

01 – Teachers and Rangers

Fostering ownership, value of space to young people

Being involved in a space's development from a young age leads to valuing it later in life

Fostering a sense of ownership through involvement over time

Creation leads to ownership –

“Being involved in developing [the park], studying it. So that they feel like it's their park—not just some open space to throw cans in”

Developing place as an investment for the future

Getting kids taking ownership as a route to places' sustainability –

“They have ownership of it, the whole thing, and then maybe they'll appreciate it and look after it.”

Schools are slow, lumbering, handicapped institutions

Schools are slow to evolve

Progress is reliant on individual teachers' attitudes

Teachers restricted by top-down pressure

Teachers' creativity has been “knocked out of them”

Later school stages are more structured and restrictive

Time is a sparse resource

Time is in demand by multiple teachers across subjects

Value of outdoor learning

Combining the teaching of multiple curriculum subjects through one topic of interest

Outdoor learning has “enormous” benefits

Situated outdoor learning is necessary for some subjects – “I was a geographer—you can't teach geography in the bloody classroom!”

Negative aspects and complications of technology

Technology de-skills people, removes the necessity to learn skills – “I think a lot of technology actually de-skills people—it takes away the skill, and takes away the learning that needs to go on.”

People are over-reliant on technology

Need for curation

Sensitivity of data

Need for security

Empowerment through technology

Enables access to experiences by the disadvantaged – “There'll be some children who don't get to go to the parks, and having that recording would be fantastic for them.”

02 – Supply Teachers

Being indoors is a negative – *“all the year fives and sixes are stuck in at playtime”*

Younger groups spend more time outdoors

Younger groups more adaptable to environment

Weather as a resource

Playful experimentation

More structured lessons means less time outside

Curriculum doesn't easily support outdoor learning

Nursery curriculum is more flexible

Outdoor learning allows learners more independence

Outdoor learning through play

Young people enjoy having a degree of control over their learning

Students enjoy openness, flexibility, freedom

Teachers acting as facilitators

More overhead for the teachers

Initial paperwork investment

Risk-assessments can be tweaked and re-used – differences are trivial

Physical space is a resource classrooms lack

Outdoor hands-on physics experiments, practicals

Technology as a tool to support learning

Not all outdoor environments are suitable for every activity

Tensions between different requirements for the configuration of space – *“With biology, that’s about needing an area of untouched grounds. If you go to most parks the areas are too well maintained, which creates a problem.”*

Open space is a resource in and of itself

Outdoor learning limited by practicalities such as time and money

Teachers are resource-starved

Easier to get GCSE students out than KS3

Transport is the main cost

Walking can be impractical

The amount of adult supervision required lowers with students’ ages

Harder to keep discipline in outdoor activities

Designing outdoor facilities (playground)

Personal attachment to a space can be fostered through involvement in its creation

Later stages of school move from imagination to practicality

Integrating multiple subjects’ topics into one trip

Gathering natural resources

Using natural resources as art materials/inspiration

Returning to the school with resources from the park

Structuring OL activities around curriculum requirements

Lack of transport can result in no park visits

Real risks, duty of care, responsibility – *“You need to be aware that there is an issue with [allergic reactions] and it deserves to be taken into account.”*

Additional issues can arise over time – e.g. allergies emerge

Parents over-protective – *“You might be better off not notifying the parents of the dangers, just keeping it nice and vague. Sometimes they get very worried when they see a list of, oh, different poisonous plants that they never knew existed, and as soon as you mention them suddenly their child is about to die.”*

Dismissive/critical of parents’ concerns – *“‘My child has got an allergy to...’ and you’re like, really?”*

Teaching to care for and nurture nature – *“We had a massive greenhouse and loads of flowers and vegetables, and it’s teaching the children to care for the nature and that sort of thing – it’s really lovely. Giving them that appreciation.”*

Allowing disadvantaged children access to nature – *“Giving them that appreciation, especially when they are removed from natural life.”*

Ownership fostered over time through long-term projects – *“They planted all the seeds and they got to harvest the crops and take them home to their families. That was through the whole year, so they could see it happening throughout the seasons and stuff. [...] Schools sort of set up these things where they help make wild areas in parks, and then they create something that they have ownership of in that park.”*

Children could become the carers of the parks – *“They could be like little park rangers.”*

Older children more cynical, may resent extra work – *“I think it would be great with primary schools, but the secondary ones? They wouldn’t take as much ownership. You know, it’s like ‘someone else’s job’.”*

Using parks for exercise and fitness studies

Being outdoors beneficial in itself – *“Hopefully getting them doing something to keep them fit as well as getting them in the fresh air.”*

