



# RISKY BUSINESS?

Over recent years, cotton wool culture has led to fewer educational visits and other opportunities for learning outside the classroom in some schools – and students are seriously missing out as a result, warns **Elaine Skates...**

**F**rom accidents and lost children to boys sneaking into the girls' dorm, we can all call to mind dramatic stories of what, in the worst case scenario, could go wrong during a school trip or residential. There is no doubt that the responsibility weighs heavily on the shoulders of teachers leading educational visits.

However, against these risks we must weigh the benefits of learning outside the classroom (LOtC) in the school



grounds, local community or further afield on a day trip or residential. Wherever it happens, LOtC has been proven to raise attainment, improve behaviour and engage all children in their learning, especially those who are hard to motivate inside the classroom environment. As well as these educational benefits, there are many wider benefits including: improved physical health and motor skills; improved mental health & self-esteem; improved relationships between students; and improved



student/teacher relationships. All of these benefits are of relevance to school improvement but, more importantly, can have a life changing impact for the young people themselves.

It is true to say that health and safety concerns and fear of litigation have had an impact on opportunities for all young people to experience the world beyond the classroom as part of their education. However, it is also true that today's 'cotton wool culture' is not limited to schools. As the National Trust's recent Natural Childhood report (*Moss, 2012*) explores, parents are more reluctant to let their children play outside than ever before. Anxieties about increased traffic, stranger danger and other everyday risks means that the 'radius of activity' for children – the area around their home where they are allowed to roam unsupervised – has declined by almost 90% since the 1970s (*Gaster, 1991*). This trend has led to concerns that young people today are becoming 'entombed' in their homes and classrooms. The issue is society wide, which makes the role of schools in ensuring children have the opportunity to get out and about even more vital.

The fact is that risk is a part of everyday life, so by creating an artificial 'risk free' environment for our children we are placing them at greater danger in the long run. We have to strike a balance between keeping children safe and giving them opportunity to experience challenge and learn to manage risk for themselves, because we won't always be there to catch them when they fall.

LOtC enables children to experience challenge and adventure in a controlled environment, giving them the skills to manage risk and keep themselves safe in the real

## A PROPORTIONATE APPROACH

Revised health and safety guidance to schools issued in 2011 stated health and safety measures should help children experience a wide range of activities safely, not stop them, and called for common sense in assessing and managing the risks. The following are practical suggestions to help you reduce paperwork when planning visits:

- Use your own grounds more to build skills and confidence in leading LOtC.
- Have one consent form for visits that parents fill in at the beginning of the year (parental consent is not needed within the normal school day where an activity is delivering the National Curriculum).
- Treat it as you would planning for any other lesson and make sure time spent planning is proportionate to the time spent doing the activity.
- Reduce paperwork by choosing an LOtC Quality Badge accredited venue for the visit. Providers will have undergone a rigorous application process to demonstrate that they offer good quality educational experiences and manage risk effectively. Most LA outdoor education advisors do not require you to do additional risk assessments if you choose a provider who has been accredited under the LOtC Quality Badge scheme. To search for LOtC Quality Badge holders in your area visit [lotcqualitybadge.org.uk](http://lotcqualitybadge.org.uk).
- Refer to the free online guidance at [lotc.org.uk](http://lotc.org.uk) and the national guidance at [oeapng.info](http://oeapng.info).



### ABOUT THE EXPERT

ELAINE SKATES IS DEPUTY CHIEF EXECUTIVE OF THE NATIONAL CHARITY, COUNCIL FOR LEARNING OUTSIDE THE CLASSROOM (CLOT). TO SIGN UP TO THE FREE NEWSLETTER AND RECEIVE INFORMATION ON LOTC MARK, MEMBERSHIP, TRAINING AND RESOURCES SEND AN EMAIL TO [ELAINE.SKATES@LOTC.ORG.UK](mailto:ELAINE.SKATES@LOTC.ORG.UK)

world. For this reason, getting young people involved in the planning of an educational visit will teach them how to assess risks and benefits and give them some essential life skills such as reading a bus timetable, understanding how to behave safely in the countryside or navigating the London underground.

LOtC experiences also contribute to ensuring that pupils are equipped and ready for the workplace after they leave school. As GCSE results were published in 2012, a Federation of Small Businesses (FSB) survey found that 8 out of 10 companies are concerned that school leavers are not adequately prepared for the world of work, citing worries about school leavers' self-management skills as well as their ability to work in teams and communicate. Real world learning experiences can ensure young people have the chance to apply their learning in practical, real life situations so they understand why they are learning about a concept in maths or science, for example, and how that knowledge can be applied.

