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Teacher and pupil attitudes towards Learning Outside the Classroom:

Influences on primary writing.

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The candidate confirms that the work submitted is her own and that appropriate credit has been given where reference has been made to the work of others.

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Abstract

The role of Learning Outside the Classroom (LOtC) has been consistently researched relating to the delivery of the National Curriculum and the development of children. However, the research reflecting on pupils' and teachers' perceptions of the role of LOtC in writing is minimal. This research aims to begin to close this gap in literature, influenced by previous research conducted by Marchant et al. (2019) to validate the findings in the study and to identify the perceptions of LOtC in specific reference to primary writing.

Literature has been explored regarding the purpose of LOtC, how dialogue can influence and engage learners, children's relationships with nature and the purpose of taking children outdoors. This has been examined closely to provide a theoretical background to discuss the research focus, teachers' and pupils' experiences of LOtC and any potential influences it has on writing.

This study was conducted in the researcher's final school experience placement school, through the use of a case study approach. The data collection process occurred over three main points within the research. Two data collection methods were used including: questionnaires which gained reflections from teachers, and semi-structured interviews, which sought rich data from teacher and child participants. A follow-up semi-structured interview took place with the special educational needs coordinator after analysing the data from the questionnaires.

The findings from this study support those in Marchant et al.'s (2019) research and identify that both teachers and children view LOtC as beneficial for aiding writing. Teachers and pupils highlighted that the outdoor environment has an influence on children's ability to focus on their writing, through authentic experiences and teachers highlight the positive impacts it has for children with special educational needs and disabilities, and reluctant writers. This study provides a new light to the existing research, as it captures the voices of the children and teachers and provides possible suggestions for practice in schools relating to the use of alternative learning environments, supporting engagement of all children.

Word count: 6555

Teacher and pupil attitudes towards Learning Outside the Classroom: Influences on primary writing.

Introduction

This mixed-methods study aims to discuss teacher and pupil attitudes towards Learning Outside the Classroom and its influences on primary writing. Learning Outside the Classroom (LOtC) was chosen by the researcher to investigate its potential influences on writing as much of the literature suggests it is an inclusive process (Glanville, 2023), which is an important discovery as the researcher enters their first years of teaching. The researcher's final placement school was selected to conduct this study, as the small rural primary school in Goole, England, had already established LOtC as part of their teaching practice. The school, in question has 27 children on roll and six teachers employed.

Research has previously been carried out investigating the impacts of LOtC on curriculum delivery (Marchant et al., 2019) and writing, however the majority of research fails to highlight pupil and teacher perceptions about its influence, which this research aims to consider.

Questionnaires were undertaken by six teachers and interviews were conducted with five key stage two (KS2) pupils, four teachers, including the Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENCo) and English lead. Participants were asked about their opinions and experiences of LOtC in relation to the teaching of English and writing to answer the research question. The researcher hopes the outcomes of this study can add to the field of research in education and influence future practice.

Literature review:

This literature review will discuss existing literature around LOtC. The themes that will be considered include: the values of LOtC, the impacts on mental health, inclusion, dialogue and writing. They have been identified to discuss and relate back to answering the research focus: Teacher and pupil attitudes towards Learning Outside the Classroom: Influences on primary writing.

What is LOtC?

LOtC is a pedagogical technique used by practitioners to take learning into alternative environments, rather than the use of a typical classroom (Council for Learning Outside the Classroom, 2022; Waite, 2021; DfE, 2006). LOtC provides children with an opportunity to explore their own heritage, study anthropology and discuss the environment through visiting different settings including nature reserves, historical places and their local community (Grigg and Lewis, 2016; Council for Learning Outside the Classroom, 2022; Natural England, 2022).

In 2007, Brooke conducted some research suggesting LOtC does not realistically aid the holistic development of children, however, a report published by Natural England (2022) proved this to be invalid and evidenced the benefits of children engaging in LOtC. Their study aligns with additional research outlining the impact LOtC has on children's development including their mental and physical health, pro-environmental behaviours, sense of belonging, supporting engagement and academic progression (Natural England, 2022; Waite et al., 2016; Dyment, Bell and Green, 2017; Patchen et al., 2022). These aims were identified in the LOtC manifesto (DfE, 2006) and Grigg and Lewis' (2016) discussion suggesting LOtC allows children to gain knowledge and an understanding of the world around them, building social and personal skills through interactions with a space and peers.

Many barriers to the inclusion of LOtC have been identified in literature. Research by Patchen et al. (2022) highlight teachers fear of taking children outside due to the heightened risk of overstimulation and change. However, there is a vast amount of controversy in this area, as a similar study was undertaken in the same year and it addressed the learning inequalities in school and the data demonstrated LOtC helps children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) to regulate and improve their mental health. One possible explanation for teachers reluctance to take children outside could be their lack of confidence outside the traditional classroom environment (Oberle et al., 2021; Little, 2015; Savery et al., 2017).

As previously highlighted, many researchers found that LOtC benefits all children. Although, there is a growing body of literature over the past twenty years relating to teacher's worries about behavioural issues when taking children outside, impeding their ability to make LOtC a beneficial experience for all (Oberle et al., 2021; Grigg and Lewis; 2016, Rickinson et al., 2004). This academic literature has sparked many researchers to study behaviour outdoors. A multitude of research concluded that regular use of LOtC promotes connections to a space and children learn new routines which reduces behaviour problems (DfE, 2006, RSPB, 2010, Waite, 2021; Council for Learning Outside the Classroom, 2022; Patchen et al., 2022).