Exposure to new people, environments and experiences equips children to make decisions about their future – *“Children pick these ideas, right from the grass root, deciding which profession. ‘Oh, I might be a medical doctor’, or ‘I am going to be a geologist’. ‘Am I going to be a scientist to take on this research?’ They pick all of these because they are exposed to a wider variety of natural things, they have a choice to make. You see these children growing, developing—some of them cruelly didn’t go through these exposures. We shouldn’t just tie our pupils into traditional classroom activities. [...] Expose children so that when they grow they can become specialists.”*

Being outside is exciting in itself

Preparation is needed – account for weather

LOtC can be more memorable, enjoyable – *“So I went out with the students and we did the experiment. It was a really nice summer’s day, so I went back in and grabbed my resources and we just sat outside. Probably one of my favourite lessons I’ve ever had.”*

Prejudice, stigma of LOTC not being a proper learning environment – *“Out of about fifty parents that drove past, one complained and said that they weren’t in the learning environment. It was just this weird perception. [...] The parents looked at it and saw ‘Look at those students relaxing, that’s not going to be a learning environment’.”*

Comfortable learning environment can result in better engagement – *“I have never had as much focus as when they were just relaxed, lying in the grass.”*

Parents not always a positive force – *“Some parents you wouldn’t want helping out...”*

Institutional restrictions on parents helping

Institutional requirements – evidence of learning, schemes of work

Schemes of work can be useful for other teachers

School grounds allow for more flexibility than parks – less planning

Have to teach according to a specification

Producing schemes of work takes up teachers’ time

Schemes of work are used to pre-emptively defend teaching choices

Parents try to catch out, contradict teachers

Using structured photography over seasons

Higher engagement when doing work based on students’ interests

Different age groups working together on different aspects of the same project

Prioritising peer learning

Activity design based on Ofsted requirements

Learning through exploration

Parks are nice, safe environments

Using tech as a planning and review tool

Using tech for data collection

Using tech to familiarise yourself with a location remotely

Using tech for evidence of learning

Children are eager to believe their teachers – *“They listen to you and take it all in. They believe Miss when she says that happens.”*

Using technology to increase appreciation of nature – *“I think the audio would be really interesting to just listen to what the park sounds like, and to take that back in and actually listen to it, because I don’t think we listen to nature enough. [...] That would be a really worthwhile thing anyway, and developing listening skills in an important part—just appreciating it.”*

Using public space for performances in from of the community

Using technology to document activities

Creating and researching local history of a place

Using technology to overcome funding barriers – taking photos to prove they've been at a location, requires fewer staff

Safety barriers to activities – parks at night

Social barriers to activities – interviewing strangers

Using technology to share learning

Using technology to create and embed meaning in physical places

Control over your work is empowering – *"They become the emperor of what they are producing, rather than you. They are making the progress."*

Children drawn to creative tasks which use tech

Children are often forced to do work they have no interest in

Evidence of learning is a formality and isn't always true

Using tech is immediate

Using technology to share and be exposed to viewpoints, insights

Have to teach civically responsible use of technology – *"We had to do several lessons on what were good comments to write to each other."*

Children are tech literate from an early age

Using creative tech to create art

New technologies and environments allow for new learning possibilities – *"You look at that environment, and there's so much that girl can do. Look at the iPad she's holding—this is where I think is the beginning of a new life in education."*

Technology can be a distraction from nature – *"You could also go the other way, and say look at what's around her. She's focussing on [the iPad]!"*

Parents see phone as a contact 'lifeline'

LOtC can provide new life experiences – *"A lot of these kids were very wrapped in cotton wool, they never knew what the real world was like. [...] It was a bit of a harsh reality for them."*

Abusing technology for distractions or bullying

Teachers want ultimate control over technology use

Using tech for safety – sharing photos of suspicious people to avoid

Schools control network access

The Internet represents the best and worst of society – *"It's a shame, because [unauthorised external websites] are the biggest learning resources that could actually exist, but it's also terrible."*

Technology can be over-used – *"I know we're in the 'digital age' etcetera, but I'm a bit old for that and I'm thinking what is so wrong with paper and pencil?"*

Choosing not to use technology is seen as outdated – *“Some of us are old fashioned”*

Expectation of immediacy negatively impacts work ethics and attitudes to learning – *“They have that instant gratification, like everything in video games, TV... everything is instantaneous. They want to be rewarded immediately. So, for them pulling it in, drying it out, opening a book and checking it takes time and effort.”*

Outdoor learning allows for slowing down, appreciating – *“Maybe one of the things with the outdoor learning is giving them the chance to take time, and not have to do it immediately.”*

