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What is the point of outdoor learning?
Year 2 pupils' perspectives on the benefits of outdoor learning

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Abstract

Hands on, meaningful experiences are considered to be an effective base for embedding learning. Outdoor learning appears to offer a successful vehicle for experiential learning, however, research indicates that it is a wide-ranging field in which pedagogy, purpose and approach can vary widely and that the perspectives of educators and facilitators are equally broad. While adult voices are well documented in research on the implementation and outcomes of outdoor learning there is a more minimal body of work that incorporates the opinions and perspectives of children. This small-scale case study proposal seeks to explore and elicit the opinions of children on outdoor learning and consider how these align with wider research. Data will be collected through semi-structured group interviews, questionnaires and observations using the Mosaic approach as a model.

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Introduction

Outdoor learning is a broad area of education that takes many forms. Berg et al. (2021) cite a definition of outdoor learning from Robertson (2014), which incorporates "every type of learning experience that occurs outdoors, whether it is large or small, intentional or not" (p.173). It has become well-established in some countries, particularly Scandinavia, and has been embraced by some education systems but not others (Sahrakhiz et al., 2018). There is a growing research base on the benefits of outdoor learning, though this does not always demarcate the different ways it is undertaken and carried out (Sahrakhiz et al., 2018; Waite et al., 2016). However, there seems to be less research available on how children view outdoor learning and pupils' own perspectives on going outdoors to learn.

My aim in this case study is to determine children's views on outdoor learning, whether they perceive it as having value for their wider learning and whether their perceptions of its benefits align with the benefits evidenced by research in this area. I will combine different methods of data collection using Clark and Moss's Mosaic approach (Clark et al., 2011) as a model. The Mosaic approach is designed for use with children and has a highly participatory ethos and based on this, I will combine observation with a preliminary questionnaire and a semi-structured group interview. My aim is to gather both quantitative and qualitative data in this way. I am interested in Clark's (2007) use of maps and photography and will incorporate these into the semi-structured interviews.

Outdoor learning is more typical with younger children, and I have therefore chosen to focus this study on a Year 2 class at the top of KS1, looking towards an increasingly formalised and attainment-focused curriculum in KS2 (Coates & Pimlott-Wilson, 2019). The research will involve children from a suburban school with a large outdoor area available to them. The case study will address the following three research questions (RQs):

RQ1: What do children say they learn outside?

RQ2: What value do children attach to outdoor learning?

RQ3: Do children's perceived benefits of outdoor learning align with those of researchers?

Literature Review

The classroom is generally the default learning environment for most schools in modern Western society (Sjöblom & Svens, 2019), and as such, outdoor learning is positioned as both an antidote and a complement to this. Studies on outdoor learning do not always refer to identical concepts: the time spent outdoors, intervals between sessions, curriculum emphasis, location and structure are all variable (Sahrakhiz et al., 2018). Given the breadth of the subject and the range of models for outdoor learning, this literature review will consider different examples of outdoor learning, outcomes identified in existing research, and findings on children's perspectives.

Examples of outdoor learning

In their 2016 study, Waite et al. note that comparing outdoor learning is akin to comparing apples and pears – they are similar but are not like for like. The aims and purposes of outdoor learning are influenced by the country context in which it takes place, the cultural and educational context (Andkjær, 2012) and the immediate local environment (Fägerstam, 2014). They are, therefore, inevitably different, even if they may share a similar philosophical approach (Waite et al., 2016).

Location and Purpose

Fägerstam (2014), Sjöblom & Svens (2019), and Andkjær (2012) highlight the significance of location and note the ways in which different locations affect the aims and focus of the learning taking place. In Norway, for example, Fägerstam's (2014) exploration of uteskole – literally 'outdoor school' – notes that the local environment around the school is intentionally used to develop connections with the local community and environment.