Dialogue in the Outdoors

Dialogic talk is a pedagogical tool used to encourage children to explore, problem solve, and encourage thinking and new learning (Alexander, 2020; Alexander 2018; Kim and Wilkinson, 2019). Pupils become active participants when they engage in talk and are encouraged to construct their own knowledge suggesting dialogue benefits academic progression, cognition and social interactions (Vygotsky, 1962). There is extensive literature on dialogic teaching and the

development of theories over time. Shor and Freire's (1987) dialogical teaching depicts talk has three main purposes: collective, reciprocal and supportive. Much like in research by Burbles (1993) and Alexander (2018) it is identified that talk allows individuals to discuss learning together and support development. However, Shor and Freire fail to acknowledge how different types of dialogue can support different academic goals, which is mentioned in the research by Burbles (1993) and Alexander (2018).

Over the past two decades, major advances in the power of talk have allowed practitioners to become more aware of the research behind its benefits. Initial research by Shor and Freire's (1987) and Burbles (1993) identified the value of authentic dialogue, asking questions about a phenomenon, seeking education. However, some research has identified how the purpose of talk is confused and the discussions within the classroom are not meaningful and off topic, Emmanuel (2020) proposes that teachers set 'ground rules' to ensure the dialogue is rich, meaningful and aids learning. It is important that teachers encourage children to develop their vocabulary through discussions and interacting with their surroundings (Merrit, 2015; Cremin and Reedy, 2023). Recent evidence suggests that the natural environment is the best setting to provide inspiration and stimulate discussions (Learning through Landscapes, 2022; Suharmi, 2015; Young and Ferguson, 2021). Language acquisition can be supported using talk in outdoor provisions to encourage children to build subject specific vocabulary and vocalise their ideas (Richardson and Murray, 2017).

Inclusion

The inclusivity during a LOtC session is depicted as the level at which all individuals are fully involved, can access learning and make progress during the session (Learning through Landscapes, 2022). Pre-historic views identifying that LOtC was for people of privilege and people

were discriminated against based on their race and heritage (Aylward and Mitten, 2022). Although some believe children with disabilities are more likely to feel excluded in LOfC, as a society the attitudes of inclusion have altered and teachers make reasonable adjustments to make learning accessible, so all children can fully participate and enjoy a meaningful education (Edwards, 2023; Aylward and Mitten, 2022; DfE, 2015). Creating a social capital is essential to include all children in learning and LOfC allows children to develop trust and social connections (Kransy, 2020; Glanville, 2023). It has been reported that children with SEND feel more supported when LOfC is built into the school's curriculum and dialogue supports this inclusivity (Aylward and Mitten, 2022; Glanville, 2023). However, if the right support and preparation is not provided, it can result in loss of learning and disrupt a children's ability to focus and learn (Patchen et al., 2022).

Research by Glanville (2023) highlights the importance of the environment children work in and its influence on academic achievement. They highlight that the calming nature of outdoor spaces allow children with SEND to focus better on their learning compared to the overwhelming environment of the classroom (Glanville, 2023). Data from several sources highlights this notion and dialogue supports children to feel included during all stages of the learning process (Donovan, 2016; Aylward and Mitten). For some children with SEND, who have underdeveloped fine and gross motor skills (Murphy, 2022) it can challenge their ability to write, but using dialogue, children are still fully included within the lessons (Merrit, 2015; Glanville, 2023).

Writing in nature

Providing children with real-life experiences supports the learning process (Kinberg, 2020; Neville, Petrass and Ben, 2021; Noobanjong and Louhapensang, 2017; Powell, 2015). Multiple studies highlight the benefits nature-based learning has for progression of writing skills and literacy (Jennerjohn, 2022; Gardner and Kuzich, 2018; Merrit, 2015). Recent studies have established how

children are spending less time in nature and more on electronic devices, impacting their relationships with nature (Kinberg, 2020; Jennerjohn, 2022; Merrit 2015). This is a missed opportunity for children to engage in authentic learning experiences, connecting with nature as it can positively influence language development (Jennerjohn, 2022).

Teachers should provide exciting outdoor experiences to foster children's volition to write (Young and Ferguson, 2021). Research suggests when children are motivated, they take ownership of their writing, take academic risks and have a personal interest to write for a purpose (Suharmi, 2015; Cremin, 2023; Young and Ferguson, 2021; Kinberg, 2020). It is now well established from a variety of studies that LOtC is a good stimulus to encourage children to observe, listen and discuss nature aided by their senses (Quibell, Charlton and Law, 2017; Roa, 2018) and to think critically about language choices (Gardner and Kuzich, 2018; Kinberg, 2020; Suharmi, 2015; Merrit, 2015; Learning through Landscapes, 2022;). Much of this research highlights the connections between LOtC and academic engagement, suggesting children are more actively participating in the writing as they have an opportunity to be creative (Neville, Petrass and Ben 2021; Learning through Landscapes, 2022; Esposito, 2012; Glanville, 2023). Unfortunately, LOtC has been highlighted as an add on activity in many pieces of literature, it must be built into the curriculum and be established in the setting to be most impactful (Learning through Landscapes, 2022; Donovan, 2016; DfE, 2006). Supported by Neville, Petrass and Ben (2021), who report that out of 27 student participants, 87% believed that their writing ability improved through authentic interactions with the outdoors. This suggests that both practitioners and children perceive LOtC to be beneficial for emerging writers.