Children’s nature hasn’t changed, their tools and environment have – kids still enjoy using dictionaries

Using tech to share teaching resources

03 – Rangers

Teaching focusses on the natural resources of the park

Teaching about the local area’s history

Rangers develop activities per teachers’ requests

National curriculum (NC) resulted in teachers requiring specific lessons

Prior to the NC there was more ‘earth education’

NC resulted in moving from general civic education to specific subjects

Rangers given very specific requests by teachers – *“They had to cover all of these points in the curriculum and they would send you bits of the NC for you to look at and say: ‘I want you to cover this, this and this.’ It was quite specific.”*

Loss of dedicated education staff

Dedicated staff allowed for more ‘earth education’

NC means that schools cover very similar topics

Teaching materials can be re-used

Initial creation of new teaching materials hard work, brainless? – *“Once the initial donkeywork had been done...”*

Reliance on worksheets

Prescribed, linear, cloned activities – *“So you’re saying, ‘What have we got?’ ‘Well, which age group?’ Through the filing cabinet. ‘That one?’ ‘Yes, that one.’ Photocopy it and you’re ready to go.”*

NC affected the demographics of OL groups – *“I think it was more KS1, wasn’t it?” “Well it was always more one and two than three. But I think it became even more so, don’t you?”*

Stigma, perception of OL not being real work – *“They haven’t got time to go out of school and have... what’s considered a jolly [holiday] by some people.” “Especially the teachers, sometimes!”*

Teachers sometimes hand-off responsibility to the rangers – *“A lot of them were quite happy to...”*
“Just wanted to chat at the back.” *“Yes. Stand back and let you do all of the work.”*

Rangers experts in their environment – *“Well, it’s not their thing, is it? So we were probably better suited to doing it.”*

Teaching social history and change through place – *“I used to do a lot about the river, about the history of the people living next to the river and what they did for work, entertainment and what they do now – comparing the two.”*

Students had more autonomy, formulate opinions – *“We discussed that from the point of view of ‘It’s your opinion. It doesn’t have to be right or wrong. This is your opinion of what you see.’”*

OL activities limited by time – *“Was there any kind of long term growing things or anything like that?”* *“No, because we didn’t have them long term...”* *“Yes, it was just one-off visits, wasn’t it?”*

Parks introduced charges for school trips due to budget cuts

Schools ‘dropped off’ when charges introduced

Cost of travel prohibitive for schools

Schools trying to ‘get their money’s worth’, sending unsustainably large groups

Park specifically maintained to support OL

Time investment by rangers – *“One of the key things you’d do before you had a class, where you’d go and check the site and make sure it was tidy. Because you go to these areas where there’s needles – not the best place to take a load of kids, is it?”*

Environmental education movement – *“It’s a huge programme, isn’t it? A movement rather than just one or two activities... It’s an approach to environmental education.”*

Experiential, holistic education – *“It’s more about being in the outdoors and experiencing it as opposed to just saying, ‘That’s a daffodil, that’s an oak tree.’”* *“Yes, it’s about immersing yourself in the environment and appreciating it.”* [...] *“Just sights and sounds and colours...”* *“It’s all about the senses, isn’t it?”* *“Yes. It’s all about using your senses in a heightened sort of way to experience the environment around you.”*

Experiential education is outdated – *“It’s quite old-fashioned now, isn’t it?”*

Schools no longer want experiential education – *“It’s just not something that really happens anymore.”* [...] *“Generally they’re struggling to still find schools that would do it.”*

Isn’t obvious that experiential education fits the curriculum – *“It’s really difficult, because it doesn’t... even though it can meet the curriculum, it doesn’t at first glance look as though it does.”*

You can tailor most lessons to outdoor learning

Rangers don’t have time to dedicate to education

Education is part of being a ranger – *“Well, it’s what we got employed for. That’s what we got employed to do.”*

Rangers' roles have changed due to cuts – *“We didn’t get employed to just go and pick rubbish and crap up.” [...] “I think we’re pretty much park keepers now, aren’t we? I would say we’re more park keepers than rangers now. [...] I think we’ve definitely been dumbed down, put it that way.”*

Digitization of resources desirable – *“It would be nice to be able to put that in a folder on the website to get it used.”*

Respect for parks in early years lasts through later life – *“It’s really important that you get the kids at an early age and get them to respect the parks, then when they grow up they won’t...”*

Weather is a major challenge in OL

Schools require facilities (e.g. toilets) for longer sessions

Preparation procedures (health and safety) specific to the location and planned activities

