

Staff:pupil ratios need to be considered carefully. Some young people need two staff to one young person. Voyager works on two staff to five young people (four is better, three is ideal). Both staff are outdoor practitioners, confident and competent in both the activity and working with young people with challenging behaviour.

Start the day with tea, toast (most have fallen out of bed and haven't eaten) and chat time to find out what is happening in their lives. They may have stayed up late to watch a film or play on their Playstation, have had a row at home, be worried about something or be under the influence of illegal substances. This time normally revolves around a game of cards (UNO is a favourite) and will give you invaluable information on what physical and emotional state they are in.

Draw the plan for the day. Use stick pictures if you are no artist, but a colourful visual representation of what they will be doing helps them understand and prepare.

If you are travelling in a vehicle to the activity, have some outdoor magazines for them to read. Also a few packs of top trumps cards works well. Allow them to listen to their own music with headphones on – set to a level that others can't hear. Drive as smoothly and slowly as you can. Initially the young people will moan incessantly and egg you on to overtake, but after a while they calm down and accept that you are keeping them safe.

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Do not allow the young people to smoke. This is contentious. However, you know it's wrong and they know it's wrong. If you allow them to do one thing that's knowingly wrong (smoke) you have no basis on which to "challenge" any inappropriate behaviour. If they do have a sly smoke, make sure that there is an appropriate consequence. Staff working with the young people are not to smoke either – that includes sneaking off behind a tree for a quick puff. You can't have double standards. All young people have a strong sense of injustice and it will undermine any respect they may have for you.

Use B.O.D.O.R.s all the time to describe good and poor choices, good and poor behaviour and successes.

Patience and calmness, patience and calmness, patience and calmness should be on the top of any job description if you are working with young people with challenging behaviour. If you feel you have to raise your voice, something's gone wrong!

Taking a group of challenging young people kayaking at a specific venue on a specific day is more hazardous than taking a "normal" group kayaking to the same venue on the same day. In other words the "behaviour" changes both the written and dynamic Risk Assessment.

All staff should be trained in positive handling techniques* and child protection as a minimum. Drug awareness, inter-agency support systems, and sex and relationship education training to name a few are all additionally useful. (* De-escalation techniques are the primary tool and physical intervention would only be employed when young people are directly putting themselves or others at harm)

Communication between staff almost needs to be "as one". You do need eyes in the back of your head, so use your ears lots! Group dynamics can change very quickly. Staff, need to be constantly covering each other to make sure that things are moving along as smoothly as possible. However, incidents do happen and there needs to be appropriate operational procedures in place so that staff know what to do.

Working with young people with challenging behaviour is very stressful and at the end of the day staff need a chance to de-stress. **A chat about the day with people who weren't there is essential as they can provide objective support.** If this is formalised as an end of day staff meeting, where each young person is discussed individually it is much more effective. This meeting enables staff to de-stress, but also ensures that all staff are aware of the issues with each young person and helps inform tomorrow's plans.

Finally at the end of the day

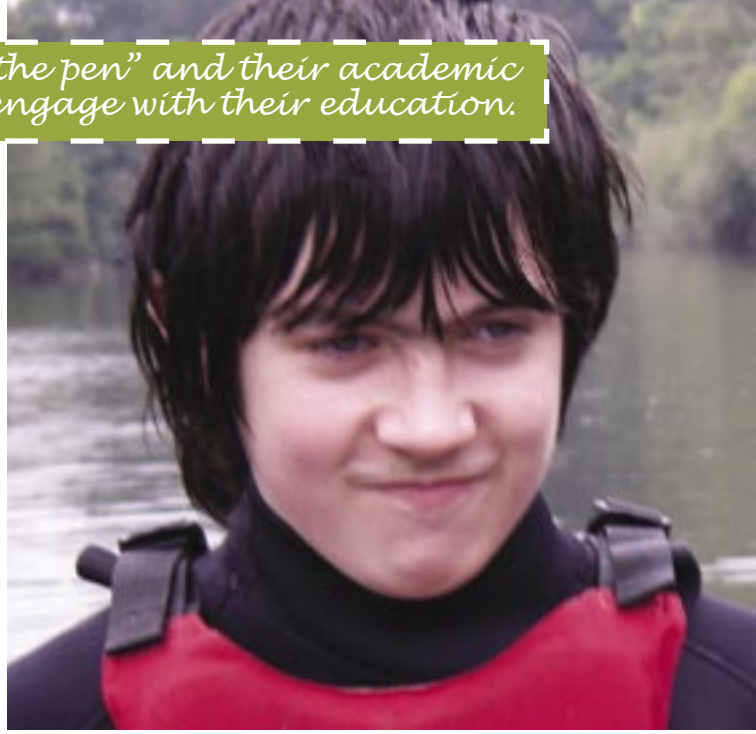
If possible, phone home and let parents and carers know how the day has been. The involvement of parents and carers helps everyone - parents/carers, staff and, importantly, the young people! Working with young people with challenging behaviour requires a lot of good quality data to inform your planning and support progress for the young people.