"If we never took a risk our children would not learn to walk, climb stairs, ride a bicycle or swim; business would not develop innovative new products... scientists would not experiment and discover, we would not have great art, literature, music and architecture." (*Jones, 1997*)

One commonly cited risk of LOtC is bad behaviour.

“Children should be able to go on exciting school trips that broaden their horizons. That is why we are cutting unnecessary red tape in schools and putting teachers back in charge.”

MICHAEL GOVE, EDUCATION SECRETARY, 2011



However, evidence suggests that learning experiences outside the classroom have a positive impact on motivation and behaviour because they offer young people a different kind of stimulus from the formality of the classroom, providing them with opportunities to learn that suit them as individuals. In addition, sharing an experience away from the classroom can improve pupil teacher relationships, and can represent a breakthrough with challenging pupils that will endure back at school (*Amos and Reiss, 2009*).

Far from discouraging educational visits, the Health and Safety Executive actively supports LOfC and the role it plays in giving pupils the skills to keep themselves safe. The latest Government guidance on health and safety in schools advises ensuring that health and safety procedures are proportionate and focus on real risks not paperwork. Time spent planning LOfC should be proportionate to the activity. Undertaking a risk benefit approach to assessing risk ensures that risk is minimised whilst ensuring that learning is the key driver when planning LOfC activities.

So next time you are considering the risks of undertaking an educational visit remember to also consider the risks to young people of *not* doing LOfC: underachievement, obesity, poor mental health, lack of employability, disconnect with the natural world and the inability to keep themselves safe in the real world. Now what do you think – is that visit worth it?

# THINKING OUTSIDE THE BOX

WHEN PLANNING LEARNING OUTSIDE THE CLASSROOM, IT IS IMPORTANT TO THINK ABOUT THE WHOLE CURRICULUM AS THE OPPORTUNITIES AREN'T ALWAYS OBVIOUS. MAKING THE MOST OF CROSS CURRICULA LEARNING DURING EDUCATIONAL VISITS WILL HELP YOU TO DERIVE THE MOST BENEFIT FROM EVERY EXPERIENCE, AND MAY HELP YOU RESOLVE TEACHER COVER ISSUES TOO.

Here are a few examples to get you thinking...

## A FRESH LOOK AT RESIDENTIALS

- You don't need to travel far to practise foreign language skills. Combine a wilderness camping adventure with a total French, Spanish or German immersion experience to enable pupils to practice their speaking and listening skills in a real life context.
- Build in some maths to your adventurous activity residential – introduce pupils to the concept of vectors in 2 dimensions by asking them to estimate how tide or wind affects the direction a canoe or kayak must be paddled in order to go in a straight line.
- Ask pupils to film a TV. report to share the experiences they gained on residential with their peers back at school.

## COVER THE WHOLE CURRICULUM DURING A VISIT TO AN ART GALLERY

- Run a workshop to test pigments in paints to identify whether a painting is genuine or fake.
- Ask pupils to apply their business skills by planning their own exhibition – from setting the budget to writing the promotional materials.
- Relate English texts to their social and historical contexts using art from the era to explore key themes.
- Link to the geography or RE curriculum by exploring art from different countries or investigating religious art from different times or cultures.
- Describe a painting from France or Germany using the language of that country in both the written and spoken word.

## OPPORTUNITIES ABOUND IN THE SCHOOL GROUNDS AND NATURAL SPACES

- Introduce anthocyanins in the school garden or allotment – ask pupils to gather suitable plants then use litmus testing in the lab, recording their findings.
- Apply geometry and measurement on a large scale by measuring the dimensions of a regular shaped object found in the school grounds e.g. areas of paving, seats or sport pitches.
- Study a measurable aspect of a natural object or feature, analysing and presenting the data collected.
- Use school spaces to represent school life through dramatic characterisation.
- Focus on the changing distribution of economic activity and its impact during a field trip to a farm. Introduce the idea of how farming is changing and how it has an impact on the environment, exploring issues such as water pollution, genetically modified crops and farm diversification.

Talking to the venues you visit will help you to identify the full range of activities they offer. Venues holding the LOfC Quality Badge can tailor activities, focusing on learning outcomes, to meet your needs. CLOtC resource packs full of lesson ideas for English, maths and science at every key stage are available at [lotc.org.uk](http://lotc.org.uk)