The connections between nature and mental health

Children are spending less time in the outdoors and in a post-covid climate (Merrit, 2015), the NHS (2022) researched the impact this had on children's mental health. They concluded that 1 in 6 children are identified as having a diagnosable mental health condition (NHS, 2022). It has been proven that being in the outdoors has positive benefits on wellbeing, physical, mental and emotional health (Fyfe-Johnson et al., 2021; Glanville, 2023; Merrit, 2015). The time spent outdoors should be an established classroom practice, with regular sessions to form personal connections with nature, so the children feel safe and calm in the space (Glanville, 2023; Merrit, 2015). However, children should not be taken out if it does not aid development (Grigg and Lewis, 2018). Although, for children from a disadvantaged background who do not have regular time outside, it is important that teachers allow them this time to connect with nature (McCree, 2022; Learning through Landscapes, 2020). Therefore, teachers need to educate children to see the benefits of being in nature (Kransy, 2020), so they carry on this positive engagement at home. The NHS (2022) outlined that if children aren't mentally happy, they will struggle to enjoy learning and be inspired.

Although Patchen et al. (2022) suggested that taking children with sensory processing disorders can become over stimulated by the outdoors, several lines of evidence suggest that teachers should use LOtC as a routine to encourage mindfulness, supporting those children who struggle in the classroom environment, which can reduce anxiety and frustration (Edwards, 2023; Glanville, 2023). This research aligns with McCree (2022), who outlines working with nature can support children with SEND to self-regulate and build emotional resilience.

Conclusion

Overall, the literature outlined suggests that LOtC can support children in many different areas of their development including socially and emotionally but can also support children accessing

learning and English. However, there is a gap in the literature that responds specifically to children's and teachers' perceptions of LOtC and if it impacts primary writing. This will be further discussed in relation to the findings of this research.

Research approach:

This research project follows a case study design, used to explore teachers' and pupils' perceptions of LOtC and whether it influences primary writing. A case study approach aims to explore a specific phenomenon in depth in its natural environment, producing detailed accounts of people's real-life experiences and opinions (Punch and Oancea, 2014; Denscombe, 2021; Thomas, 2023). Although, case studies are often criticised because of their lack of generalisability and representation as it is a single case being investigated (Punch and Oancea, 2014; Denscombe, 2021), this research was designed based on a previous study by Marchant, et al. (2019) who explored pupils' and teachers' views of outdoor learning. Using similar methodology, this allows the findings of both studies to be deemed more reliable (Denscombe, 2021). Kumar suggests "the greater the comparability, the greater the validity" (Kumar 2021, p.295) and as the research projects were conducted in two different locations: South Wales and East Riding of Yorkshire, this allows the ability to generalise the findings more accurately.

A mixed methods approach was utilised to explore a range of personnel's views on the impacts of LOtC, allowing the researcher to examine thoroughly the statements made using several methodological approaches, thus triangulating and cross-checking the data, meaning the findings could be generalised to the wider field (Walliman, 2018). Through implementing a mixed methods approach, the research has mitigated the negative implications of both quantitative and qualitative research, benefiting from the strengths of both types of research (Poth, 2021).

Participants:

The purpose of this study was to examine the attitudes of pupils and teachers, 5 key stage two children and 6 teachers from a small, rural mainstream primary school in Goole, England, participated in this study. Convenience sampling was used to pursue participants from the researcher's final placement class (years three, four and six), who were invited to contribute to the research as the sample population fitted the participant criterion for the study (Kumar, 2021).

Additionally, six teachers, from various departments within the school gave consent to contribute to this study.

Data Collection:

A combination of quantitative and qualitative data collection methods was used in this study: questionnaires completed by the teachers and semi-structured interviews, for both the teachers and pupils. Marchant et al. (2019) used interviews to gain detailed accounts of outdoor learning and as a case study approach was taken and the researcher chose to replicate this methodology by collecting rich data about respondents' perceptions of the influences of LOtC in the form of qualitative data during the interviews (Dawson, 2019). A mixed methods approach was used to design the questionnaire, aiming to generate both statistical data and to capture in-depth opinions and complexities associated with writing and LOtC, in a succinct approach (Thomas, 2023; Dawson, 2019).

Questionnaires:

The questionnaires were distributed via email to the teacher participants (see Appendix E).

Although, self-administered questionnaires are subject to a low-response rate (Kumar, 2021;

Denscombe, 2021; Walliman, 2018), the researcher engaged in anticipatory steps to reduce the

risk of this occurring. Prior notice was given to participants, through informal discussions during staff meetings and in emails. A follow up to a non-response was completed through a general reminder, thus boosting response rates, not impacting the sample size and validity of the findings (Denscombe, 2021). The questionnaires included a mixture of open and closed questions, in an attempt to reduce question fatigue (Denscombe, 2021) but allowing respondents the freedom to express their personal views, reducing the risk of researcher bias, thus providing honest and reliable responses (Walliman, 2018; Braun, 2021). To reduce the risk of this further, the researcher piloted the questionnaire to check for ambiguity in the questions and general feedback about its design (Walliman, 2018).

Semi- Structured Interviews:

Four of the six teachers agreed to participate in semi-structured interviews, including the school's English lead, to further gain a deeper understanding of their views (see Appendix A and C) (Braun, 2021), mirroring the approach taken by Marchant et al. (2021). Semi-structured interviews are a common method of exploring participants perspectives, as they respond in their own words (Braun, 2021) unlike the use of structured interviews where respondents can feel restricted as there is little room to expand and introduce new topics (Punch and Oancea, 2014). This study aimed to explore participants' perceptions of LOtC, therefore, semi-structured interviews created an opportunity to explore participants' personal narratives based on a set of guidance questions established prior to the interview (Atkins and Wallace, 2016).