In Finland, the Nature School system also draws on areas local to schools but places more importance on interaction with the natural environment. Delivered by external education organisations, Finnish Nature schools fulfil a curriculum requirement for schools to draw on their immediate environment and focus predominantly on learning about nature, sustainability and

environmental safety (Sjöblom & Svens (2019). A further example from Denmark shows an even greater shift towards an emphasis on nature. As described by Andkjær (2012), Danish 'Friluftsliv' can be understood as both outdoor learning and outdoor recreation and frames the natural environment as a change and a break which offers a contrast to what is normal. These variations suggest a sort of continuum on which outdoor learning can be placed, with greater or lesser physical proximity to the 'normal' school environment, greater or lesser connection to curricular learning, and greater or lesser emphasis on environmental education.

Loynes' (2015) review of Quay and Seaman's work on experiential education notes cycles in outdoor education, shifting from subject-centred to student-centred approaches, which makes the space cluttered with competing options and not much time in the school day to carry them out. Space and time to include outdoor learning in a busy school day are pertinent issues, and the location of outdoor learning raises interesting implications if it is less accessible and potentially less impactful due to the infrequency of visits, particularly for urban schools (Waite et al., 2016).

Pedagogy and approach

Loynes (2015) makes the case that a deep connection between learner and experience is important for meaningful learning and that outdoor learning should not become too similar to classroom-based learning, where theoretical experiences are stripped of emotional and physical engagement. Based on this, it could be argued that the most nature-based, child-led outdoor learning is the most enabling for children because of their detachment from classroom-based learning. Yet, these often follow structured programmes with a significant element of adult-led activities, as in the Finnish Nature School example cited above.

Forest School, for example, is defined by Coates and Pimlott-Wilson (2019) as "inclusive, child-focused, offering the opportunity to engage in supported risky play and providing a range of play-based activities" (p.23). However, a trained Forest School leader is a requirement to fully deliver Forest School, and as Coates & Pimlott-Wilson note, while there is a clear, constructivist argument for adult scaffolded learning through play, their study found that children's descriptions of what they did at Forest School "suggested that many activities were structured and facilitated by adults, typical of traditional instruction" (ibid., p.36).

In Germany, where outdoor learning is less well established, Sahrakhiz et al. (2018) reviewed outdoor learning, which was led by teachers and structured to include free play as well as teacher-led activities. They found that this combination meant that much of the school-based social and teaching norms transferred with them to the outdoor space and that in the children's statements, the language of "being allowed to" versus "having to" was juxtaposed when they talked about free play and other activities (p.218).

Curriculum and subject links

While some models of outdoor learning seek separation from classroom-based learning, others specifically aim to extend and enrich it via outdoor learning time. Though not explicitly part of the curriculum, udeskole in Denmark aims to support and supplement the formal curriculum (Waite et al., 2016), and individual schools and teachers take the initiative to include it in their practice. Mygind et al. (2019) found it was very important to teachers that outdoor and indoor lessons were "mutually linked and had the same academic goals" (p.603) though they did not elevate academic outcomes over other goals. Making connections with tangible things, observing and interacting were equally valued and were described by teachers as "an investment in the knowledge bank" for each child (ibid., pp.603–604). Similarly, Fägerstam's study of uteskole in Norway found that the aims and purposes of outdoor learning were flexible as long as they supplemented the existing curriculum (Fägerstam, 2014). In one example, she describes students and teachers using the outdoor space at school for a 'walk and talk' activity to discuss issues that had arisen in the classroom (ibid.).

While there are differences in these various models, there is also commonality, and wherever they may be positioned on the continuum of outdoor learning, they all open up wider spaces for children's learning, both metaphorical and physical. Culverhouse (2017), in her investigation into mathematical play, cites wise words from Donalson which can be applied across all forms of outdoor learning and learning in general: "In teaching, you will come to grief as soon as you forget that your pupils have bodies." (Donalson 1978, p.83, as cited in Culverhouse, 2017, p.12).

