




Get Out There

Tell me, I'll forget.
Show me, I may remember.
Involve me, and I'll understand.
(Chinese proverb)



Offering experiential learning opportunities ensures your students understand the world around them and how they can interact with it – from a visit to a supermarket to experiencing forces in your grounds.

Here are some ideas for using your grounds to stimulate learning.

Learning Outside The Classroom

Overcoming Barriers (Permission)

"When planned and implemented well, learning outside the classroom contributed significantly to raising standards and improving pupils' personal, social and emotional development"
(Ofsted report, 'Learning outside the Classroom' October 2008)

More and more schools are seeing the benefits of teaching lessons in their school grounds, from raised standards to improved behaviour. However, for many there is still a barrier. It is essential to highlight these and overcome them.

During various surveys it is evident that the main concern for school staff is complaints from parents if their child goes home muddy or injured, followed by worries of nettle stings and allergic reactions to bees. Other factors include lack of confidence dealing with behaviour and lack of resources/training for lessons outside.

Here are a few easy steps to overcome these barriers.

- Question your staff as to why they do not 'Get out there' more often and respond to those barriers – see the sample questionnaire below.
- Review your current practices and question why they are in place, eg 'Why don't you allow free access to certain areas?', 'Why don't you like your children out of sight?' If you have any Health and Safety concerns then contact RoSPA for advice - www.rospace.com
- Write to parents/guardians indicating that the school is encouraging outdoor learning/play, and that every effort will be made to minimise risks however their children may come home muddy and with minor stings, scratches. See the example below.
- Discuss risk with the children and get them to develop a set of rules - get them to identify the benefits for undertaking an activity, what features/actions may pose a risk, and how they will minimise that risk.
- With school staff including lunchtime supervisors, and governors, discuss and develop a guide to using the school grounds including the benefits, risks and their control.
- Assess your curriculum for aspects that could be taught outside, and develop resources to support this. Highlight these areas in medium and long term planning.
- Offer staff training in using the outdoors for learning.

Example Letter:

Dear Parent/Carer,

At _____ School we are currently reviewing our curriculum and as such are planning to implement more learning outside the classroom. It was recognised by Ofsted that *"When planned and implemented well, learning outside the classroom contributed significantly to raising standards and improving pupils' personal, social and emotional development"* ('Learning outside the Classroom' October 2008)

Working outside the classroom obviously comes with the risk of stings, scratches and getting muddy. Every effort will be taken to teach your child how to minimise these risks such as wearing the right clothes, using dock leaves etc, however incidents may occur and we welcome your support in accepting that this is part of learning outdoors.

Teaching Staff - School Grounds Questionnaire

This questionnaire is designed to assess what teaching is already undertaken in the school grounds and to look at what you would like to teach. If you are new to the school then please consider what you hope to do.

1. Do you think the school grounds are currently adequate:
 - for your teaching objectives? Yes/No
 - to occupy and stimulate pupils at playtime? Yes/No
2. Have incidents that have happened at playtime impacted in any way on your lessons? Yes/No
3. Except for physical education, do you teach or plan to teach any other lessons outside? Yes/No
If no, go to question 4.

If yes, what percentage of your week do you teach outside (this may vary with season)?

If yes, please give more details

If yes, would you be willing to share ideas for teaching outside with other staff? Yes/No

4. What would encourage you to teach in your grounds more frequently?

	Tick
Development of school policy for using the grounds	
Training on completing risk assessments/risk-benefit analysis	
More ideas/resources for teaching outside	
Training on activities for teaching outside	
Information about outdoor art activities	
Greater understanding from parents about the risks of working outside	
Timetabling of activities to prevent clashes	
Better teaching facilities outside	
Other (give details) –	

5. In your teaching, what would you like to use the school grounds for?

6. Have you seen any features in other school grounds that you would like to see at your school?

7. If given support, do you have time to get your pupils involved in developing some part of the grounds (this can be linked into your curriculum)? Yes/No

Learning outside the classroom is not an addition to the curriculum but should become integral to it and a regular part of teaching and learning. To make sure that happens, it is important to build learning outside the classroom into schemes of work and into curriculum planning. In this way, experiences are frequent, continuous and progressive. This should mean that in a typical school at any given time, individuals, groups and classes are likely to be actively involved in some kind of LOtC experience in the grounds, immediate environment or further afield.