An additional interview was conducted with the SENCo upon analysis of the questionnaires as inclusion was an area that needed to be explored further (see Appendix B) (Atkins and Wallace, 2016).

Following a LOtC based English lesson, 5 key stage two children were invited to participate in a semi-structured interview to reflect on their opinions about the potential impact LOtC has on their writing (see Appendix D). The interviews were conducted in a private room to reduce distractions (Braun, 2021). Rapport was built with the children at the beginning of the interview which involved: explaining the purpose of the research, the interest in the respondent's individual opinions, their right to withdraw and to form relationships to reduce the risk of prestige bias (Denscombe, 2021; Thomas, 2023). Individual semi-structured interviews were deemed most suitable, allowing the children the opportunity to express their views without being influenced by others or feel that they were repeating comments from other participants, which could influence the themes in the data, this is why a group interview was dismissed (Denscombe, 2021). Transcriptions of the interviews were created during the interviews using dictation software, which were transcribed verbatim, reducing researcher bias (Walliman, 2018; Kumar, 2021). The researcher confirmed the transcription matched with the participant's views, thus making the respondents active participants, making the findings more reliable, reducing interpretation bias (Thomas, 2023; Kumar, 2021).

Limitations:

The methodological approach taken in this study is mixed methodology in an attempt to gain an insight into pupils' and teachers' perceptions of LOtC and how influential it is on writing (Braun, 2021). Despite this study aiming to research opinions surrounding LOtC and the influence it has on writing and aiming to support and strengthen the claims made in Marchant et al's. (2019) research, this is a small-scale research project, therefore more research needs to be conducted in this area to generalise the findings. However, this study contributes to the wider field of research in education. Moreover, the reliability of this study could be impacted due to the status of the researcher being a student teacher and this could influence the responses given by the children and raises concerns of potential researcher bias (Kumar, 2021). However, the researcher took

precautions to ensure the data collected was reliable and reflected respondents honest views including the use of active participants (Thomas, 2023; Kumar, 2021). Overall, the design of the study has been proven to be successful as the data collected has been synthesised and related to literature that has been established in the field, contributing to the limited research in this area.

Ethical considerations:

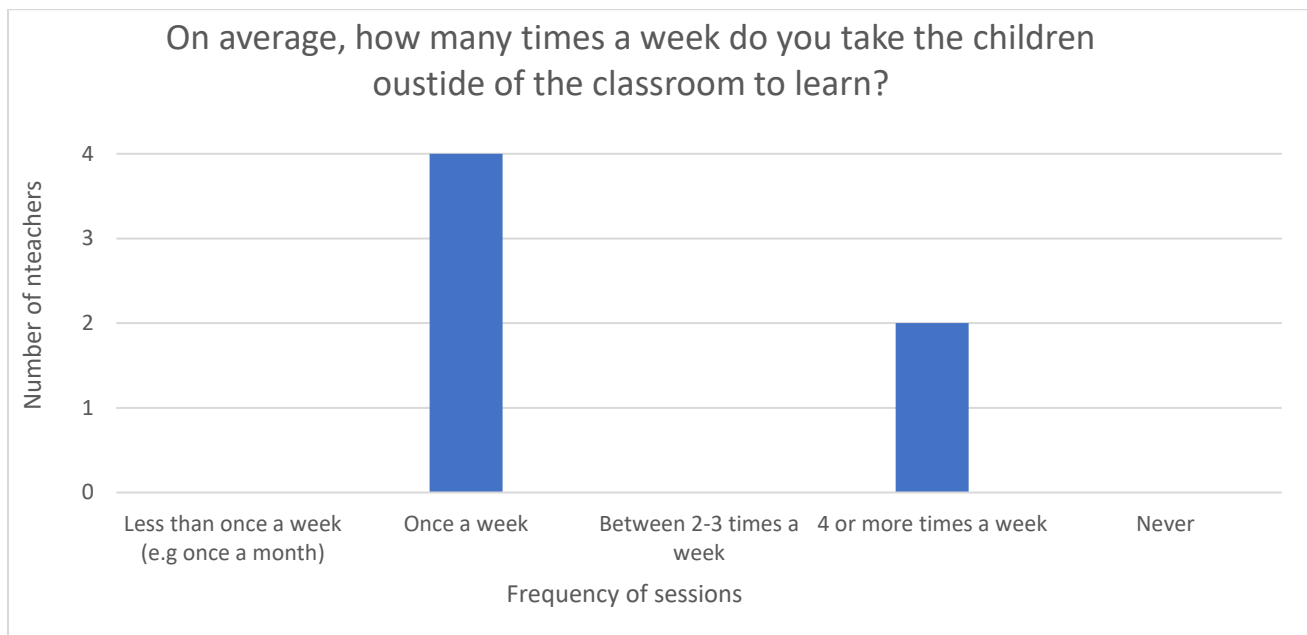
Following the York St John ethical guidance, the researcher gained ethical clearance to conduct this research from the York St John ethical clearance board. Consent was given from the gatekeeper of the school to conduct the research (see Appendix F), thus assent was gained from the children. Strong efforts were made to protect all participants and ensure that confidentiality and anonymity of participants was sustained throughout the study, which is essential to keep all participants safe, especially as children classed as a vulnerable group (Denscombe, 2021). Throughout the research, the researcher reiterated the right to withdraw from the study at any point and this was voiced during every part of the study.