Research findings

Despite the diverse nature of outdoor learning, its aims and implementation, the outcomes found across all research reviewed appear to be very consistent, with outdoor learning almost being

viewed as a "homogenous entity" (Waite et al., 2016, p.869). A useful starting point for discussion of the impact of outdoor learning is the 2004 meta-analysis conducted by Rickinson et al., as reported in Sjöblom & Svens (2019), which categorised four types of impact and grouped them as follows:

- cognitive – improving knowledge and understanding with a link to academic outcomes
- affective – changing or enhancing attitudes, values and beliefs relating to how children see or perceive themselves
- social/inter-personal – using and developing communication, teamwork and leadership
- physical/behavioural – opportunities for fitness and the use of physical skills, changes in personal behaviours and social actions

These four areas are referenced to different extents in the research reviewed here and are discussed below.

Making connections

Fägerstam's 2014 study recognised cognitive, affective and social/interpersonal benefits, and participating teachers perceived improvements in children's motivation, communication and participation. They reported that shared experiences outdoors provided a starting point for follow-up learning indoors, making indoor learning more meaningful. Assessing teachers' experiences of outdoor learning in Denmark, Mygind et al. (2019) found that teachers recognised similar impacts and reported these as motivating not only for the children but for themselves to continue to deliver udeskole sessions. In the study findings, teachers talked about the potential for children to make connections in support of their learning, to be more social because of the wider physical space and to "unfold" once outside the classroom (p.604).

Affective outcomes and behaviour

An evaluation carried out by O'Brien and Murray (2007) into the impact of Forest School identified six themes which correlate closely with the four areas of impact above: confidence; social skills; language and communication; motivation and concentration; physical skills and knowledge; understanding of the environment (ibid.).

However, they reported that it took time – in some cases several weeks - for these themes to emerge as outcomes in terms of children's skills and behaviour (ibid.). This was hypothesised to be related to the children's lack of experience in such outdoor environments and their early reluctance to engage with their surroundings.

In contrast to this, Berg et al. (2021), whilst studying outdoor learning in Canada, found behaviour issues while outside were not an issue. They noted that children had significant ownership of their learning and considered this to be relevant to the behavioural finding. Fägerstam (2014), whose study was school based, unlike O'Brien and Murray (2007) and Berg et al. (2021), also found that it took up to three months before children adjusted to outdoor learning and were able to treat the time outdoors as lesson time rather than break time. In the latter case, it seems that familiarity was the cause of the lack of engagement. Given the discussion above, it is interesting that these contrasting models of outdoor learning have identified similar outcomes, both positive and negative.

Cognitive impact and interactive relationships

With regard to cognitive impact, Skalstad and Munkebye's (2021) research on questioning offers some interesting findings. Citing Scardamalia and Bereiter (1992), they differentiate superficial, practical questions from higher cognitive level questions using the terms 'basic information questions' and 'wonderment questions'. Their findings show that all but one of the 'wonderment questions' asked by children were related to observations of nature and were more readily prompted in an outdoor environment as opposed to a classroom environment. They also note the importance of the teacher in this study to be available to take part in relevant, on-topic conversations in order to promote further questions and thinking. Mygind et al. (2019) describe this as 'the common third', a concept introduced by philosopher Michael Husen to describe unusual situations in which the teacher and pupils work together to solve a problem or address a situation. For Mygind et al. the sharing of a task in this way "enriched teacher-pupil relationships" (ibid., p.606) and benefitted learning both in and out of the classroom.

Academic outcomes

While cognitive impact is recognised in many studies, academic improvements were not found to be typical in the research included in this review. Fägerstam (2014) found that outdoor learning did not impact test results but changed children's attitudes and made them more interested in learning.

Otte et al. (2019) researching teaching mathematics outside, similarly found no significant difference in maths skills between their outdoor learning group and the control group, though they noted limited outdoor learning time as a caveat.