Initial Assessment, Planning & Record Keeping

There is a commercially available IT based diagnostic assessment tool, entitled Special Needs Assessment Profile (S.N.A.P.) which uses a series of questionnaires (parents/carers, school and young people) to produce a profile of the young person's special needs and suggested strategies that might help the young person. S.N.A.P. is a tool that can inform your practice, but does not replace professional assessments made by Educational Psychologists, and General Practitioners etc.

Another commercially available IT based assessment tool entitled Pupil Attitude to School & Self (P.A.S.S.), uses 50 questions to give an indication of self esteem. P.A.S.S. takes about 10 minutes to complete and is very useful as a tracking tool to establish how a young person is responding to a particular programme over a period of time.

During this time they "pick up the pen" and their academic progress goes exponential as they reengage with their education.



Personalised learning requires personalised planning. So a daily learning plan for each individual young person is better than a session plan for a group. The personalised learning plan for each young person will mention the activity and state the behaviour competency (taken from S.H.A.P.E.) that you want the young person to focus on.

At the end of the day, if the formal staff discussion about each individual pupil, individual learning plans and S.H.A.P.E. scores is recorded electronically you can very easily build up a picture of repeated patterns of behaviours, successful strategies and progress.

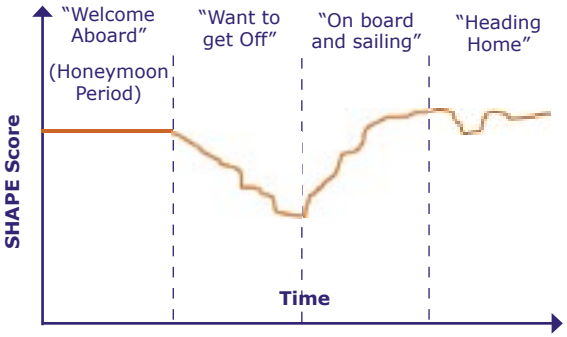
Special Needs Assessment Profile (2005). www.snapassessment.com, date accessed: 29/03/08.

Pupil Attitudes to School and Self, (2002). www.w3insights.pass-survey.com/pass.htm accessed 29 /03/08.

Young Person's Voyage

If the SHAPE scores are plotted over time there is a generalised pattern that most young people follow during their voyage.

SHAPE Scores over Time to Show Progress



The first stage is the "welcome aboard" or the honeymoon period, this can take weeks, days or even minutes! Their behaviour is normally really good as they work out where the boundaries are and become familiar with their new surroundings.

The second stage is the "I want to get off" period. They push the boundaries and spend a lot of time blaming their behaviour on everything, or everyone, else. This is the most stressful time for staff. During this time staff, have to trust the methodology and systems.

Eventually the young people understand that they have to take responsibility for their behaviour. They then understand that staff are here to help them and can be trusted. This is the most exciting time as you watch the young people develop confidence, begin to value themselves and transform before your very eyes. During this time they "pick up the pen" and their academic progress goes exponential as they re-engage with their education. It's a wonderful moment when they move from "I hate those f*****ing teachers" to say "I want to go back to school".

The final stage is when they are "heading home" – going back to mainstream education. This can be very unsettling and the young people need a lot of encouragement to help them believe that they can be successful in another environment. Each young person needs to be reintegrated back into mainstream education differently, according to their individual needs. Some take weeks to reintegrate, others take days.

Saying goodbye is always full of mixed emotion. It's fantastic to watch another young person re-engage with their life, but always a bit disappointing for staff to think that just when we have got the young people to the point when they are achieving - we have to let them go! ■

Voyager
Voyager is a Devon local Authority Pupil Referral Unit that works with young people who have been, or are at risk of being, excluded from mainstream education. Young people at Voyager have an indoor and an outdoor learning programme. Our main aim is to teach behaviour, not climbing or geography.
At a recent Ofsted Inspection, Voyager Pupil Referral Unit (PRU) was awarded the highest grade of "outstanding" for every category. Voyager was the first PRU ever to be awarded this. Therefore according to Ofsted, it is the most successful PRU in the country. The Ofsted inspectors stated that they believed Voyager was providing true personalised learning.

