

Planning for learning outside the classroom

In the second of a series of three articles on 'Making learning outside the classroom happen', Martin Smith, Chairman of the Outdoor Education Advisors Panel, outlines how schools and other settings might plan for LOtC.

As Ofsted highlighted in their October 2008 report; "when planned and implemented well, learning outside the classroom contributed significantly to raising standards and improving pupils' personal, social and emotional development." Ofsted also went on to say that: "learning outside the classroom was most successful when it was an integral element of long-term curriculum planning and closely linked to classroom activities."

This gives us a great steer when thinking about how LOtC can be effectively implemented. It needs to be well planned and effectively integrated into the broader programmes or the curriculum within the child setting we work. This applies equally to work in children's centres, youth centres and schools.

In addition to maximising learning outcomes, effective planning will also lead to safer practice when working outdoors. Lord Hunt, in his speech to the Healthy Schools Conference, March 2006, 'Sensible Risk and the Law' during the Safe Schools, identified risk assessment as being a means to an end – 'a way of ensuing good planning'. There is no doubt that the two are linked, a point re-emphasised in the forthcoming revision of guidance for learning outside the classroom (HASLOC) where it states that risk assessment is part of careful planning.

In support of effective planning

Effective planning will take place on two levels within a school:

- 1) The broader curriculum followed by the school as a whole
- 2) The work undertaken as part of an individual lesson or particular programme of work

Whole School Planning

There are currently many effective guides and tools that can assist with bringing LOtC into programme and curriculum planning. The LOtC website has a useful guide to planning learning outside the classroom within the school curriculum. For those working within a school context this can be supplemented by the CPD module on curriculum planning that supports this process.

Further support can also be obtained from the QCDA in the 'organising your curriculum' section of National Curriculum on-line. The QCDA recently produced a curriculum planning guide, 'Sustainable development in action: a curriculum planning guide for schools', which although written with Sustainable Development issues in mind, would be a useful template for LOtC.

What are we doing now?

As with any curriculum planning, an overview of where the school is now is an easy place to start and will also provide a baseline against which to assess progress. In order to undertake this process, a clear idea of what LOtC actually is will be required, something we addressed in the first article. As I found during a recent visit to a school, this is not always as straightforward as it may seem. I had been invited along to help develop LOtC opportunities within the curriculum on the assumption that there was little going on. However, during the session it became clear that there was more going on than people realised – it was even being used to effectively reinforce learning inside the classroom! How had this been missed? Well, it was taking place in the playground, close to classroom on a regular basis with no particular fuss being made. There were also some more regular activities being undertaken just beyond the immediate school environment. However, there was not a much happening in the form of longer planned visits beyond the local environment and it was this that was seen by some as LOtC.

What are we trying to achieve?

Alongside any baseline assessment it will also be worthwhile clarifying why LOtC will make a difference in your school. Think about what it can add and what are the opportunities? I have always seen LOtC as just one piece of a much larger jigsaw and will only be effective when integrated into the whole. It adds another dimension to the components of learning, as recognised in the 'Big picture of the curriculum', developed by the QCDA.

In terms of the next step, the QCDA model for curriculum design goes on to provide a good framework for developing the whole school curriculum. It begins by asking a very basic question – 'What are we trying to achieve?' Establishing a curriculum with clear aims that suits the needs of your learners is essential. The Curriculum at Key Stage 3 and the emerging Key Stage 1 and 2 curriculum from the Rose Review offers much greater flexibility for schools to

design and develop their own curriculum to better fit the needs of learners and wider community.

How do we organise learning?

This leads us into the next stage of the curriculum planning process – how are we going to organise our learning in order to achieve our aims? At this stage schools have the opportunity to challenge what has gone before. This does not mean we discard all previous practice, but gives us the chance to test it and develop new ways of delivering the curriculum. It is within this context that we can begin to maximise the potential of LOtC to support learning across and throughout the curriculum. I think many of us would want to see more LOtC to redress an imbalance that has occurred over the two last two decades and see the lessons learnt outside the classroom taken back into the classroom in order to maximise their impact on wider learning.

Approaches to learning

In a recent paper, 'Why outdoors? The role of learning in sustainability, health and citizenship', 2009, Professor Peter Higgins from the University of Edinburgh, highlighted the need for our work in outdoor learning to focus on the 'three Rs'. In other words, outdoor learning should be 'Real and relevant' to pupils. It offers another valuable tool in personalising the curriculum and contributes to the range of learning styles. It also offers the opportunity to present direct learning experiences around real world issues and as a means of reinforcing learning in other areas of the curriculum.

Professor Higgins goes on to suggest that outdoor learning helps develop Relationships and a willingness to take Responsibilities. Teachers should consider these '3Rs' in their practice. Such considerations can be used when addressing the delivery of personal, learning and thinking skills across the curriculum as part of curriculum planning and should be an important consideration in lesson planning and delivery.

Set within a statutory context

Implementing outdoor learning within our day to day teaching is something I will address in my final article. However in terms of supporting planning, once again I can only recommend the National Centre for Excellence in Teaching Mathematics website. This site not only has some great ideas on supporting mathematics in the outdoors but within the website there is an easy

to follow CPD unit on 'Learning Mathematics Outside the Classroom'. This unit encourages staff to explore how they can further develop their existing teaching and curriculum to incorporate LOfC and would be an excellent framework to supplement more detailed curriculum planning.

How are we achieving our aims?

Evaluating the impact of our work, especially that of LOfC, is our last challenge and an area that is beginning to develop with a little more rigour than in the past. The recent initiative, 'Learning Away', led by the Paul Hamlyn Foundation will pull together research on good practice and the impact of LOfC through residential experiences. Outcomes of this work will be available to the wider teaching fraternity.

Using LOfC as a means of developing pupil self and peer assessment is an element of the Outdoor Education Advisers' Panel 'Outdoor Learning Cards' which also include guidance on reviewing outdoor learning. The use of outdoor learning activities provide an excellent medium to develop assessment technique that can be transferred back to the classroom, teambuilding activities in particular are good at this as well as supporting PSHE.

Lesson Planning

In supporting ongoing curriculum planning in schools I have found that probably the greatest aid to effectively integrating LOfC into the curriculum is merely re-visiting the curriculum and simply asking where can LOfC effectively support our learning? Of course it will not always work efficiently for all aspects of learning but can add value in many areas of our work. I have found that just spending some time with a staff team looking at the term ahead and brainstorming some outdoor learning opportunities has been really useful. These more general approaches can then be integrated into lesson planning, and I intend to explore this process further in the final article and look in more detail at some of the many opportunities we have for integrating learning outside the classroom into our everyday work.

Links

- DCSF HASLOC guidance:
www.dcsf.gov.uk/consultations/index.cfm?action=consultationDetails&consultationId=1599&external=no&menu=1
- Planning LOfC within the school curriculum guidance:
<http://www.lotc.org.uk/getmedia/639461eb-06ce-401b-8fe1-5bc61267ea66/Planning-Learning-Outside-the-Classroom-within-the-School-Curriculum-1-22JUNE09.aspx>
- Out & About CPD modules: www.lotc.org.uk/getdoc/f5e588ee-09cb-483f-84c8-300317c96144/From-curriculum-to-compelling-learning.aspx
- Qualifications and Curriculum Development Agency: www.qcda.gov.uk/
- National Curriculum personal, learning and thinking skills:
<http://curriculum.qcda.gov.uk/key-stages-3-and-4/skills/plts/index.aspx>
- National Centre for Excellence in the Teaching of Mathematics:
www.ncetm.org.uk/resources/