Overall, the literature in this review suggests that the benefits of outdoor learning are not wholly clear-cut and are more complex than they may appear. Equally, the context and scope of outdoor learning, despite wide variation may have limited significance in relation to outcomes.

Children's perspectives

Few studies on outdoor learning include children's perspectives, and this is often noted by the authors themselves (O'Brien & Murray, 2007; Sjöblom & Svens, 2019). Where studies do consider children's views, they tend to focus on children's perceptions of outdoor spaces linked to learning rather than outdoor learning specifically (Moore et al., 2021; Niklasson & Sandberg, 2010; Norðdahl & Einarsdóttir, 2015).

The importance of outdoor spaces

Overwhelmingly, children affirm that they like and want to be outdoors (Clark, 2007; Jørring et al., 2020; Norðdahl & Einarsdóttir, 2015; Sjöblom & Svens, 2019). Clark (2007) cites a study by Cousins (1999) which found that when children went to two different settings and one of them had outside space, they invariably chose the setting with the garden as their favourite. In their research on children's preferences regarding their outdoor environment, Norðdahl & Einarsdóttir (2015) cite a number of studies which state that outdoor areas are the most popular places in schools. Their study sought to engage children in discussion about what they would like their outdoor spaces to offer and found that children talked about investigating, manipulating and examining their environment as well as expressing interest in colour, beauty and access to both natural and man-made resources, including trees, plants and animals (ibid.).

Given the amount of time children spend at school, their access to school-based outdoor spaces must be considered significant, and indeed Norðdahl & Einarsdóttir (2015) note that the schoolyard and playground may be the outdoor spaces most familiar and most available to children. As such, it is important to consider what sort of experiences these environments offer.

Quiet and private spaces

A number of studies specifically found that many children wanted privacy, making or choosing areas where they could be alone or play with a small group of friends (Clark, 2007; Niklasson & Sandberg, 2010; Norðdahl & Jóhannesson, 2016). Niklasson and Sandberg's (2010) research also found that seemingly social activities "can be carried out parallel to another person's activity, not necessarily together in a joint venture" (p.494). These findings suggest that being outdoors gives children a break from the close proximity of the classroom and are interesting, given the emphasis on social interaction as a benefit of outdoor learning. Moore et al.'s (2021) study of two school-based play areas in preschools in Australia would seem to support this. The researchers felt that a larger outdoor area with trees and grass gave children space to find 'secret' places to be alone much more than an urban preschool outdoor area which was smaller and busier, with less natural vegetation, although children in both settings reported that they sought out and found quiet places in which to be alone.

Learning or playing

Children consider their playgrounds to be a part of the school (Norðdahl & Einarsdóttir, 2015) but perceive a contrast with the classroom, which is strongly associated with learning, while outdoors is for play and relaxation (Jørring et al., 2020; Sjöblom & Svens, 2019). Jørring et al. (2020) found that children talked about time outdoors as being "a break all the time" and that "a good day at school means that we are indoors some of the time and outdoors the rest of the time … because it is a good combination to be indoors and concentrate and outdoors making fun" (p.421). Fägerstam's 2014 study findings correlate with this. She notes that children took time to adjust to learning outdoors, finding it hard to move away from the idea that outdoor time was recreational. Similarly, Sjöblom & Svens (2019) found that children attending Nature School appreciated a day that was different to their normal routine but weren't sure if they had been learning.

Jørring et al. (2020) investigated pupils' social and academic well-being in relation to their experience outside the classroom. They grouped children involved into "two opposite levels of academic competence" (ibid., p.414) and found that 'non-academic' boys, in particular, struggled to see the outdoors as a learning area, finding it distracting to be outside. This was also noted by Sjöblom and Svens (2019), who recorded mixed responses from children about whether it was easier to concentrate on a task outdoors or indoors. In terms of social well-being, findings also

indicate a transfer of classroom habits so that social exclusions existing in the classroom translated to the outdoor context (Jørring et al., 2020; Sjöblom & Svens, 2019).