Author's Notes
Dr Roger J Hopper, APIOL, Director of Outdoor Learning, Voyager PRU. Roger didn't like school except when he was walking on Dartmoor. He popped out of University with a few degrees in civil engineering, but chose to work with young people instead. Since then he has worked as a youth worker, Head of a medium sized Residential Outdoor Education Centre in Yorkshire, Activity Manager at a large outdoor centre in Devon, has been at Voyager for about six years and picked up a reasonable portfolio of outdoor qualifications along the way. He is happiest when he's outside experiencing the power of the outdoors transforming lives.

Photos:
All photos from the author.

Do learners learn what teachers teach?

A model to help practitioners consider transformative learning and sustainability education

by Orlando Rutter

Introduction

There have been many articles in recent editions of Horizons about education for sustainable development (ESD) and the way that we, as outdoor practitioners, can integrate this with our work 'learning outdoors'. Sometimes the language of ESD can be off-putting and I have found the following a useful model to help me think about my integrating ESD based on my experience as an outdoor learning practitioner.

Outdoor learning or outdoor teaching?

Outdoor learning practitioners have a strong tradition of debating the relative merits of 'teaching' or processing the outdoor experience and allowing participants to draw their own conclusions without any external guidance (or interference!) from the leader. The latter approach is sometimes referred to as "allowing the mountains to speak for themselves". A good introduction to this apparent tension in our practice can be found in Thomas James' (1980) thoughtful article: Can the mountains speak for themselves?

In fact we probably all adopt different positions on this apparent spectrum at any one time and I have found it useful to use a mental construct to help me be clear in my practice.

Figure 1 (page 7) illustrates two notional scales: the horizontal scale describes outcomes in terms of a predetermined or open outcome whilst the vertical goes from very teacher or leader directed to entirely pupil centred learning. So in the bottom left you might imagine an activity that the teacher has planned in the classroom, that has predetermined learning objectives, a methodology that is fixed, possibly even pre-determined data sets: so perhaps a simple piece of fieldwork to help students understand rivers through measuring variables such as width, depth and velocity but, importantly, with little opportunity for students to develop or test their own hypotheses. Up in the top right quadrant students may be encouraged to develop their own responses to their experiences of the environment with the outdoor practitioner merely providing a very loose frame for them to operate within.

There is sometimes a tendency to think that one approach is more valid than the other – but this, for me, depends on what you are trying to achieve. So, for example – asking a novice to guess how to tie a secure, safe and easy to untie knot on their first climbing session might

well be pupil centric learning with a predetermined outcome…but there are probably better ways of getting this student started on their first session. On the other hand once the climb has been completed it is equally valid to allow the participant time to dwell on their experience in private as to run an evaluation session…this depends somewhat on the participant and the instructor! Similarly, asking students open ended questions when what you have to cover in a relatively short time is a piece of Geography curriculum driven coursework about rivers is frustrating, both for you and the student!

A lot of work that we engage in describes 'transformative learning experiences' as one of the many benefits of our outdoor practice. Transformative learning describes a process where the learner re-evaluates past beliefs and experiences which had previously been understood within assumptions derived from others. It is the process of "perspective transformation", with three dimensions: psychological (changes in understanding of the self), convictional (revision of belief systems), and behavioural (changes in lifestyle). It contrasts with transmissive learning in which the teacher aims to pass on a body of knowledge in its entirety (can you remember your 7 times table?). It is the transformative experiences that are perhaps most exemplified by activities that happen in the top right hand corner of figure 1 and it is here that the link to Education as sustainability takes place (see explanation of ESD1 and ESD2).

Education for Sustainable Development (ESD): ESD1 and ESD2

An example of the fundamental difference in educational philosophy is demonstrated by approaches to 'Education for Sustainable Development' as described by Professor Bill Scott (University of Bath) who, with Stephen Gough and Paul Vare, has described ESD in two additional ways, (see for example Vare & Scott 2007). The statements below illustrate the two fundamental philosophical differences between old and new ways of thinking about education relating to the environment. ESD 1 focuses on behaviour and ESD 2 on thinking critically; while ESD 1 implies learning is to make us sustainable, ESD 2 implies that the learning is part of the process of sustainability.

ESD 1

Promoting/facilitating changes in what we do
Learning for sustainability
Promoting (informed, skilled) behaviours and ways of thinking where the need for this is deemed important by the 'experts'.

