

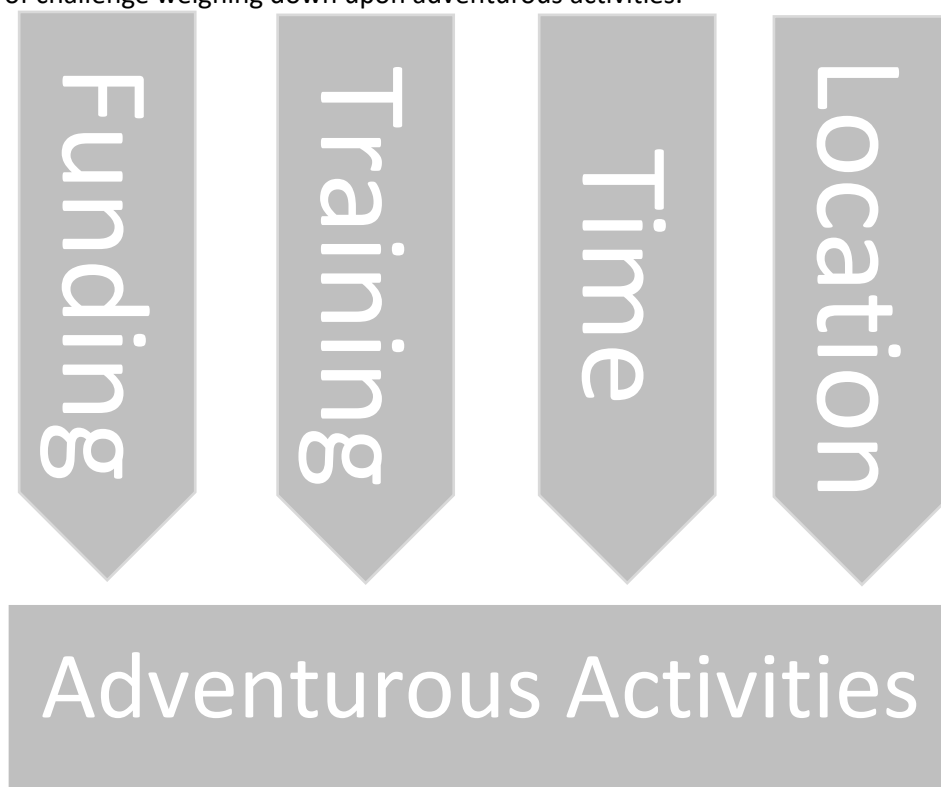
Outdoor Education in the Curriculum

Thank you Rachael for getting this important debate under way with a wonderfully written and thought provoking piece.

I thought I would attempt to put across my thoughts on the topic using a visual approach. It is worth noting that have provided a brief bibliography of some of my reading in addition to the recommended texts, to go some way to highlight where my opinion has originated from, however some of what I discuss is based upon my personal observations.

When considering the current provision outdoor education within the national curriculum, it can be found that the provision typically falls into two categories. Residential outdoor education experiences or in school experiences. I thought I would concentrate on in school provision. To prevent my thoughts wandering to broadly I have narrowed my inquiry to the provision of such activities in Wales. The Welsh National Curriculum documents refer to outdoor education as “Adventurous Activities”. These adventurous activities are intended to be delivered as an aspect of PE. So therefore have a physical Literacy and Foundational Movement Competencies bias. Focusing the attention of the experiences on physical development rather than the affordances provided by such activities to develop a connection with nature. This is before we consider the capabilities of genuine adventurous activities to develop stronger social bonds, and a more positive relationship with risk among a plethora of other potential benefits.

My rudimentary diagram below attempts to outline the challenges that the delivery of adventurous activities face within a typical school environment. By taking the distinctive supporting pillars model and turning it on its head I am attempting to demonstrate how these pillars in question are in fact the pillars of challenge weighing down upon adventurous activities.



Funding

As Mathew has previously stated school funding is dropping at an alarming rate. Through my personal experiences of running commercial adventure company that was attempting to extend its provision of residential experiences to provision within schools, funding was always the first and most controversial pillar of challenge to off load. This is only going to become more difficult as more residential providers will be forced to look for ways to diversify. As organisations come under greater financial stress due to the Covid pandemic. This could well result in a ugly price war over the provision of in school experiences. Additionally the additional cost for training and facilities required for such activities is increasingly becoming difficult to justify. For example the IOL state that a school can have a simple bouldering traversing well installed for approximately £3000, not an insignificant sum of money, when bearing in mind this is only one aspect of possible provision required.

Training

Whilst working alongside primary school teachers to explore their adventurous provision and attempt to find genuine adventurous opportunities within their school environment, I witnessed a genuine desire to provide meaningful activities. Extensively however, the need for additional training had been identified. I was heartened to discover the existence of the IOL Outdoor Learning Cards. These have been developed to provide some guidance for teachers on how to provide these adventurous activities. I cannot speak from the view point of a teacher however these Outdoor Learning Cards appear like they have helped bridge the training gap and ease the fear of leading adventurous activities. Particularly when they have come hand in hand with CPD. I also experienced a justifiable level of fear associated with providing activities described as adventurous. Which by their very definition are associated with increased levels of risk. A responsibility teachers were often not willing to be responsible for. This somewhat explains the existing commodified approach to the external provision of such activities.

Time

Those of you who have worked within formal education would know all too well how little time teachers have to innovate and develop new approaches to educating their students. Particularly within an area they have potentially had very little personal experience or training. So in my experience quite often these adventurous activities become another reflection of the tick box mentality of some aspects of formal education.

Location

School environments are limited and at times overly familiar for pupils resulting in it becoming very challenging for teachers to provide meaningful experiences let alone experiential outdoor experiences. Linking to my previous point often schools do not have the funding to enhance the school outdoor learning environment.

To conclude, I too completely agree with your point Lizzy that outdoor education should be a fundamental building block within education for all at a holistic level. Hopefully my rambling narrative about my loosely evidenced model goes some way to highlight the extensive cultural and practical challenges outdoor education and us as outdoor educators face. I am deeply concerned for outdoor education as we know it, the immediate future looks bleak with job losses and providers going out of business across the country, the outdoor education community needs to evolve rapidly in a coordinated manner to safe guard a future.

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