Children's agency

There are mixed findings about children's agency and choice. For higher attaining children, a lack of adult support was welcome, enabling them to tackle challenges independently in a secure and familiar environment (Jørring et al., 2020; Norðdahl & Einarsdóttir, 2015). However, Jørring et al. (2020) found that lower attaining children wanted more support and felt it was easier to get help from the teacher in the classroom, which they preferred. In contrast to academic challenges, physical challenges like lighting a fire (ibid.) or mastering a climbing frame (Norðdahl & Einarsdóttir, 2015) were appreciated by many children though more so by boys than by girls (Jørring et al., 2020).

Overall, while much of what children report in these studies chimes with the benefits of outdoor learning cited in wider research, there are some gaps and discrepancies.

Methodology

Research Design

This research project will use a case study design to gather Year 2 students' viewpoints, experiences and ideas (Cohen et al., 2018) in order to address the question 'what is the point of outdoor learning?'. As the research review above has shown, outdoor learning often has child-led elements and supports a democratic learning context in which a constructivist approach that values experiential education and social and individual experiences is important (Cohen et al., 2018; Loynes, 2015). Given this, it is appropriate that a naturalistic methodology is used (Cohen et al., 2018) and as a case study approach incorporates multiple perspectives and different types of data collection, together these will give a more robust overall view (Hamilton, 2011).

While qualitative data collection is more typically associated with naturalistic research (Cohen et al., 2018), I will use a multi-method approach to compare findings from different data sets with the aim of following Mason's model of mixing methods to ask "distinctive but intersecting questions" (Mason, 2006, p.9). This should also have an additional benefit in that by collating and comparing

data from different methods and tools; I will hope to follow Stake's (2000) definition of triangulation as "a process of using multiple perceptions to clarify meaning" (p.443).

Given the age of the pupils I aim to work with, the data collection tools will be modelled on Clark et al.'s (2011) Mosaic approach with the aim of being highly child-friendly and accessible. The Mosaic approach incorporates child led elements using photography and mapping to form the basis of semi-structured group interviews as well as observation (ibid.). My approach will vary in that I will not include the perspectives of teachers but instead will incorporate observation using the Leuven scale which measures the emotional well-being and involvement of children in early years settings, questionnaires using a Likert scale, and semi-structured interviews using children's photography and map-making as a prompt for discussion.

Participants

The case study will follow Stake's model of a delimited or instrumental case study by focusing on the particular issue of outdoor learning within one school (Hamilton, 2011). Given my focus on outdoor learning and my geographical location in Cambridge, I am interested in looking particularly at how urban schools access outdoor learning. My case school is in a suburban area of a city and has access to some green spaces among its outdoor grounds, including a wooded area which is used for Forest School activities and a large field which is used for play times and PE. The school also has a playground with a mix of tarmac, climbing frames and grass and shrub areas.

The participants will be drawn from a Year 2 class in an urban primary school with a mixed social demographic. The whole class will be involved in aspects of the case study, depending on consent, in order to provide a wider body of data and to give a sample from which to select children to take part in semi-structured focus group discussions.

Cohen (2018) notes that questionnaires can be used as the basis for selecting participants in focus groups or interviews. With this in mind, the participants will be grouped based on the observation phase of the study depending on high and low engagement. One girl and one boy will be chosen from each of three categories – low, medium and high engagement. Similarly, using the questionnaire responses, six children will be selected based on their low, medium or high responses overall. This will create a group of 12 children with mixed responses to outdoor learning to take part in semi-structured interviews.

Data collection

Observation, a questionnaire and semi-structured interviews will be used to gather data on the research questions:

RQ1: What do children say they learn outside?

RQ2: What value do children attach to outdoor learning?

RQ3: Do children's perceived benefits of outdoor learning align with those of researchers?

