

Learning Away: a small scale literature review

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Introduction

CUREE intends to work with PHF and clusters to develop a Self Evaluation Framework and accompanying tools as the principal means of formative evaluation of the Learning Away project. The framework will be constructed to support all three of the evaluation areas: namely, rendering judgements, facilitating improvements and generating knowledge. Expert knowledge of effective teaching and learning and curriculum design and associated research will form one of the foundations of the framework. This will enable us to use evidence-based indicators of students' enjoyment, engagement in learning, their achievement and wellbeing as part of the impact assessment. Preliminary scanning of the out of school research literature led us to the supposition that there were relatively few studies which attempted to isolate and to separately and systematically evaluate the specific contribution of the residential component of such programmes. However, there was evidence from various sources, including a review of the learning away literature (Rickinson et al 2004), that residential experience in particular can lead to individual growth and improvements in social skills as well as higher order learning. Hence our starting point for the framework was to conduct a small-scale literature review to make sure that the evaluation was adequately informed by the existing knowledge base about residential learning. We have also scanned the research outputs of the Edinburgh team provided by PHF, the results of which are reported on p.10.

Review Methods

The literature review focused exclusively on research about residential learning. The intention behind the review was to capture data which had the capacity to inform us about residential learning. We suspected from our preliminary literature scan that robust empirical research which focused specifically on the residential variable in out of school learning was scarce. So the review question was broad: 'What do we know about residential learning for learners?'

Searching

The search strategy involved:

- searching electronic databases for reports and articles in journals, and research reports from other resources. Databases included Educational Resources Information Centre (ERIC), the British Education Index (BEI) and Current Educational Research in the UK (CERUK);
- searching relevant sites including the British Educational Research Association (BERA), the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF), Ofsted and selected LA and university websites; and
- sourcing citations already on references lists of other studies including the studies sent to us by Paul Hamlyn Foundation.

Identifying and describing studies

Our inclusion criteria allowed us to screen the studies for their potential relevance to the review. All citations (titles and abstracts) identified in initial searches were subjected to the application of inclusion criteria. We excluded reports that did not meet all inclusion criteria. Only a limited amount of information is accessible from the review titles and abstracts. Hence to minimise the risk of relevant studies being excluded at this stage, we erred on the side of caution and adopted a policy of inclusion where there was any doubt.

A total of 67 review titles and abstracts were identified in the preliminary searches of the review. Screening by title and abstract using stage 1 inclusion criteria narrowed this down to 22, for which full reports were retrieved. We reapplied the inclusion criteria to the full reports which left the final number for in-depth review at 10.

We focused on studies published after the introduction of the national curriculum in the UK because that is the environment in which we are conducting the evaluation. However, we also included relevant studies from elsewhere. For practical and budgetary reason we also needed to keep the review small scale. Thus we needed to restrict the parameters of our search. We limited the search chronologically to capture studies that had been published after 1990, and only included studies which were specifically concerned with residential learning.

For stage 2 inclusion in the review, we reapplied stage 1 criteria to the full studies plus additional criteria which addressed reliability and usability as follows:

- reported in English;
- transparent and reliable methodologies (where empirical studies were concerned); and
- inclusion of descriptions of the residential intervention and its processes.

11 studies met all stage 1 and 2 criteria and were included in the review. It needs to be pointed out that the degree to which studies met the criterion regarding descriptions of the interventions was variable. This had consequences for the capacity of the data extraction framework to capture meaningful comparative data across all the studies. Hence in some cases we have simply noted individual findings which we believe to be capable of informing the evaluation where synthesis is not possible. We also used the DCFS 2006 Learning Outside the Classroom Manifesto and the reported foci of the LA clusters as a guide to our data extraction framework.

Data Extraction

The following factors were used to frame the questions for the data extraction process. (Where these are not specifically discussed in the findings section this is because we found no data to report.)

1. Country of origin
2. Number of students involved
3. Phase or year group
4. Gender
5. Methods
6. Target group of students
7. Teachers/ school staff involved in the residential
8. External staff/ facilitators involved.

