

Issue 85 Spring 2019

HORIZONS

professional development in outdoor learning



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Don't drown in change

Part 2: Getting buy-in

In the previous article (Horizons 82), we looked at how the use of simple frameworks can help guide and support the introduction of outdoor learning into schools. The Outdoor Learning and Teacher Development Model describes a layered approach to achieving curricular outcomes, beginning with the conditions necessary to enable learning to be taken outside. Once these are in place, it is about getting used to the environment – both teachers and pupils – and then learning the particular skills that are necessary to achieve the lesson outcomes. This article builds on the first one and uses the Change Matrix (Figure 1) as a tool for identifying the key elements required to successfully implement change.

The Change Matrix is based on the idea that to implement change, several inter-related components are necessary. The right-hand column highlights the effect if all the components are in place (i.e.



change), but also what the effect is if one is missing. For example, the second row shows a gap in the skills box. Being asked to deliver a new subject that demands skills you don't yet have could very well be stressful, resulting in anxiety. The third row has 'incentives' missing – the 'why are we doing this?' question. If there is no shared understanding of the thinking behind the strategy or the need to be involved, then opposition or slow progress is likely. This also works in reverse (with both children and adults) – if you are experiencing one of the emotions on the right, it could be connected to one of the causes on the top row. The different elements relate directly to the first level of the Outdoor Learning and Teacher Development Model (see Horizons 82).

Vision	+ Skills	+ Incentives	+ Resources	+ Action Plan	CHANGE
	Skills	+ Incentives	+ Resources	+ Action Plan	Confusion
Vision		+ Incentives	+ Resources	+ Action Plan	Anxiety
Vision	Skills		+ Resources	+ Action Plan	Opposition
Vision	Skills	+ Incentives		+ Action Plan	Frustration
Vision	Skills	+ Incentives	+ Resources		False starts

Figure 1: Change Matrix¹

Vision

Establishing and articulating a shared vision that runs through the school means that everyone, including parents, governors, students and support staff are all on board and know what the direction of travel is. Ultimately, including outdoor learning in the school improvement plan demonstrates school-wide commitment.

- What is the vision for outdoor learning in the school?
- Why do you want to introduce it?
- Is it shared or the burning flame of one member of staff?

Skills

Lack of confidence amongst teachers and teaching assistants when it comes to taking the class outside is common. Pressure to engage with the outdoors coupled with a lack of experience and skills can lead to anxiety and stress. Auditing the skills that staff currently have is a good place to start and from there a training action plan can be developed. Skill gaps could be subject specific, or more general ones associated with class management in the outdoor environment. The local Outdoor Education Advisor is a good source of information and training, and there are numerous other training providers and sources of information available. A whole-staff INSET day or series of twilight sessions can be very effective, providing not only the opportunity to try out new ideas for themselves but also to share in a team-building experience.

- What skills do the staff have already?
- How can staff be supported to develop their skill sets?
- Where does training fit into the action plan? Who can deliver it?

Resources

No matter how strong the vision, any new strategy is likely to fail without the resources to deliver it. Again, audits are a good way to start: what have you got in terms of school grounds, within walking distance and further afield? Many schools focus initially on developing the school grounds, inspiring staff and pupils alike, but it can be the small things – such as a lack of outdoor clothing – that trip up progress. Sourcing funding can be a challenge: PE and sport premium funding can be used, and grant funding for small projects is often available locally. Local business might also be willing to help support outdoor initiatives, and volunteers can be a rich source of help.

Implementing an outdoor learning strategy demands time. Sourcing equipment, looking for funding, and developing relationships with suppliers and providers all require considerable effort. Another heavy demand of time which also requires senior leadership support is that needed for planning, reflection, collecting evidence and sharing knowledge.

- What have you got already?
- What do you need/want?
- What is the budget? Where else can you get funding?
- Who/what else can you draw on for support?

Motivation

Implementing any new initiative, in what is already a crowded curriculum, can be difficult. Opposition to taking the class outdoors, with its requirement for new ways of teaching, is a very real possibility. The current focus on testing can lead teachers to feel that they can't afford the time to do anything different and that they are going to be penalised if they do. Support from senior staff, then, is critical to articulate the vision, listen to – and address – fears, alleviate concerns over assessment and help with creative ways of evidencing practice. Celebrating success, sharing good practice and promoting outdoor learning pedagogy and practice alongside other subjects will all help to encourage and empower staff.