ESD 2

Enabling/realising sustainable development
Learning as sustainable development
Building capacity to think critically about (and beyond) what experts say, and test out sustainable development ideas.

In practical terms ESD1 might be teaching that 'recycling is good' and ESD2 might be getting participants to think carefully about their litter, where it comes from, where it goes to, what they could do with it, what their responsibilities are, and so on.

Increasingly the debate on ESD recognises that we cannot use the current teaching and learning styles nor the way in which we process knowledge to solve the problems that have yet to appear. The model of transmissive education ('experts' telling people the 'answer') is replaced with the need to equip students of today with skills that will help them solve problems tomorrow. For an excellent analysis of this see Sterling (2001).

Or, to put it another way:

> *"It has become appallingly obvious that our technology has exceeded our humanity"* - Albert Einstein

This emphasis on learning for its own sake, to enable young people to 'be' rather than to 'do', or as more than just a tool to make future economically active citizens, runs contrary to many of the imperatives in current UK mainstream education…but the ideas behind this more holistic approach to education are hardly new. Delors et al (1996) identified four pillars of learning; learning to know, learning to do, learning to live together and learning to be. Whilst the first two pillars clearly are 'mainstream', learning to be specifically identifies the benefits for individuals:

"…so as better to develop one's personality and be able to act with ever greater autonomy, judgment and personal responsibility."

Now that sounds like something we, as outdoor practitioners, could identify with.