9. The aim of the residential intervention
10. The type of residential
11. Description of the intervention/s
12. Teaching and learning approach/es
13. Links to school pedagogies
14. Curriculum focus
15. Links to school aspirations, plans and curriculum
16. Student involvement in shaping/designing their residential experience.
17. Roles of school and external facilitators/instructors
18. Staff development
19. Impact data
20. Types of impact on students
21. Impact on staff

Findings

Eight of the included studies were UK based (two in Scotland) and three in the USA. They spanned the two decades between 1990 and 2009 as follows:

Table 1: Breakdown by date (N=10)

Year	No. of Studies
1993	1
1998	1
2000	2
2002	1
2003	1
2004	1
2007	1
2008	1
2009	2

The studies were evenly spread as regards gender. Most were concerned with secondary students, two involved primary students, one undergraduates and one reported on an adult residential intervention. We included this study (Fleming 1998) because of the detailed exploration of the particular features of

the residential experience which it identified. The perceptions of adult literacy learners, because of their capacity to articulate them, have been influential in the design of effective children's literacy programmes. Similarly, the reported perceptions about residential learning of the adults in this study have the potential to enhance our understanding by isolating the distinctive elements of residential experiences, and their capacity to contribute to learning outcomes.

Methods

Of the 11 included studies, one (Rickinson 2004) was a systematic literature review. One (Beedie 2000) was a research based review of modes of delivering outdoor education, including residential delivery. Power et al (2009) used a UK-wide questionnaire (to which 220 schools responded) plus case studies and documentary analysis to explore variations in provision as well as participation in out of school experiences, including residential experiences. Ofsted (2008) used a survey, visits and discussions with 26 schools and colleges. The remainder used a variety of quantitative and qualitative methodologies to establish the impact of specific residential interventions in relation to their aims. These included pre and post questionnaire surveys, coded observations, focus groups, field diaries, semi-structured interviews and documentary analyses.

The size of the samples ranged from 800 + (Christie et al 2004) to 15 (Kabel 2002.)

Types of Residential Experience

Most of the residential interventions were concerned with 'outdoor adventure' in different shapes and forms, typically linked to the development of personal and social skills. Exceptions to this were Kabel (2002) who described residential learning as a 'safehouse for study and growth;' and Cooper (1993) who explored the effects of residential schooling (of varying lengths) on children with emotional and behavioural difficulties.

Aims of the residential interventions

The aims of the planned residential experiences varied. One study (Bunyan 2000) was principally concerned with the lessons for leadership in student outdoor adventure activities, but linked these to the specifics of the residential experience: namely personal skills, group dynamics and the application of academic theory in the adventure environment. What does emerge as a common thread across the majority of studies is a focus on personal and social skills and on student wellbeing. Only one study (Smith Sebasto 2009) focused specifically on an aspect of the curriculum (environmental science) and attempted to assess the impact of the residential experience in relation to enhanced student learning in the classroom. None of the studies explicitly set out to evaluate a particular teaching and learning approach as part of the residential experience.

Power et al (2009) reported a very wide range of residential foci: these included skiing trips, adventure activities, weekend visits to industrial sites, ecocentres and foreign trips (the latter largely subject specific.) The aims varied, but the researchers found that the least able and/or the least well behaved are more likely in the UK to be offered provision primarily designed to promote social and/or vocational objectives. The more academically able tended to be offered more academic development. They also found that residential provision can be offered as a form of "compensatory" education, providing poor students with experiences that their home circumstances would usually deny.

Some of the studies focused on residential experiences which aimed to offer participants opportunities for development in more ways than one. For example Simpson, (2007) found that “students attend the centre for team-building, personal development purposes, for the aspects of challenge, environmental education, building confidence, and looking after themselves. Some groups come for all these things, others just for one. Outdoor activities provide a vehicle for challenge, as well as personal and social development, but they are also the means for students to access natural environment, interact with it and be independent in it.” Likewise Christie et al (2004) found that the outdoor education setting provided both personal challenge and the opportunity to work co-operatively with other students, while Stott (2003) described a six-week wilderness expedition in arctic Greenland designed specifically to explore impact on students’ personal and social, as well as technical skills.