- What concerns do the staff have?
- How can these be addressed?
- Does someone have responsibility for outdoor learning?
- How can good practice be celebrated and shared?

Action planning

The successful introduction of a whole-school outdoor learning curriculum is unlikely without a coordinated approach. Individual and enthusiastic staff are a tremendous resource, but a great deal of time can be wasted if practice and pedagogic development are left to chance. An agreed action plan – ideally sitting in the School Improvement Plan – provides clear goals and a realistic time frame for implementation and avoids a potential 'scattergun' approach. Action planning can include skills, resources and site audits, training, key dates, special events, and curriculum implementation goals. Small steps leading to achievable goals will maintain progress and keep motivation high.

- What needs to happen and when?
- Who is going to be responsible?
- Are the targets SMART?

CASE STUDY: St Thomas' CE Junior and Infant School, Golborne

Rationale

St Thomas' School is situated in Wigan, Greater Manchester. The school has a higher than average number of children eligible for Pupil Premium funding and a significant proportion of families are on very low incomes. Many children lack the life experiences we take for granted.

Our children have a number of barriers to learning, including poor resilience, lack of problem-solving experiences and opportunities, poor communication and language skills and low levels of self-esteem. We felt





that by addressing these issues we would have happier children who have a love of learning and who are equipped to perform well in all areas of the curriculum. Many of the skills of outdoor learning are transferable and research showed they could have a positive impact on children's achievement.

Getting buy-in

This was essential to the development of outdoor learning in our school. Before any training took place I worked with the staff in order to establish what they wanted a St Thomas' pupil to look like. What core skills and qualities did they want for our children? Their list was then compared with all the benefits of outdoor learning and the skills and qualities it empowers children with if developed and taught correctly. We had our vision in the making and the staff were definitely keen.

Training

Both time and money are essential to the development of staff knowledge, skills, understanding and confidence. One of the most enlightening activities we did was an audit of staff skills in relation to outdoor learning. Collectively we were quite a talented bunch! We also identified opportunities for outdoor learning on our school site and were pleasantly surprised by the outcomes.

Full days and twilights were devoted to staff training. These were delivered both internally and with external support. Understandably there were some reservations, so it was vital to the success of the project that the training was fun and realistic. Using the school environment as the starting point, the staff became the pupils and experienced for themselves a range of activities that included opportunities to work in teams with different people, develop their creative skills, develop their problem-solving skills, and – most importantly – have fun!

Very quickly the staff were able to see the benefits of outdoor learning.

Planning and delivering

Lots of collaboration amongst the staff made for the planning of successful learning experiences for the pupils, based around the following areas:

- Exploring and discovering
- Creating
- Applying
- Team building
- Investigating
- Growing and cooking



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Outdoor learning is identified on medium and long term plans in all year groups. Pupils benefit from a range of engaging, purposeful learning experiences.

These learning experiences are merely the starting point for our children as they can transfer many of the skills during whole-class visits. Our Year 2 pupils, for example, were able to use the mapping skills they developed at school during a full day visit to Delamere Forest. From Year 3 onwards our pupils experience a range of residential visits where they are able to build upon and extend the skills already developed at school.

What next?

Whilst we have key elements of outdoor learning firmly embedded, I feel it is important to continue to add new elements to keep the momentum going. In the past 18 months we have come a long way and I am incredibly proud of all my staff and pupils for the way they have embraced our outdoor learning vision.

Joanne Woods, Headteacher ■

References

1 Lippitt, M. (1987) The Managing Complex Change Model. Available at: <https://www.panview.nl/en/lean-production-theory/5-elements-succesful-change>.

Further reading

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AUTHORS:



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Dave is currently studying for a PhD at the University of Cumbria looking at the reach, capacity and progression opportunities for outdoor learning. He has been actively involved with teacher training and outdoor learning curriculum development since 2009, working with the IOL to establish the 'Enabling Outdoor Learning' INSET programme.



Joanne Woods

Joanne is Headteacher of a primary school in Wigan. Outdoor learning has always been a high priority since the beginning of her teaching career and as Head she is actively developing it to enhance the curriculum and provide the children with valuable life skills.

Photos: from the authors