>>

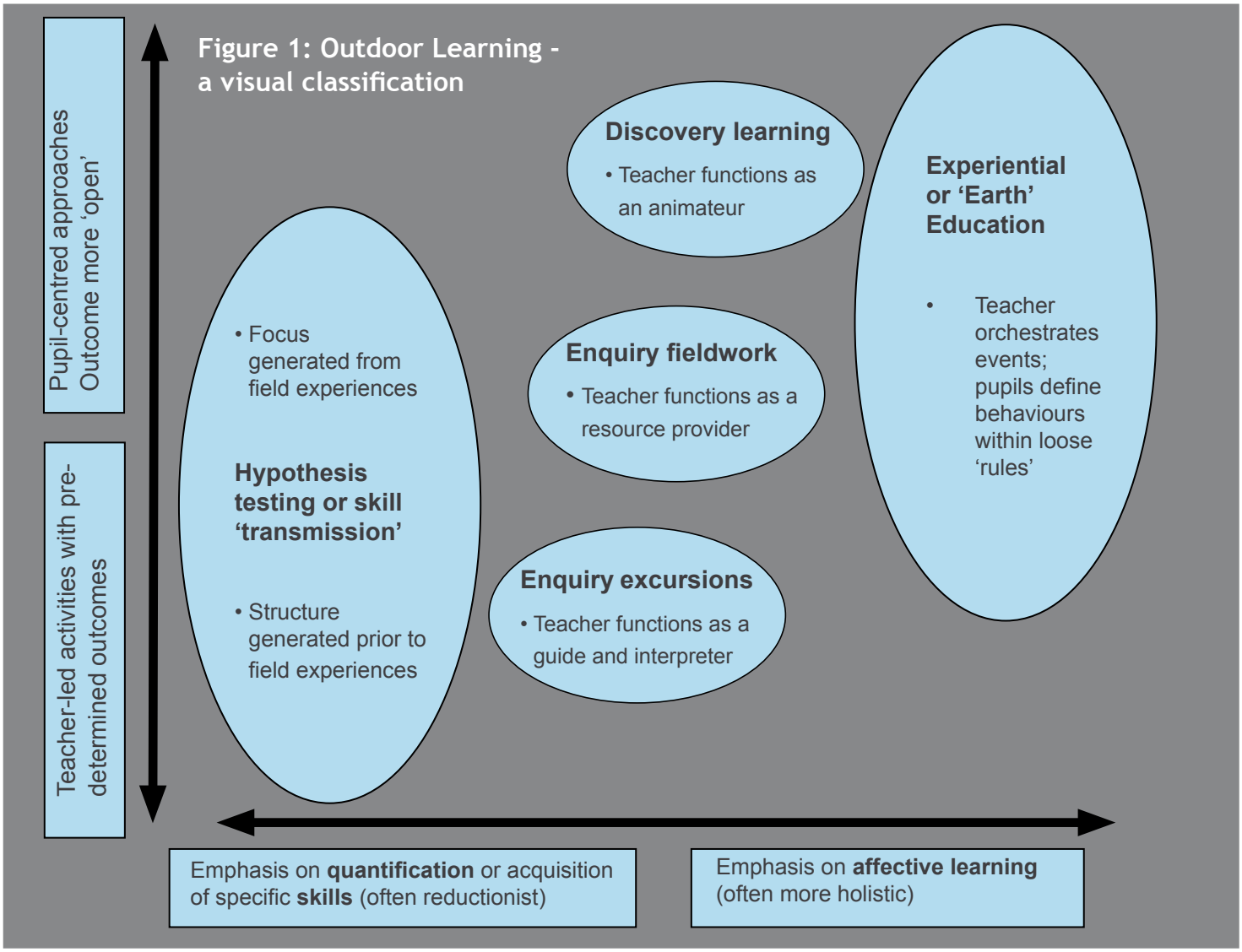
Conclusion

I find this model useful for thinking about my practice; it goes beyond the simple two dimensions of either 'letting mountains speak' vs. full on facilitation and allows a richer range of options to be explored. In fact I quite often add third (and even fourth and fifth axes/dimensions) – for example:

- Deciding on the environmental education focus – is it education for, in or about the environment?
- Considering the activity sequence and pace – the dramaturgy.
- Thinking about participant's needs – some will require more support than others, some require stretching, some will easily achieve…

In practice this means that a day or session may have many layers of activity with different aims at different times but that taken as a whole there is a clear 'journey' across the axes of the model clearly linked to the overall aims – whether those are prescribed by curriculum or are more about allowing space for people to make their own experience.

Figure 1: Outdoor Learning - a visual classification



End questions

Next time you are planning a new session, designing a new programme or perhaps rethinking one of your 'standard' days you could consider some of the following:

- Are your outcomes predetermined or entirely open?
- Do you have soft goals or hard outputs in mind?
- What is your role: teacher or facilitator?
- What opportunities are there to create transformative learning experiences outdoors in your next session?
- Are these transformative experiences about personal development or sustainability thinking (or both!)?
- Consider activity sequence, pace and group management opportunities. ■

Author's Notes

Orlando Rutter LPIOL, Senior Learning & Outreach Officer, Dartmoor National Park Authority.
Orlando has worked for a number of wildlife and environmental education charities as well as in local government facilitating community learning for sustainability.

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Images: **Title image from the author. Others submitted by Anthea Hanson and Low bank Ground Team.**

Some Thoughts on Getting Youngsters Out of the Classroom

by Richard Simpson

Outdoor Education

It is unusual these days to come up against colleagues in the world of education who challenge the value of learning outside the classroom. It is not uncommon to hear their excuses for not getting out and about and we will all have heard these. I often get

'Well I'm too busy to organise anything extra'

'Other colleagues complain that students will get behind if they miss their lessons to go out and about with me'

And, a good one from a primary head, 'Outdoor learning is very important in this school. Year 6 always go on a residential once SATs have finished.' To which I suggested that they could go earlier in the year, but was met with 'Oh no, we can't do anything like that until after SATs'.

A big part of my work is to support teachers in getting children out of the classroom, whether for modest small-scale activities or for major trips. Part of my pitch is always that outdoor learning represents work that is instead of, not additional to, that which they would have done in any case.

This article describes a field study day that I led from Lister School at Herford in Germany. The starting point was to work with Keith Bull an Advanced Skills Teacher (AST) for ICT. Keith was exploring the use of Personal Digital Assistants (PDAs) with primary school children. We approached Lister School because they are active in enabling children to learn outside the classroom and because Jon Gill, the year 5 class teacher, is an exponent of real world learning. Since we have to justify any time out of the classroom in terms of high quality learning, we were determined to milk the day for all it was worth.

The unit of work was planned to:

- Form a useful component to that term's theme of local area studies
- Explore the use of PDAs as a useful ICT tool
- Meet aspects of the Geographical enquiry and skills requirement of the National Curriculum
- Enable the children to gain real experiences and learning about the world around them
- Achieve Every Child Matters outcomes

In doing so the day provided stimulus for work in:

- Literacy
- ICT – spreadsheets, graphs, photographs
- Art
- Geography
- Science
- Simple map work

For me it was easy. I set up the usual stuff about taking children out of school and planned a forest investigation that had a broadly bio-geographical slant and was designed to be strong on the youngsters finding their way around the forest and on data collection. Hypotheses related to the range of tree species, the amount of daylight that reaches the forest floor, depth of leaf litter and nature and extent of ground cover.

Jon spent time with the class setting the scene and preparing them for what was to come – work on forests, local area and so on. Keith taught them how to use a PDA. I did some work with them on risk management and personal and group responsibility. And out we went to meet the challenge of outdoor learning in November in northern Germany.