Findings:

Post data collection, the interview and questionnaire responses were analysed by the researcher. Through thematically coding the data (Thomas, 2023; Walliman, 2018), the researcher analysed the data into the key themes that emerged, using a similar approach to that of Marchant et al. (2019).

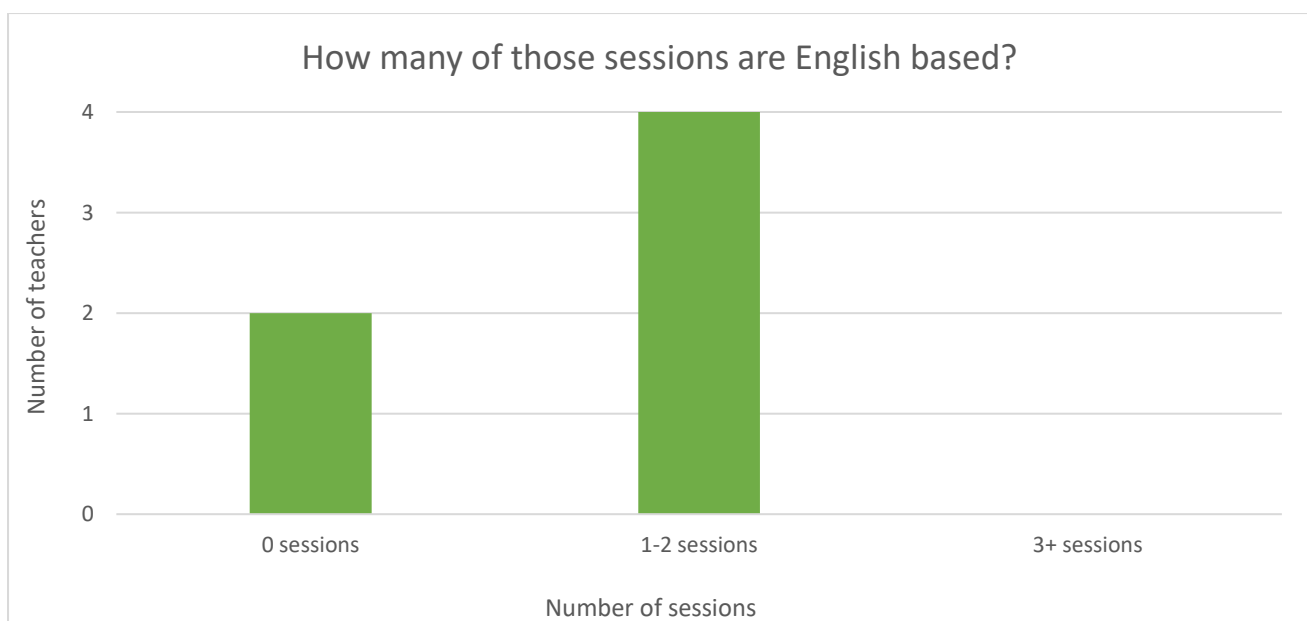
The data suggested that all of the child participants believed that LOtC has a positive influence on their ability to create higher level writing. Teachers shared this positive outlook of LOtC and reiterated the benefits it has for children's writing.

Graph 1



Graph 1 shows the frequency of LOtC sessions in the specific case school. The graph shows answers to the question above and suggest that all participants engage in LOtC at least once a week. This evidence suggests that LOtC is embedded in the school's curriculum and 100% of teachers value LOtC.

Graph 2



Graph 2 evidences how many LOtC sessions are used to support English lessons. Of the 6 teacher participants, 4 identified that they use LOtC during their English sessions. However, as evidenced by the graph above, 2 participants do not use LOtC to support their English sessions but is used in other areas of the curriculum.

The themes presented below have been identified through thematic analysis from the responses of children's interviews and teacher questionnaires and interviews.

Inclusion

One theme that emerged from the data suggested LOtC aids pupils' ability to access writing. Five out of six teachers discussed that a significant aspect of LOtC is making learning accessible and achievable for all children. This theme reoccurred several times during the data collection as teachers discussed the inclusivity of the environments supporting children who struggle with the formality and physical restraints of a classroom environment, this was discussed by four participants.

For one participant, they discussed how versatile LOtC is and how it can support reluctant learners to become more confident and engaged in learning. They recounted the use of alternative writing tools, like chalk, to engage pupils. Teachers reflect on the positive impact LOtC can have on including all children in learning, even subjects they struggle with. These results emerged within Marchant et al.'s (2019) research, thus triangulating these results and increasing the credibility of the findings in both studies (Kumar, 2021).

However, two participants voiced their concerns about the use of outdoor learning for children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) and sensory disorders. Data from the follow up interview with the SENCo and another teacher participant discussed the benefits of LOtC as it reduces stress and the outdoors provides a relaxing environment for some children. They identify the difficulty some children might face with change, lack of their safe space and being over stimulated in the

environment. Therefore, as stated by two participants, anticipatory actions need to be taken to make the environment inclusive for all children, removing barriers to learning as appropriate. One participant suggested the use of headphones for children with ASD to help with the transition to LOtC settings.