Observation

Observation is a key tool in the Mosaic Approach and is "an important starting point for listening to young children's perspectives and facilitating exchange." (Clark, 2007, p.351).

Evans (2008) makes the case that observation is a useful tool for gauging children's interactions with their environment and can complement case study work with pupils. Smith (1996) supports this and recommends observation as a way of appreciating what is important to young children, the uniqueness of each child and their engagement with their surroundings, both social and environmental. In particular, it is a means of gathering a record of children's physical movement and expression, which can be read as a non-verbal account of their views and perspectives (ibid.).

I will use a timed observation model (Clark, 2007), which draws on the Leuven Scale in order to gather data related to the second and third research questions – what value do children attach to outdoor learning, and do children's perceived benefits of outdoor learning align with those of researchers? During outdoor learning time, I will record how children interact with others, their physical movement, where they spend most of their time and their levels of well-being and involvement. My aim is to observe 12 children over a period of five minutes each, with this approach being piloted over a 15-minute period to assess its validity.

Questionnaires

I will include a simple, child-friendly questionnaire in order to add a quantitative element to the data collected. I have chosen to use a rating scale – specifically a Likert Scale – which provides a range of responses to a given question or statement (Cohen et al., 2018). My aim is that this will be more navigable for children and will therefore be an appropriate tool for this study. Cohen et al.

(2018) state that rating scales "afford the researcher the freedom to fuse measurement with opinion, quantity and quality" (p.481) and are "particularly useful for tapping attitudes, perceptions and opinions" (p.485). A Likert Scale questionnaire, therefore, has the potential to offer quantitative data while supporting the overall aim of the case study to gather the opinions of children.

There are a number of practical components to be aware of to ensure valid responses, a good response rate and completion rate which support good-quality data (Denscombe, 2017). An awareness of the respondents and their capabilities must inform the design of the questions and the questionnaire so that they are not too long or complicated (Cohen et al., 2018; Denscombe, 2017). The respondents in this case study will be aged between six and seven years and are likely to have a lack of experience and understanding of research tools such as this. To make the questionnaire as appropriate and accessible as possible, the questions will be limited to a maximum of six, using simplified language to support understanding. Children who have difficulty accessing written text will have support from an adult. The Likert Scale will use smiley faces ranging from red as the most negative response to green as the most positive. Recognising the debate about the number of scale points in a rating scale, and the age of the respondents, I will include five scale points to reflect a range of responses without making it overwhelming for the respondents to make a choice (Cohen et al., 2018). The use of smiley faces, while familiar and more appealing to children, also rules out the inclusion of a 'don't know' response which Cohen notes can be detrimental to the data collected.

The "greater subtlety of response" (Cohen et al., 2018, p.480) built into a rating scale makes it suitable for gathering data on attitudes and opinions, which ideally will support my interest in whether children agree with the findings of wider research. The questionnaire will therefore focus on my third research question – do children's perceived benefits of outdoor learning align with those of researchers? The questions will address the most commonly cited benefits of outdoor learning: improved knowledge and understanding; self-perception; communication; physical skills, and personal behaviour. The questions will be carefully checked to make sure they are relevant and will be piloted with a small group of children.

Semi-structured group interviews

Semi-structured interviews are another component of the Mosaic approach. They are particularly appropriate for case studies because they allow for flexibility and depth of responses through

discussion and enable the researcher to respond to what the interview participants say rather than following a prescribed set of questions (Cohen et al., 2018; Evans, 2008).

There is some debate about whether individual or group interviews are more beneficial in terms of data quality (Evans, 2008; Sjöblom & Svens, 2019; Vaughn et al., 1996). Evans (2008) argues that individual interviews are better because responses are clearly individual and are not influenced by others in a group scenario. However, Vaughn et al. (1996) consider these influences and interactions to be beneficial, adding "depth and dimension to the knowledge gained" (p.16). With the aim of matching the research tools to the naturalistic methodology of this case study and reflecting on the social aspects of outdoor learning, I will carry out group interviews in this case study.