The nature of the interventions

In terms of length, residential placements reported in the studies ranged from a six-week expedition in Greenland (Stott 2003), to weekends (Power 2009), and anything from four days to two weeks in between. Cooper’s (1993) study of longer term residential placements for children with emotional and behavioural problems was an exception. There appears to be no correlation between the length of the interventions and their aims and reported impacts.

The extent to which the studies reported process data varied. Commonly, the emphasis on social and personal skills across most of the studies was linked to a strong focus on group work, variously described as working ‘co-operatively’ (Christie et al 2004), working in small groups (Bunyan 2000), ‘team building’ and ‘activity groups’ (Simpson 2007), ‘collaborative learning’ (Stott 2003), ‘learning group of peers’ (Smith Sebasto 2009) and ‘groupwork’ (Kabel 2002). In most cases (see above) the emphasis was on participating students’ personal and social development rather than on academic achievement. There was very limited evidence of student involvement in the planning of the experience, nor was there any direct evidence that this was linked positively with student outcomes. Christie et al (2004) evaluated a programme found to be successful in which students set their own personal targets for a week away, but it is not possible to isolate this as a dependent variable from all the other inputs to the programme.

To provide some context we have illustrated some of the approaches to the residential placements below.

- An eight day residential for 30 PE students based in the Peak District. The students worked in small groups, each under the guidance of one member of the teaching team. (Bunyan 2000)
- The programme begins with pre course work which briefs the students on what they can expect during their residential week. They set personal targets for themselves and work in pursuit of these in the week at Loch Eil. During the residential experience students attend as part of a group, and quickly mix with pupils from other schools to form their “clan” of 12 for the week, who work together on activities and challenges that encourage teamwork and co-operation with an element of personal challenge. (Christie 2004)
- The University of Wyoming Mountain Folk School is a one week experience based on the traditions of Danish Folk high schools and the Highlander Folk School in Tennessee. The programme emphasises environmental education and social responsibility. The rocky mountain leisure workshop is a four night gathering designed for hands on leadership training in recreation and leisure activities. (Fleming 1998)

- While all the main activities are offered, some emphasis has been given to themes that have been identified in the school curriculum such as enterprise, and efforts were made to include enterprise activity in the programme. Activities include abseiling, climbing, canoeing, raft building, gorge walking, a woodland skills day when students make things (e.g. charcoal) and do conservation work. (Simpson 2007)
- A four day, three night stay at the university-operated New Jersey School of Conservation in Northwest New Jersey. All students participated in seven sessions: Action Socialisation Experiences, Sensory Awareness in Nature, Eco-Discovery, Web of Life, Climbing wall or Confidence course, one natural science session (Black bear ecology, Ornithology or Stream Geology), and one additional session (archery, art in nature, early American woodworking, orienteering, stonewall study or survival. (Smith-Sebasto 2009)

Impact

Most of the impact data were collected via student/participant questionnaires, interviews and focus groups. In two cases (Christie et al 2004, Cooper 1993) teacher evaluations and/or observations were also used. The most commonly reported or perceived form of impact was affective:

- changes in students' confidence and self esteem;
- attitude changes: students felt more 'positive';
- relationship building: students formed productive peer relationships and student: staff relationships were enhanced;
- improvements in behaviour;
- greater self awareness;
- increased tolerance and understanding of others;
- increased independence and the ability to make choices;
- pride in accomplishments;
- team working and problem solving;
- improved technical and physical skills; and
- increased resilience.

Ofsted (2008) found that learning outside the classroom improved young people's development in all five of the Every Child Matters outcomes, especially in two areas: enjoying and achieving, and achieving economic well-being.' It was also found to contribute to the three other Every Child Matters outcomes, namely being healthy, staying safe and making a positive contribution. This happened, for example, when the children and young people took on different and additional requirements to promote their own and each other's safety when out of the classroom; by undertaking extra physical exercise; or by joining in events within the local community or with other schools and colleges.'