Further analysis of the data revealed that five participants presented how LOtC helps them maintain a better mental health. Comparing these results to Marchant et al.'s (2019) research, similar themes emerge in both studies. There is a clear link between inclusion and mental health. For children to be fully included in a setting, they should feel safe and happy. One child discussed how the freedom and open space in LOtC lessons allows them to feel free from stress and relaxed. They continue to explain how the outdoor environment:

“Helps to write better because it is very peaceful, calming and very relaxing.” [Child C, March 2023]

This suggest that the environment helps promote positive mental health and improve the environment children write in. Several participants shared this view, mirroring the findings of Marchant et al's. (2019) research.

Nature Connectedness

Of the study population, 100% of the respondents reported the significance of connecting with nature, evident across all three sources of data and in Marchant et al.'s (2019) influential study. This methodological triangulation of data suggests this to be a prominent theme within this study heightening the validity of the claims and data collected (Thomas, 2023).

One sub-theme emerging from the data suggested that all 11 participants view learning through experience was an important factor that has a positive influence on written work. This theme emerged in both interviews and questionnaires and arouse due to the clear link between

experience and connection to a place. Several children reported the benefit of working in the environment, highlighting the importance of using the surroundings as a stimulus for learning and engaging students. This view was echoed by teachers who discussed how LOtC can be used as a hook to enthuse students about learning and using this to inspire writing. One interviewee argued:

“Moving children from the classroom stimulates children’s interests. They use smells, touch, feel, sounds to enhance their writing. Plus, I feel children feel more free and creative due to the change in the standard classroom environment.” [Teacher D, March 2023]

This result also relates to the inclusivity of the environment, as many participants discuss how being outdoors promotes discussion, verbalisation of ideas and improves the use of vocabulary. This theme is echoed Marchant et al. (2019) as both teachers and children feel a sense of freedom to express themselves and are engaged.

Commenting on this, during an interview with a year 6 child, they discussed the ability to experience the environment they work in and how it supports language and vocabulary acquisition:

“If I was to think about a tree, I would just think about the wood and leaves, but if I am outside, I can touch the bark and smell the tree, so I can describe it better.”

[Child B, March 2023]

The data suggests that all the sample population view experiential learning as beneficial, allowing children to become connected to nature and use their authentic experiences and observations to build up a story about the environment.

When participants were asked about the possible influences LOtC has for the development of writing, 5 of the teacher participants discussed the notion of dialogue in the outdoors.

Most of these teachers commented that this helps children to process their thoughts and ideas, encouraging pupils to attempt using adventurous vocabulary and refine their ideas. These

participants suggested that LOtC is beneficial in the stages of planning a piece of writing to get inspiration and to introduce subject-specific vocabulary. One informant, alluded to the notion of peer talk which aids confidence building in writing due to the lack of formality in the classroom, which is beneficial for reluctant writers.

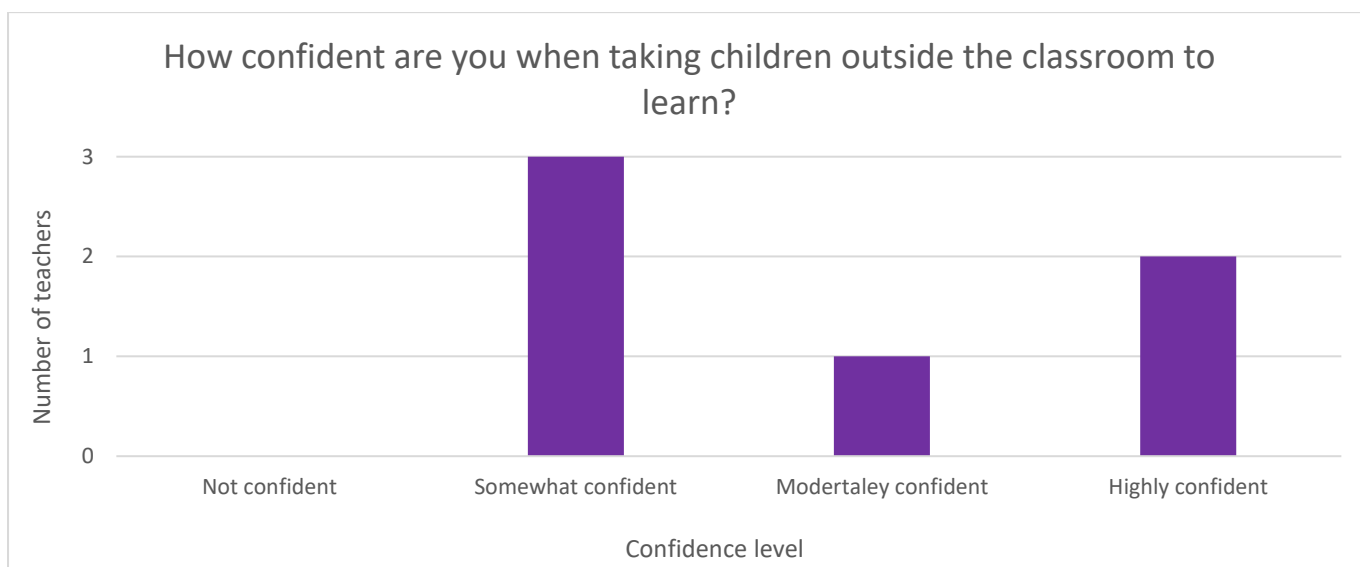
Practice

The final theme that surfaced from thematic analysis is the practice of LOtC in writing sessions. These views emerged from several children as they explored the notion that LOtC allows their learning to have a purpose. One child described the importance of having a reason to write, providing the opportunity to express their beliefs through purposeful writing. A variety of perspectives were explored in relation to this. In three interviews with teachers, they expressed their view that children should only be taken outside if it has a purpose. It should not be an add on activity and must be established in the planning stages of lessons to ensure it supports curriculum aims and progression. One respondent discussed the use of LOtC, specifically school trips. They discussed the benefit of the trip in supporting children to write recounts of the event as it was memorable and aided the structure of the piece, which they described as particularly beneficial for novice writers.

