OUTDOOR AND ADVENTUROUS ACTIVITIES: at Key Stage 2

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At Key Stage 2, “Pupils should be taught to take part in outdoor and adventurous activity challenges both individually and within a team.” National Curriculum for Physical Education (Department for Education, 2014). Why does the government think this? In the same way that we develop children's ability to swim, their creativity in dance and their understanding of how their body moves through gymnastics and games, we also need to develop children's sense of adventure.

Does every primary school in our country teach 7-11 year olds to take part in individual and team outdoor and adventurous activity (OAA) challenges? Do some schools offer a Year 5 or Year 6 residential experience and leave it at that? Or do they have a Year 3-6 programme embedded in the physical education (PE) scheme of work? What does OAA mean and what does it look like when schools are delivering a high quality OAA programme?

Children have a natural desire to test out their physical limitations and do adventurous things. More than ever, in today's society, we should be providing a structured programme of adventurous activities, and be trying to limit the sedentary time children spend on computer 'adventures'. OAA offers a unique contribution to the whole school curriculum and without it a child's educational experience is poorer.

Rock climbing, canoeing, caving and other outdoor pursuits are adventurous and present challenges, but are often just one-off experiences. Hence the need for programmes to centre on the school environment itself, without the need for specialised equipment, expertise or wild terrain. Adventurous activities can take place in the school hall and playground.

An adventure education will offer challenge and stimulate the development of key characteristics, such as responsibility, judgement, determination, self-discipline and self-reliance. A high quality OAA curriculum can encourage children to look at themselves differently. It provides the opportunity to develop specific skills and an appreciation of the quality of life. Quite simply, OAA provides a powerful learning environment and has enormous potential to influence children’s personal and social education.

Taking on group responsibilities and decisions enables children to develop an understanding of both themselves and the group. Individuals develop a wide range of personal and social skills when part of a group, especially where there is support and encouragement provided by all of its members. The increased confidence gained through high quality OAA group situations is immeasurable and teachers often find out more about the child through OAA than they do in the classroom. Achieving in adventurous situations not only develops children's personal and social skills but also develops their emotional intelligence and academic potential. It is one of the key reasons why OAA has formed and should form a firm place in any Key Stage 2 primary curriculum in the 21st century.

Clearly, how OAA is taught is as important as what is taught. Children will learn how to learn given the right opportunities. From the earliest stages, they should be encouraged to reflect on success and failure, group work, technique, efficiency and problems, relationships and feelings. Through self-review and group feedback, their own and others’ perceptions of what just happened will be challenged and future attempts will be improved.

The delivery of OAA does not need a specialist teacher; nor does it require specialist resources or off-site facilities. The school environment can provide enjoyable learning experiences that actively involve every child.

In an ideal world, teachers would plan units of work, and go through a process of deciding what and how to teach these in order to progress each pupil’s learning. This would, of course, be preferable but, in today's world, how much time do primary teachers have to plan ten subjects effectively? Therefore, to support the delivery of high quality OAA, a new framework has been developed for non-specialist teachers of Key Stage 2, called Curriculum Adventurous Activities for Primary Schools (CAAPS). It has been designed by experienced physical educators to be flexible enough for the teacher to still think through the process, make adaptations and encourage learning and development in three domains: physical (doing), socio/emotional (affectionate) and thinking (cognitive). CAAPS is a starting point: it allows progressive teaching and learning to take place as all activities are adaptable and interchangeable. Teaching and learning are at their best when teachers give thought to the aims, content and outcomes. The CAAPS framework supports this.

The four CAAPS units (one for each of Years 3, 4, 5 and 6) contain a total of 30 lessons. All activities can be easily adapted to suit the needs of individuals and groups, and include simple physical challenge and orienteering-type activities. All of the resources required to deliver each activity are listed and there are diagrams and photocopyable materials to support teaching and learning.

Enjoyment is a key factor in maximising learning potential. CAAPS presents high quality, fun learning experiences that are easy to deliver without any professional training. It offers a unique contribution, not only to the PE curriculum but to the curriculum as a whole.

For further information on the CAAPS framework go to www.caaps.org.uk

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