Although one study (Christie 2004) found that students believed that they could perform better in certain academic areas, no data appears to have been collected to put this belief to the test. Another study (Smith-Sebasto) found that when students' residential experiences were reinforced by their teachers once back in the classroom they found the scientific topics and information to be the most meaningful of their residential experience. Again no pre or post intervention achievement data were collected.

None of the studies specifically reported on any impacts of the residential experiences on teachers and teacher professional development. However, the findings from one study (Smith Sebasto 2009) highlighted the importance of teacher preparedness for the residential experience. Helping teachers to prepare for a better learning experience for their students should involve pre-trip teacher workshops and/or constructing lesson plans with which teachers have time to familiarise themselves.

The residential experience: it's not about "bells, timetables and pre-established hierarchies" (Beedie 2006)

Researchers in these studies offered a number of insights from their findings into the different elements of the residential experience which contributed to the positive impacts on student outcomes. These resonate with the knowledge base on effective teaching and learning which we have attached to this report as an Appendix in order to highlight the links.

Key factors

Fleming (1998) identified seven key factors which participants said enhanced and enabled their learning:

- unstructured time for discussion or self reflection;
- group reinforcement and support;
- immersion in learning: able to focus for uninterrupted periods of time and with greater intensity than usual;
- more opportunities to learn through a 24 hour period;
- having fun and playing;
- personal relationships which added insights, comfort and made it easier to learn; and
- learning about themselves and others as a result of being forced by the demands of living together to go beyond their own comfort limits of personal interaction.

Three findings in particular appear to have resonance in many of the studies: relationship building, creating time and space, and the need for reinforcing links with school life.

Relationship building

Six studies (Cooper 1993, Bunyan 2000, Fleming 1998, Kabel 2002, Stott 2003, Beedie 2000) emphasised the opportunities offered by residential experiences for building relationships, which in turn had a positive impact on participants' confidence, self esteem and wellbeing. During long term placements (Cooper 1993) the researcher found that staff-pupil relationships formed a central part of the therapeutic purpose of the school, and that relationships between pupils tended to reflect the positive values identified in the staff pupil relationships. Pupils engaged in informal peer counselling, for example. Hence relationships were essential to pupil wellbeing and key to behaviour change. Stott (2003) pointed out the improvements in social skills which arose from students' developing ability to control their emotions, and motivate others through living in crowded circumstances during the residential expedition. Fleming identified some key elements to describe the relationships that developed during residential programmes:

- relations were intimate because participants shared bedrooms and bathrooms;
- participants also dropped their facades – their professional titles, roles and behaviours;
- no escape – participants could not retreat from one another;

- people could see each other in a context not possible in classroom settings;
- informal bonding took place through opportunities not normally available in non residential programmes; and
- relationships often formed between individuals who would not normally choose each other's company.

Kabel (2002) emphasised the cultural aspects of the residential environment as helping, empathising and caretaking/caring. She identified careful construction of the residential curriculum as the key to generating the culture.

Time and Space for immersion in learning

Participants in Fleming's (1998) study explained that they were able to focus on the programme and themselves, and able to be uninterrupted by pressures and outside distractions. Participants could finish a discussion or conversation after a structured learning activity had been completed, for example.

Beedie (2000) cited a number of studies as evidence that learning should be experiential and not instructional. Participants in Fleming's study articulated this experiential learning as contributing to their "being in the learning" – to making their learning vivid and to helping them retain information. "I can focus on something stronger and stay with it longer, and I think you've got more opportunities to learn when you're involved in it from different angles, different perspectives, different times of day, everything factored into it."

Kabel also identified time and space as key elements of the residential experience. Time "to be creative, share past experiences and get to know one another". Continuity and residence allowed for more informal and incidental learning as "dialogue could be used at all times". Being in residence allowed learners to continue discussions informally over meals and at other times.