The challenges of LOtC were expressed by many teachers. A common view amongst teachers in this study and Marchant et al.'s (2019) research was that curriculum pressures hinders the ability to take children outdoors as there can be an expectation of the amount of written work that children need to complete. This concern was addressed as one teacher argued that teachers need to be creative with their time to enable LOtC to happen and use this to meet the curriculum expectations.

During the questionnaires, teachers were asked to state their level of confidence when taking children outside to learn. The graph below shows the results.

Graph 3



The data presented in graph 3 highlights that all teacher participants feel some level of confidence when delivering the sessions outdoors. The level of confidence varies from the participants. Three out of the six teachers justified how their high levels of confidence related directly to their experience, their knowledge of risk assessments and personalised learning. Only a small number of the respondents indicated that they lacked confidence during LOtC due to behaviour management.

Discussion

In this section, the findings of this small-scale study will be discussed in correspondence with existing literature in the field. The main findings of this study suggest that LOtC is an inclusive practice that makes learning and writing accessible for all children as the use of talk is encouraged in the surroundings. Additionally, this study concluded that LOtC provides experiential learning and acts as a stimulus for writing, encouraging children to explore language and ideas.

Nature Connectedness

In this section, the first theme that will be discussed is nature connectedness. The findings of this research show that 100% of the participants saw the benefits of experiencing nature and subsequently discussed its benefits for writing. From analysing research around this topic, this result was expected to emerge. Jennerjohn (2022) highlighted that connecting to the outdoor environment promotes the progression of skills in English. Children and teachers believed that the environment acts as a stimulus to promote writing within the primary school. This experience highlights the importance of inspiring pupils to engage with their surroundings and be excited to link their learning to the real world (Association for experiential education (AEE), 2023). Data from children's interviews elicited that children believe LOtC supports their freedom of expression and improved their descriptive writing skills. Previous studies reported consistently that LOtC enables pupils to be creative, think critically about the environment, the language they use and the inspiration that they gain (Putri, 2021; Gardner and Kuzich, 2018). This suggests that this small-scale research adds to the wide perceptions that teachers, pupils and research suggest that LOtC supports children with the inspiration for writing.

Considering this theme further, data from teacher and pupils suggest that LOtC encourages pupils to use their five senses to improve their use of vocabulary and refine their ideas. This view is reiterated throughout research and is identified in Kyllonen's (2019) exploration into the everchanging environment and its influences on writing. The research identified the use of the senses, allowing children to become engaged, intrigued and creates a sense of awe and wonder about nature (Kyllonen, 2019; Quibell, Charlton and Law, 2017). Encouraging children to discuss and talk about their experiences and refine their ideas is a key finding in this research and is echoed by Jolliffe and Waugh (2018) and mirrors the findings of Marchant et al. (2019). These

sources disclosed the importance of including dialogue in writing lessons to aid writers' ability to extend their thinking and understanding. With specific reference to Marchant et al's. (2019) research as it outlined that dialogic techniques were developed by pupils during LOtC and positively assisted their ability to feel free in the environment, supporting creativity in their work. As the development of language was a key aspect discovered in this piece of research, this notion is supported by the research of Corbett and Strong (2011) who suggest that language is learned through interactions between individuals and being exposed (auditorily) to more complicated vocabulary. As this research highlights teachers views that LOtC is inclusive for all children, through the use of dialogue, this ensures reluctant writers, children with SEND and children with developmental issues to access writing even if this is an area of the curriculum they struggle with. Children can experience learning and writing through peer interactions and talk, thus boosting their confidence and ability to engage in the learning. This opportunity supports children who do not come from linguistically rich backgrounds as they engage in rich, fruitful discussions about their shared experiences (Corbett and Strong, 2011). This dialogic approach allows children to express their views and understandings and peers can reflect on their discussions and work collaboratively to support each other to better their understanding and formulate ideas (Phillipson and Wegerif, 2017). This approach to writing is explored in this research and supports the inclusion of all children.

Inclusion

The second theme that will be explored addresses the level of inclusivity LOtC sessions provide for learners. This study found that teachers believe that LOtC is an inclusive practice to encourage all children to participate meaningfully in writing sessions. This result was expected as a similar theme emerged in Marchant et al.'s (2019) research and the results from both studies suggest that LOtC aid's children's ability to access learning especially for reluctant writers. Additional studies supported this and highlighted the improved engagement of children with SEND and reluctant

boys (Jolivet, 2015; Marchant et al., 2019). Another important finding from this research highlighted the influence the calming environment had on children, especially for those who have ASD. It is important to acknowledge that this finding is only applicable when LOtC is embedded in the curriculum as one-off sessions outside the classroom does not directly correlate to improved accessibility and engagement (Glanville, 2023). Many children identified the benefits of working in a calming environment which supported them to focus on the content of their writing and the writer's choices in relation to vocabulary and ideas. Supporting these findings, Chawla (2015) identified similar results and related these outdoor experiences to help improve children's mental health. This suggests that when children feel calm and relaxed in their environment, they produce better work and feel ready to learn (Sandberg, 2016). This relates back to the findings of this research, as the children identified their engagement in outdoor sessions linked to the calming learning environment, encouraging them to be more focused on their academic work.