Re-using risk assessments

Risk assessments use generic elements – *“...working near water. It doesn’t matter which park you go to, particularly—it’s pretty much the same.”*

Prompted exploration activities – *“Can you find members of the pea family? And we’d have an example drawing and have a look at it. How many leaves has it got?”*

Activities dependent upon location

Children interested in the immediate environment – *“That’s what gets the kids interested, because that’s what’s there.”*

Can’t (and shouldn’t) plan for the unpredictable, have to be responsive to the situation – *“What happens if you stand there, looking for the Sweet Cecily, and an enormous stripy snail is crawling along the fence? That’s what gets the kids interested.”*

Activities always play out differently – *“Even if you do the same thing every time, there’s always something different that comes up or someone’s found a really enormous dragon fly larvae or a water scorpion...”*

Teachers rely on rangers’ confidence and expertise

Rangers like showing off

Rangers enjoy feeling like they make a difference – *“It’s nice to be able to pass on your knowledge [...] and hopefully inspire some young people to do the same job as you do.”*

OL supports different interests, allows children who excel in outdoor subjects to shine – *“When I had this class everybody was reasonably good academically, and he was struggling with things like reading, maths, stuff like that. But when we went out, he knew the name of every bird, every animal, the trees—and for that day I was able to make him my little expert.”*

Variation gives appreciation for different skills and interests – *“His stature in the class really went up that afternoon, because this was something that he knew about and he could be the clever one in the class for a change. That was lovely.”*

Earth education focuses on facilitating learners’ interests, child-led – *“Usually in earth education it’s listening to the child and following what they want to do—as opposed to being subscribed.”*

Rangers don't have the funds to hold repeat earth education visits

Easier to fit earth education in early curriculum – *"It's easier with KS1 though, isn't it? I mean, they have The Great Outdoors topic now—you've got more flexibility to do that..."*

Some children are under-exposed to nature – *"The teachers need to be aware that some kids might not have been to a big urban green space before and actually walking." [...] "Even walking on ground—because they're used to tarmacked areas, so actually going off to the woods and walking on root. I know you look shocked, but--"*

Any lesson can be adapted to OL, but the rangers might not know the subject – *"We've got things like sports, science..." "Nothing to do with me."*

Rangers struggle to design lessons and activities for subjects they don't know

Public perception of park rangers is inaccurate – *"People always have the assumption that our job is lovely, don't they? People always think, 'You've got a good job, haven't you?'"*

Basing activities around significant features of the environment – *"Just thought we might use the pear tree as the starting point, because it's a significant tree."*

Using technology to communicate activities in the park – *"I can see it being really useful for the groups coming in the park, to see what was there last week..."*

Concerns about images of children being published online

Rangers want data publication to be the responsibility of the teacher/parent – *"Yes. Cool, and then it's their responsibility. We don't want to take that."*

Park used for niche activities by community – re-enactments, filming zombie movie

Divisive elements of the park – *"You could do some creative writing on the shoe tree..." "It's loathsome. It's hideous. It's rubbish!" "It's got a bit of history really, but you could do an art theme with it."*

Mobile technology more acceptable/useful than traditional computers – *"We want to get the kids outdoors and get them away from the computers, but the app is going to be useful."*

Rangers haven't used technology in OL – *"We've never really... we've just used the outdoors, haven't we?"*

Technology interfering/distracting from environment – *"It's like when you go to a concert, and you see all these people watching a concert through a screen. Stop it. Just put it away and watch the concert."*

Rangers don't see themselves needing mobile learning – *"We don't want anything out of it really, apart from them enjoying themselves and learning about it."*

Danger of replacing educators with technology – *"But I can see if it was, obviously, designed and created and the kids loved it, but then would they need us? If it's just totally..."*

Mobile learning allows for self-led activities when school groups are too large to have all doing the same activity

No requirement for teachers to even talk to the rangers – *"Schools don't have to pre-arrange with things technically, just because it's a public space."*

Technology would be useful for tracking the use of the park – *“Being able to collect the numbers of children that have been in the park that year, that month.” “Because that’s always useful, say, for a Lottery funding bid or something like that.”*

Technology might be useful for feedback – *“Teachers – we always used to give them an evaluation form. If you didn’t get them to fill it in there and then, you never got it back did you?” “They’d go back to the classroom and say, “Oh, yes. We’ll send it back.” And they never did. So having some instant feedback.”*

Feedback and pointers for other teachers – *“I thought the feedback thing would be useful for other teachers – you know, if someone has used it [...and say...] ‘We tried this in this area, but it didn’t work. We saw this on the way that you might want to...’. You know, just so other schools can...”*