

Background

Delivering the Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) as people are always saying crosses many boundaries – many aspects of the four capacities are quite naturally incorporated into outdoor education and outdoor education is always a huge motivator for primary age children. The problem is however that an overarching curriculum design is fraught with problems. It's easy to come up with ideas about developing fitness, working as a team, taking responsibility for safety, acting independently, reflecting on a personal performance and so on but it is really problematic for an individual teacher to find the resources to design an overarching curriculum.

As headteacher, I recognised the need for support for staff in taking forward CfE and in this instance CfE Outdoor Education in particular. I attended the national course and while there were many really good groups – cycle, paddle sports, climbing – who were keen to be on board, the possibilities were fragmented and expensive in terms of class time as well as financially. Often it is the case that an activity can only be delivered to half a class or a group. Start and finish times and transport were also inhibiting. Standards were sometimes an issue as was the ability to relate to the needs of younger children.

Action

I sought to work with David and Chris from Edinburgh's Telford Colleges to design an outdoor education programme which would:

- Be suitable for all pupils in P6
- Provide variety over the course of a session
- Would provide a clearly measurable progression of skills
- Be enjoyable
- Provide activities that could not be provided by a class teacher
- Get pupils off campus as much as possible
- Mesh with CfE (see attached)
- Be affordable
- Mesh with a primary school day
- Mesh with JASS

We managed to do this – amazingly and it was a lot of work to get things right.

Results

The results have been fantastic. The pupils are really buzzing. Staff and parents are really pleased.

The delivery from Telford has been highly impressive. All of the staff have engaged really well with our pupils and are delivering courses to a high standard. We really like the links with the awarding bodies and the principle of measuring progress up to a given standard.

At the JASS Awards ceremony, the pupils will receive certificates for cycling skills, climbing, canoeing and orienteering alongside their JASS sectional certificates and the full award for those who have completed all the other sections.

Elizabeth Wood. Headteacher. Currie Primary School

Extracts from curriculum for excellence through outdoor education

Vision

Our vision for outdoor learning in Scotland is that:

- All children and young people are participating in a range of progressive and creative outdoor learning experiences which are clearly part of the curriculum
- Schools and centres are providing regular, frequent, enjoyable and challenging opportunities for all children and young people to learn outdoors throughout their school career and beyond
- Teachers and educators embed outdoor learning in the curriculum so that learning in the outdoor environment becomes a reality for all children and young people.

Rationale

Curriculum for Excellence offers opportunities for all children and young people to enjoy first-hand experience outdoors, whether within the school grounds, in urban green spaces, in Scotland's countryside or in wilder environments. Such experiences motivate our children and young people to become successful learners and to develop as healthy, confident, enterprising and responsible citizens. Well-constructed and well-planned outdoor learning helps develop the skills of enquiry, critical thinking and reflection necessary for our children and young people to meet the social, economic and environmental challenges of life in the 21st century.

Outdoor learning connects children and young people with the natural world, with our built heritage and our culture and society, and encourages lifelong involvement and activity in Scotland's outdoors. The core values of Curriculum for Excellence resonate with long-standing key concepts of outdoor learning. Challenge, enjoyment, relevance, depth, development of the whole person and an adventurous approach to learning are at the core of outdoor pedagogy. The outdoor environment encourages staff and students to see each other in a different light, building positive relationships and improving self-awareness and understanding of others.

The journey through education for any child in Scotland must include opportunities for a series of planned, quality outdoor learning experiences.

Outdoor learning contributes to delivering the Scottish Government's overarching strategic objectives towards 'creating a more successful country':

Smarter – Outdoor learning encourages learners to understand the interplay and relationship between curriculum areas. This awareness promotes lifelong learning and develops critical thinking skills.

Healthier – Learning outdoors can lead to lifelong recreation. Activities such as walking and cycling which are ideal for physical and emotional wellbeing contribute to a healthier Scotland. Scots have a reputation for adventure activities such as mountaineering and have achieved international sporting success in canoeing, sailing and skiing.

Safer and stronger – Outdoor learning activities span social divisions and can help build stronger communities. Some organisations have therapeutic programmes where outdoor learning plays a central

role. Children and young people have opportunities to develop skills to assess and manage risk when making decisions.

Greener – Frequent and regular outdoor learning encourages children and young people to engage with the natural and built heritage. Scotland’s countryside and urban areas provide ideal settings for children and young people to understand the global significance of sustainability issues and inform personal decisions that contribute towards a greener Scotland.

Wealthier and fairer – The outdoors provides excellent opportunities to use a wide range of skills and abilities not always visible in the classroom. Becoming aware of such skills can fundamentally change personal, peer and staff perceptions and lead to profound changes in life expectations and success.

Partnerships between staff in schools, other educational settings and with other organisations will create working relationships that contribute to professional development for teachers and educators and construct clear pathways for delivering Curriculum for Excellence experiences and outcomes outdoors.

Realising this vision will contribute to the wellbeing of our children and young people and enable them to become resilient, responsible citizens and successful lifelong learners, who value our landscape and culture and contribute effectively to our local and global society.

Progressive experiences

‘All aspects of the curriculum can be explored outside. The sights, sounds and smells of the outdoors, the closeness to nature, the excitement most children feel, the wonder and curiosity all serve to enhance and stimulate learning.’

Providing a progressive range of sustainable outdoor learning experiences may mean maximising the use of local contexts and using repeat visits at different levels to add depth to the totality of experiences. From a learner’s point of view each visit, including ones to the same place, will offer a different perspective, enriching the curriculum and providing greater coherence.