Based on Clark's (2007) model and drawing on the tools used by Moore et al. (2021), children will be invited to draw pictures depicting their outdoor learning, collect artefacts relevant to their outdoor learning experiences and take photographs of their significant outdoor areas. These items will be collated into maps, and the interview questions will then be developed based on these with a focus on the first and second research questions: What do children say they learn outside? What value do children attach to outdoor learning? A total of three focus groups with four children in each will be formed to include a balance of boys and girls and a range of children with different recorded responses to outdoor learning based on the observation and questionnaire data.

Data analysis

A thematic analysis will be carried out with the aim of identifying patterns in the data before analysing and interpreting these (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017). A thematic analysis using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase framework will be followed:

- Step 1: Become familiar with the data
- Step 2: Generate initial codes
- Step 3: Search for themes
- Step 4: Review themes
- Step 5: Define themes
- Step 6: Write-up

The interviews will be transcribed, and the questionnaire results will be collated into a table recording the number of given responses to each question and the number of responses sorted by girls and boys. The transcripts will be read and re-read in conjunction with the observation notes and the questionnaire findings in order to start identifying initial codes and subsequent themes. As Braun and Clarke explain, this is not a linear process but "is more recursive" (Braun & Clarke, 2006) and will involve moving between the steps to analyse, revisit and review the data.

Once themes have been identified, these will be reviewed to see how they relate to the research questions to ensure that the data is driving the analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The findings will be written up as a report, and an additional presentation will be designed for the children who participate in the study to show them the findings in a child-friendly way. Outcomes will be shared with the children, the class teacher and Headteacher. The children will be able to present their own maps for discussion with their classmates, and the study findings will be added to this. The school will be provided with a copy of the final case study report.

Ethical considerations

By its nature, this case study is dependent on gaining pupils perspectives, and as such, it requires the inclusion of children's voices, views and ideas. In order to ensure that the benefits of the research are significant and the risks minimal, an initial risk assessment will be carried out, and any identified risks will be avoided or minimised. The methodologies chosen to collect data have been identified as appropriate for use with children based on previous studies and guidance (Clark, 2007; Moore et al., 2021; Smith, 1996). They aim to be inclusive and have been selected with the aim of avoiding stressful or upsetting situations for the children involved and to make their interaction with the research accessible and open. In case of any concerns arising with regard to disclosure or distressing situations emerging, the school's safeguarding policies and procedures will be followed.

This research will uphold the British Educational Research Association's (BERA) (2018) ethic of respect and will assess any costs and benefits of participation before being undertaken. The school's own safeguarding policies and procedures will be referenced to ensure that all proposed research activities are in line with these. Voluntary informed consent to be involved in the research will be obtained before the research begins and will be sought from the Headteacher as well as parents of children and children themselves. An initial discussion will be sought with the Headteacher and

class teacher before formal consent letters are provided. Following this, consent letters will be sent to parents, including an outline of the proposed research.

Based on parental consent and in line with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) – which recognises that children should be given the opportunity to form their own views – children in the participant group will be asked for their consent to participate. The scope of the case study will be described verbally, and the data collection tools will be shown to them. It will be explained that their consent to take part can be withdrawn at any time and for any reason without needing to explain why. Any further dissemination expected will also be explained for purposes of consent.

In line with BERAs guidelines (2018), all data will be anonymised, and no details of the school or children's names will be included in the case study. All names of children, adults and schools will be changed or coded in order to ensure confidentiality. If children's own inputs to the study, including photographs, writing and drawings, include images or names, images of children will be obscured, and additional consent will be sought to include written names. These will be anonymised if this consent is not given. The study will further comply with the legal requirements in relation to the storage and use of personal data. It is not anticipated that any part of this case study or the associated data collected will be published online or shared via any public platform, however, if this changes, the appropriate guidelines will be followed, and any necessary permissions gained first. Outcomes and findings will be shared with stakeholders in the case study research, including the children, their parents, the class teacher and Headteacher at the school involved. They will be shared both verbally and visually, and a written copy of the final report will be made available to the school.