As far as I was concerned the day was a huge success. The youngsters were so motivated by the preparatory work of Jon and Keith that once in the forest they just got on with the tasks in hand. Jon managed to get weeks of classroom work out of the activity, thus maximising the benefits for the planning and preparation effort. This was strong on literacy, art and geography but also hit aspects of the maths and science programmes of study. One way to get boys writing is to give them something to write about. Keith was pleased because the youngsters developed a range of ICT skills that seemed quite advanced to me. In the follow up work they were adept at transferring and sharing data, tabulating and graphing data and providing hyperlinks from data analysis to photographs that provided evidence of the data collection.

A number of things demonstrate the success of the activity including:

- The children's sheer enthusiasm for being in the forest with a real purpose. The photographs show some of this as do comments such as:
  - I thurelly (sic) enjoyed the forest investigation and I want to do it again (Callum)
  - I was very exited (sic) because I had not been in this forest before (Meg)
  - We were wet, muddy and very cold, but everyone enjoyed it. (Jamie)

- The achievement of Every Child Matters outcomes.
  - After a little guidance on arrival at the forest they just got on with the tasks in hand (Positive Contribution)
  - They were sensible (well reasonably!) about throwing quadrats, not wandering off, supporting each other and avoiding steep ground (Stay Safe)
  - The physical activity and fresh air certainly contributed to Be Healthy, but more than that for some children, it opened their eyes to the idea that there is more to our world than houses, shops and electronic games.
  - Enjoy and Achieve is well illustrated by the photographs, comments and sheer effort in the children's work.

It seems to me that as professionals working in the outdoors, one way that we might promote learning outside the classroom is to help teachers and others to maximise the benefits of going outside. By influencing this group we may well be successful in getting more youngsters out and about and learning for real. ■