This emphasis on informal learning opportunities is reflected in Smith Sebasto's (2009) finding about the impact on younger students of involving older students as counsellors and role models with whom they could discuss their learning and develop positive relationships.

Reinforcement

There is evidence in the review studies that (a) most learning away programmes are not linked to school and curricular objectives, and (b) that they could make a greater contribution to young people's learning if they were.

Beedie (2000) found that residential used the locational advantages of non-school settings as a "powerful, perhaps unique educational opportunity". However, the greater the distance from normal life "the more likely the experience is to be seen as a 'one off', isolated and peripheral to everyday school life. Transferring the powerful learning potential of the school setting is one of the most important but under emphasised parts of the residential experience". Ofsted (2008) found that "too many residential and other visits considered during the survey had learning objectives which were imprecisely defined and not integrated sufficiently with activities in the classroom. This was particularly the case in primary schools. Of the schools and colleges visited, only three had evaluated the impact of learning outside the classroom on improving achievement, or monitored the take-up of activities by groups of pupils and students. "The vast majority in the sample were not able to assess the effectiveness, inclusiveness or value for money of such activities".

Primary schools in particular relied increasingly on commercial centres to arrange and provide residential visits because of concerns about health and safety and the high workload for staff, especially in small schools. But it was “uncommon” for teachers to liaise closely with the staff of the centres beforehand to plan how the chosen activities could draw on, and develop further, the learning that had taken place at school. The teachers’ professional skills and knowledge of the pupils’ particular needs were not used well enough and the residential visit became an isolated special event.

By contrast secondary schools were more likely to plan residential visits to build on what had been learned in class and focus closely on curricular objectives and examination requirements, as well as on individuals’ personal development. In such cases (see above) the visits had the capacity to make a difference to a range of children’s wellbeing attributes, including self-esteem and self confidence.

A survey of 160 schools¹ found that several schools had difficulties “negotiating appropriate programmes with staff from residential centres who were sometimes perceived as out of touch with the curriculum and modern teaching methods”. Interestingly, specialist staff from these centres who were also interviewed reported difficulties in helping schools to understand how they could make better use of the experiences in ways that would support their curricula. Staff in both situations identified the need for better partnership working and especially a better awareness of the world of the other practitioner.”

Smith-Sebasto (2009) found from his student surveys that young people needed to have their experience reinforced by subsequent classroom lessons or activities. “The feeling of belonging [based on student responses immediately and 6 months later] and emphasis on group work is more strongly present while still in the situation in which group belonging and teamwork is needed”. He stresses the importance of careful preparation and design of the teaching and learning during the trip “or students can get confused and the confusion stays with them”. His work highlights the importance of supporting teachers with preparation for the experience – for example conducting pre-trip workshops for teachers.

Some concluding thoughts

This does not purport to be a large-scale, systematic literature review. However, the robust search strategy and the application of systematic criteria to the inclusion of studies gives us the confidence to draw certain conclusions: both about the research landscape related to learning away, and to key elements involved in effective residential experiences.

The research landscape with regard to the residential experience *per se* is sparsely populated. However Power’s (2009) findings and those of Ofsted (2006, 2008) may help to explain this. Schools rarely monitor and evaluate out of school learning or assess its impact on learning and the curriculum. It is also relatively rarely (and extremely rare in primary schools) that out of school residential learning opportunities are designed to reinforce children’s access to the curriculum and success at school. Nicol et al (2006) found that:

‘Ninety-three percent of respondents did not or could not provide robust evidence of learning outcomes of their programmes. There has never been a national requirement to assess learning outcomes. Perhaps as a consequence evaluation of learning is not conducted systematically, not triangulated with other evidence and not evaluated and assessed externally. The fact that such monitoring and evaluation in support of key claims has neither come from within the sector nor been imposed by external agents (e.g.

¹ Precise citation to follow: this was a survey sent to us by Chris who has been asked to provide the reference.

fundlers or educational policy-makers) places the sector in an un-necessarily weak position...'²

Hence the evaluation of the PHF LA project has the potential to make a substantial contribution to the wider knowledge base about learning away.