Implications for my future practice

Based on this assignment, I have identified three key implications for my future practice.

There is value in allowing children to spend time outdoors

Outdoor learning does benefit pupils, and opportunities to go outside should be taken where possible. Given the reduced opportunities for children to spend time outdoors both in school and at home, I will aim to include outdoor learning as a regular part of the timetable for my classes.

Evidence cited above suggests that school grounds offer a range of possibilities, are easy to access regularly, familiar for children and are secure. As such, they offer low-cost, low-risk opportunities to take children outside on a regular basis, and I will use them as a primary resource for outdoor learning. I also recognise that learning does not always have to draw on nature and that the environment can simply be considered as a different space to work and learn in.

Planning ways in which outdoor learning can support the curriculum is important, but time outside is generally beneficial for children and does not always need to be curriculum based. Given this, I feel that a combination of structured, subject-related learning and an allowance for children to pursue their own interests would be valuable, and I will discuss this with colleagues and look for examples of schools that use an approach like this. In recognition of the issues cited with behaviour, I will discuss expectations with children to gain consensus on the aims of learning outdoors. Ideally, frequent outdoor learning will help children form concepts of outdoor learning that separate it from break and play time.

In terms of pedagogy, I will follow a dialogic approach with the aim of supporting children to ask higher cognitive level 'wonderment questions', following their interests and using outdoor spaces and resources – both natural and man-made – as prompts. I am also conscious of the potential for some children to enjoy independence while others may prefer outdoor learning to be more heavily scaffolded by an adult. I am aware that the social implications of outdoor learning are not clear-cut and that careful attention needs to be paid to how children are grouped and managed.

The research cited in this assignment suggests that familiar places do not lose novelty for children but rather take on special significance. This supports learning in terms of developing a depth of understanding as opposed to adjusting to new environments and also offers children safe places to retreat to away from the busyness of the school day. While this may not directly impact changes in academic results, the potential for children to make connections and top up their 'knowledge banks' is supportive of attitudes to learning and metacognition.

Pupil perspectives should be sought to inform teaching and learning on an ongoing basis

Children have views on their learning environment and have a right to have their views heard. I will aim to take this into account in order to develop more effective child-centred practice. In a number of studies cited here, children's perspectives revealed outcomes that were not explicit for adults,

such as children's need for quiet, private spaces, and this has resonated with me. Clark and Moss's Mosaic approach and its focus on participative thinking is something which I plan to learn more about, particularly with a view to using an approach like this on a regular basis to understand children's views. Regularly seeking children's perspectives on their learning and experiences will help to ensure that teaching and learning are meeting children's needs and are effective. Building on the Mosaic approach to gather pupils' perspectives on things like their classroom environment and resources will create opportunities for children to share their views and have an impact on their own learning.

As well as giving children the opportunity to influence their learning environment, sharing opinions and ideas should enhance their sense of agency and build confidence in the legitimacy of their thinking and reasoning. There is also an opportunity to engage with children on more challenging concepts, such as what is learning and how do we learn, to understand their views on less visible aspects such as teamwork and hands-on experiences.

Engagement with research

Outdoor learning is an attractive concept, and the benefits cited are appealing, however, engaging more closely with a body of research has given me a much greater insight into the scope, benefits and potential issues with this form of teaching and learning. It has been very valuable to understand the evidence and data behind overarching or sweeping benefits that may be claimed, and this is a useful lesson for my future practice. I will continue to follow my interests in different types of pedagogy and ways of learning, but I will try to take a more informed approach by looking carefully at the evidence behind the headlines.

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