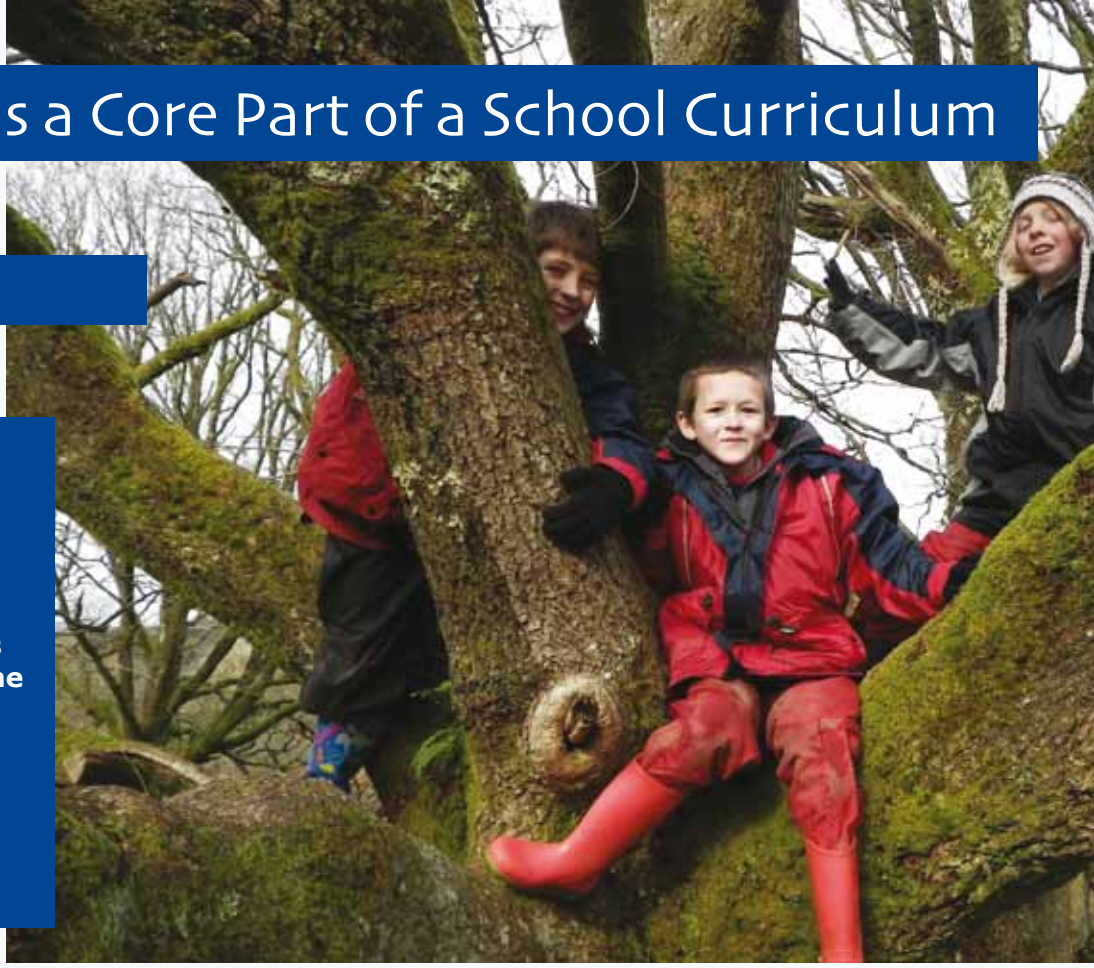
Author's Notes

Richard Simpson was formerly Outdoor Education Adviser for Service Children's Education. Lister School is an SCE school. He now works independently as a trainer, coach and adviser on outdoor learning matters.

Photos: All from the author

Teaching Skills as a Core Part of a School Curriculum

by Roger Hopper



Introduction

This article presents how learning outside the classroom activities form a core part of a Special Needs School curriculum to help the children learn skills.

The skills competencies are generic and could be used by any outdoor practitioner working with any age participant.

School and Pupils

Courtlands is a special needs school in Plymouth, Devon which caters for primary aged children who have moderate learning difficulties. All of the children have a full Statement of Special Educational Needs with a wide range of needs including mild medical issues, developmental disorders such as ADHD and Dyspraxia, mild Autism and some behavioural, emotional or social difficulties. The school has up to 75 children ranging in age from four too 11 years old, with nine classes averaging eight in a class.

The school follows the national curriculum with a strong focus on teaching skills. To this end personal development using learning outside the classroom (LOtC) is taught as a core part of the curriculum. Every child in the school is engaged with LOtC for half a day a week. The sessions are led by two qualified outdoor practitioner school teaching staff.

Skills Competencies

The teaching of approximately 100 individual skill competencies form the main focus of LOtC sessions. These skill competencies have been developed directly from the National Curriculum (Department for Education and Employment, 2009) and have been grouped together under four main headings of:

- Working with others
- Improving own Learning & Performance
- Problem Solving
- Thinking Skills

Within these groups the skills competencies are ordered to support the pupils to progress their skills.

The skills competencies are entirely transferable. Therefore any activity can be used to teach/learn any of the individual skills competencies. The activities which have been developed are therefore based on what will motivate the children, as this then makes it easier for them to access the learning of the skills.

Activities

The grounds within the school have been developed over a period of eighteen months and the current activities are summarised as:

Animal Care - The school has four chickens and two guinea pigs. The children learn to care for animals and transfer this to caring for themselves and each other.

Bike Riding - We have a fleet of different sized mountain bikes, some with stabilisers and an off road track in the school grounds. All the children are learning how to ride the bikes, bike and road safety and off road riding skills.

Gardening - We have a polytunnel, vegetable beds and compost bins. The children are learning about sowing, planting, watering, harvesting and composting and is supporting healthy eating and cooking.

Forest School - The school has a small woodland area with fire pit. The children are learning how to use tools, build shelters, light and cook on open fires including jacket potatoes grown in the garden.

Construction -The children are using tools to build things – bike ramps, weather station, squirrel assault course, bench etc and thus learning about being safe, sharing and work skills.

Climbing Activities - We have climbing equipment and a climbing wall and we can go off-site to use local crags on Dartmoor. Children develop coordination and strength and learn about coping with challenge.

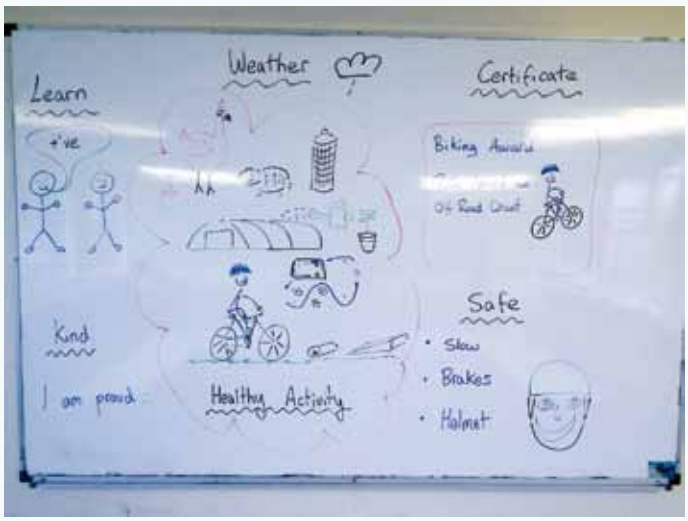
Other - Other activities include orienteering, campcraft, moorland walking and letterboxing. Future plans include watersports activities.