Equally there appears to be no longitudinal research in this area. The five-year span of the PHF programme increases the capacity of the project to build year-on-year learning into forward planning and to evaluate this over time. The findings and conclusions from the studies in the review, particularly where these have been articulated by participants in the residential programmes, have the capacity to inform the evaluation framework in very practical ways (e.g. relationship building), building on the wider knowledge base both about effective pedagogies, and about effective teacher professional development, and scaling up professional learning.

Appendix

In our original proposal we referred to examples of where the curriculum evidence base connects strongly to the Learning Away research. Our foray, reported above, into reviewing the residential literature has uncovered some strong consistencies between the two fields of research.

1. Links to the 'mainstream' school learning experience rather than 'add on.'

Accumulated evidence from reviews of curriculum research³ on the effectiveness for learning of particular curriculum interventions, highlight key findings which are particularly relevant to the aims of the LA project and residential learning:

- The effectiveness of learning that is "context based" (dealing with ideas and phenomena in real or simulated practical situations.) This is echoed in the literature on experiential learning.
- The importance of connecting the curriculum with young people's experiences of home and community and the related, but also distinctive theme of parental involvement in children's learning
- Curriculum involves both design and enactment. Clusters will need to show links to mainstream (in school) curriculum; 'enactment' will need to show the benefits/differences for enacting the curriculum in the residential setting.

2. Transformative, cross-curricular pedagogies linked to enhanced learning outcomes

Accumulated evidence from nine years of summarising empirical research for the RfT Resource⁴ and for the Research Informed Practice Site highlights⁵ key findings which were also reinforced by the key findings from the BETB project.⁶ Of particular relevance to the LA project are:

² Note on the Edinburgh studies PHF asked us to look at: eight studies were not related to outdoor (and also not to residential) education. These are related to creative partnerships, citizenship and natural heritage education in school curriculum. Hence we excluded them from the review. The three remaining papers are about outdoor education in Scotland. However the nature of the outdoor education is seldom specified and we did not find it possible to relate their findings specifically to our review, except for the valuable insight recorded above (Nicol et al) on the quality of such programmes as a whole.

³ Bell, M., Cordingley, P., Gibbons, S. & Hawkins, M. (2008). *Review of Individual Studies from Systematic Research Reviews*. Coventry: CUREE.

⁴ Research for Teachers. <http://www.gtce.org.uk/teachers/rft/>

⁵ TRIPS. <http://www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/research/>

⁶ Bell, M., Cordingley, P., Gibbons, S. & Hawkins, M. (2008). *Review of Individual Studies from Systematic Research Reviews*. Coventry: CUREE.

- the impact on pupil motivation and learning of structured dialogue in group work and of collaborative learning - both of which lend themselves especially well to the residential environment;
- the need to remove rigidity in the approach to the curriculum –to allow time and space for conceptual development, to encourage integration of cross-curricular learning; and
- the importance of inquiry-based learning for the development of higher order thinking skills and approaches to problem-solving.

3. Motivation and wellbeing

Research linking student achievement (across a wide spectrum of achievement levels) with motivation and wellbeing highlights approaches to learning such as:

- explicit and well articulated approaches to planning and enacting the curriculum in ways that promoted positive relationships;
- recognition amongst both staff and students that there were personal skills that students could learn which would help them to do well and feel well in school, including understanding and articulating how they learn; and
- opportunities for students to develop their relationship and learning skills through carefully planned ‘extra curricular’ programmes.

A systematic review of research on teachers’ construction of challenge for students⁷, including ‘at risk’ and low achieving students as well as gifted and talented groups came to the conclusion that challenge had to embrace motivation as well as cognitive challenge. Group work and problem-solving skills were an important part of the learning process.

All of the research in this area also points to the importance of starting where the students are and the value of teachers’ diagnostic skills and appropriate progression planning for individual students.

Reference List (Studies in the Review and which informed the review)

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⁷ CUREE/QCA (2009, forthcoming) *Building the evidence base: Strand 3 challenge review report*. London: QCA.

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