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Title of paper: Outdoor learning: Scottish primary teachers' perceptions of training and professional development

Related theme: Educating Professionals: how do we learn from practice? How do we bring together learning from different practices? What new challenges in work practices are impacting professional learning?

Name(s): Leanne Mattu, Bethan L Wood, Carlo Rinaldi and David Roberts*

Affiliation(s): University of Glasgow, School of Interdisciplinary Studies; * SRUC

Contact email: l.mattu.1@research.gla.ac.uk

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Abstract:

Outdoor learning has long been an important feature of Scottish education, but the non-prescriptive nature of the curriculum has contributed to wide variations in schools' provision of outdoor educational experiences (Ross *et al.*, 2007). *Curriculum for Excellence* (CfE) further encourages the use of the outdoors as a context for learning, but still does not make this mandatory (Beames *et al.*, 2009). However, changes to the Standards for Teacher Registration require all teachers to demonstrate use of the outdoors in their teaching (GTCS, 2012).

As part of research exploring educational farm visits for primary school children, a survey of teachers in May 2013 included questions on teachers' perceptions of knowledge and training on outdoor learning. The survey results informed a series of teacher interviews, during which these topics were also discussed.

The survey results indicate that primary teachers' perceptions of their own training vary widely, while they tend to feel that probationer teachers are not well informed on outdoor learning. The need for further training and CPD was a clear theme in the qualitative elements of the survey, and early interview findings suggest that learning informally, from colleagues sharing their own experiences, is an important feature of teachers' professional development.

Although "prospects for learning outdoors have rarely been better" than under CfE (Thorburn & Allison, 2013), survey findings indicate that previously identified issues around training and CPD (e.g. Nicol *et al.*, 2007) seem to persist. Whether the views of teachers taking part in interviews support these early indications will be known by summer 2014.

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