Needs Based Lesson Structure

Lesson planning is based on meeting needs and is structured around the headings of the Every Child Matters (ECM) Outcomes (Department for Education, 2011). Routine, structure and visual clues are important to enable the children to access their learning, therefore every lesson is displayed on a large wipeboard using the ECM headings. See Figure 1 (photograph) below.

"Healthy Activity"

This shows what activities the children will be doing during the lesson. The children often ask during the week what they will be doing in their LOtC lessons. The excitement levels as they wait outside before seeing the board are often very high. There are rotas associated with certain daily routine activities like animal care, watering, filling bird/squirrel feeders etc and the children are developing a strong sense of responsibility and independent working skills.



"Certificate"

For every lesson there is a paper certificate. This certificate is worded in such a way that everybody can get it. It acts as a motivator. It also acts as a link with home, so that parents/carers know what their child has been doing during their LOtC lessons. One parent said that a wall of his son's bedroom is covered in them and another pupil said that she keeps hers in a special LOtC box.

"Safe"

There are an established set of pictures that the children now know. The children take it in turns to stand in front of the class and tell the others how they should stay safe during the lessons activities.

"Kind"

The work of Rosenberg (1989) and his self esteem scale has been modified to identify a number of key phrases/ words that are associated with the development of self esteem. These key phrases are:

I helped …

I am proud of …

I am good at …

I was successful at …

>>

"I helped feed the chickens, I am good at riding the bikes".

As part of the plenary/review at the end of the lesson the children individually say the phrase choosing how they complete it. Eg: "I helped feed the chickens, I am good at riding the bikes". Children with speech and language difficulties do this even if it is combined with signs and gestures. The children will often surprise you with what they are proud of and it is lovely to see how children with low self esteem have grown in their value of themselves.

"Learn"

The learning objective for a lesson is always a skill competency. The generic skill is made specific to the activity and transferred into a behaviour, (something that the children need to do or say). The skill is kept simple so that the children will know when they have achieved it. However, at the start of the lesson, when explaining the skill, it is structured in such a way that the children themselves decide how they are going to demonstrate that they have learnt the skill. This allows for differentiation, personalisation and child led learning.

LOtC lessons at Courtlands are used solely for personal development of skills. There are of course cross-curricular links of knowledge and understanding to individual subjects (science, geography, PE) and lots of development of speaking and listening skills. However these are neither planned for nor assessed. This is deliberate so that the focus remains as skill development. The premise is that by developing the skills and confidence of the pupils they will make better progress when learning other curriculum subjects.

Behaviour Management

There is a whole school behaviour management system which is an adaptation of the model developed at a pupil referral unit and detailed in a previous Institute for Outdoor Learning, Horizons (2008) article. This is structured around the concept of Rights and Responsibilities. The children have the right to "Learn", "Stay Safe" and be treated "Kindly" and the associated responsibility to not interfere with other people's learning, to behave in a safe manner and to be kind. These headings and associated learning are then deliberately repeated within the lesson plan structure.

Planning & Assessment

An excel spreadsheet has been developed for planning and assessment. The spreadsheet allows for planning and assessment against each individual skill competency for each individual child. Therefore, competency in a skill for any individual child in the school is easily accessible to all staff.

Applications for other Outdoor Practitioners

The skill competencies are generic. They can be applied to any child or young person or adult doing any outdoor activity. They are taken directly from the National Curriculum and could therefore support any programme that is working directly with an educational establishment. Using a lesson/session structure that is needs based and participant led transforms levels of motivation and hence access to learning.

Conclusion

At Courtlands Special Needs School, Learning Outside the Classroom is being used very successfully as a core part of the curriculum to teach skills. The skills competencies being taught are generic and could be used by other outdoor practitioners working with any age group on any activity. ■

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Author's Notes

Dr Roger J Hopper, APIOL, Learning Outside the Classroom Teacher at Courtlands Special School. Roger has worked in outdoor education for over twenty years as an instructor, Head and Manager of a couple of Residential Outdoor Centres and Deputy Head of a Pupil Referral Unit. He has a broad suite of outdoor, teaching and management qualifications. He is passionate about the power of the outdoors to transform lives.