Where to Start

If LOtC is about more than improving motivation and raising standards, and we value the importance of risk awareness/management, developing responsibility towards self, others and the environment, raising self esteem, encouraging teamwork and all those other traits that we know are important, then it must follow that our young people need real opportunities to learn how to do so.

A good starting point is to consider how very young children in the Foundation stage and Early Years can readily learn to move naturally from indoor to outdoor learning activities. This doesn't happen by chance; experienced and skilled early years practitioners know how to work towards this approach by having clear parameters, high expectations and not tolerating anything less. If such expectations are in place it should be a relatively straightforward progression to continue this principle through the Key Stages.

Clearly however, moving from largely classroom based learning to a curriculum based on LOtC cannot happen overnight so planned, gradual developments need to progressively introduce children and young people to working outdoors.

A simple progression would be:

- Full supervision, the whole group/class led by teacher/TA and any additional adults deemed necessary
- Partial supervision, groups working independently outdoors but with the teacher/TA having oversight within a defined area
- 'Remote' supervision, individuals or groups working independently with the teacher/TA located at a given point, possibly the classroom

Managing Risk

Staff have a duty of care to manage the health, safety, and welfare of the young people for whom they are responsible. This does not mean however, that they must be 'wrapped in cotton wool'. We therefore need to enable them, as far as possible, to assess and manage risk for themselves. Risk-benefit analysis is the comparison of the risk of a situation to its related benefits. If a situation involves more than minimal risk of harm to children, you must be sure that the amount of benefit clearly outweighs the amount of risk.

Managing Risk continued

Activity	How will students BENEFIT from this activity?	Possible hazards	Who is at risk?	Precautions in place to reduce the RISK	Overall risk rating: L/M/H

Risk management is about identifying and managing any risk of significant harm. A risk's rating (Low, Medium, High) is determined by:

- Likelihood - the chance of an accident or incident happening
- Severity - the degree of injury or harm if it does happen

Thus a small risk of minor injury is not significant so many LOfC activities taking place in the school grounds should not need any more risk assessing over and above applying normal duty of care and under-pinned by school policy, eg the behaviour policy. However, if there is a strong likelihood of minor injury or a small, but not negligible possibility of serious harm, then this would be considered significant. In this case, suitable/sufficient measures should be put in place to manage the identified risk.

Involving staff and students

It would be good practice for schools developing their LOfC within the curriculum to work as a staff group to consider their grounds and the opportunities offered outdoors. To avoid confusing students due to our different perceptions of risks and behaviour an agreement between staff and pupils of what is acceptable should be approached. A brief session adding red wool/ribbons to mark what they consider a hazard helps the discussion. Consider and discuss the hazards on three levels –

- Is it a hazard that should be pointed out but not removed as pupils need to learn about it e.g. the presence of brambles?
- Is it a hazard that is acceptable for students to be exposed to but needs some control measure - e.g. height they can climb a tree?
- Or is it a hazard that can cause serious harm and therefore needs to be eliminated from the area e.g. damaged tree, broken equipment.

Each school will have its own specific areas to assess. Schools should try to avoid the tendency to be over cautious when considering their pond areas, but again, this depends on circumstance such as pond design, location, depth, access, usage, age of pupils.

It is best practice to involve students in developing a code of behaviour for working outside the classroom and using their grounds for play, so that they are fully aware of the expectations placed upon them, not just by the staff but by their peers, thus enhancing compliance through understanding, trust and responsibility for their own actions.

Further information is available by exploring the following links:
Tim Gill's Balancing Risks and Benefits in Outdoor Learning and Play
Council for Learning Outside the Classroom
www.rospace.com
www.oeap.info