Practice

The final theme the research found was the majority of participants (teachers and pupils) believed that LOtC can provide a purpose for writing. The most impactful writing sessions are achieved when children view the importance of the piece of writing, they understand the purpose of it and they write for real audiences (Land 2022; CLPE, 2018). Several reports have shown that children feel they have a sense of autonomy in their writing when it is done for a cause, thus motivating the children to feel a sense of freedom and encouraging them to get their ideas across (Land, 2022; DeFauw and Smith, 2016). The findings from this study support this notion as many child participants discussed how the purpose of a piece their work supported the authenticity in their writing and they were able to use language for effect.

Although LOtC can aid curriculum delivery and synthesize learning (Macquarrie, 2018; Merewether, 2017), research from this study suggested teachers believed that children should not

be taken into alternative environments if it does not support their development or learning. This suggests teachers need to identify how the outdoors will aid the children with meeting academic aims (Kyllonen, 2019). Relating this to teacher confidence, in the questionnaires, two teachers voice their concerns about their levels of confidence when taking the children out of the classroom. They disclosed concerns about the behaviour of the children outside and retaining control. If teachers set the same expectations out of the classroom as they do indoors, then the children will behave in the desired way, this can be supported by setting ground rules (Kyllonen, 2019). Linking back to Marchant et al.'s (2019) research, they identified that the time spent out of the classroom challenged this perception and pupils' behaviour improved since working in alternative provisions, linking to improved academic work.

Another important result from this research revealed that teachers feel pressure to remain in the classroom and work on mathematic and English goals, ensuring work is completed in exercise books. Therefore, some teachers outlined that for LOtC to be effective, it needs to be made a whole-school approach. As Hawxwell (2018) suggest if it is not built into the curriculum, LOtC can become a reward for pupils to encourage them to engage in learning, rather than using it as a vehicle to aid improvement. The view of teachers in this study reflects those in Marchant et al.'s (2019) project as they both reiterate the problem of curriculum restraints and how the curriculum is built to focus on mathematical and English targets, leaving teachers little room to adapt these and inspire pupils through LOtC.

Implications for practice

This study highlights some possible considerations for practice. Teachers believe that leadership should embed LOtC in the school's curriculum, to relieve curriculum pressures, as identified in this research because teachers believe LOtC supports academic work and makes links between learning and the real world. This regular practice of LOtC is important for all students, especially

those with SEND. Teachers should establish these routines to help reduce the risk of meltdowns and uncertainty. Writing in the outdoors supports reluctant learners and development, teacher should use this inclusive practice with their class as it excites children and makes learning purposeful, which should be implemented regularly.

Conclusions

Overall, the findings of this case study have clearly shown that both teachers and pupils believe LOtC can aid academic writing. There was a clear emphasis on the use of LOtC sessions to act as a stimulus to promote curiosity in children, thus engaging all children in learning further, including those with SEND. Teachers believe that LOtC is an inclusive teaching tool to make learning accessible particularly through the use of dialogue, which teachers believe supported reluctant writers, children with SEND and those who usually lack confidence in the traditional classroom. The classroom can become an impedimentum for some children, due to its formal layout and perceived expectations. However, as identified in this research, teachers and pupils believe the calming environment of the outdoors aids the children to feel safe and ready to learn. Participants perceived experiential and purposeful writing as a key factor that promotes commitment to writing as children engage with real audiences, allowing them to be passionate and devoted to the cause through their writing.

Although this research is a small-scale study, many of its findings mirror that of other researchers. For instance, similar themes arose in Marchant et al.'s (2019) research as both studies discussed the influences and experiencing the outdoors, the impacts LOtC have on pupils learning and health, and possible obstacles teachers and pupils face in LOtC sessions. The findings from this research can be viewed as transferrable as this case study has provided a thick description of the details of the research approach, participants and the context of the report (Anney, 2014). Even

though, this is a small-scale research project, as the researcher replicated a similar study to Marchant et al. (2019) and the findings showed similarities in data, the findings can be seen as more valid and could be generalised to some extent (Kumar, 2021).

Further research should be undertaken to examine specifically children's views on how LOtC benefits their academic writing as there is a lack of research in this area. This current study discussed children's positive views of LOtC and its influence on writing, however it was limited by the relatively small sample size, which is why the researcher recommends further research should be undertaken in this area.

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Appendices:

Appendix A: Teacher Interview guide

Teacher's Interview:

1. Does LOtC promote dialogue about the surrounds, if so, why?
2. Do you think exposing the children to the interview they are writing about helps them to produce better work? If so, why, or why not?
3. Do you think do you think learning outside helps children with their motivation to write?
4. Do you think LOtC should be a whole-school approach?
5. Would you consider being in the outdoors whilst writing an inclusive process? Why is that?
6. Do you think the curriculum allows for outdoor learning?
7. Does the English curriculum allow children to take children outside to learn?
8. What do you think is the purpose of writing outdoors?
9. Is there a need to encourage children to be in the outdoors in today's current climate?

Teacher's Interview Code (all interviews):	Tally
Inclusion	16
Nature Connectedness	13
Practice	12

SENCo Interview:

1. Do you think LOTC can support those children with additional needs?
2. Would you consider being in the outdoors whilst writing an inclusive process? Why is that?
3. How do the children in your class with additional needs respond to learning and writing outdoors?
4. In what ways do you feel LOTC can support reluctant writers?
5. What specific ways is outdoor learning beneficial for SEN children when writing?
6. Are there any real obstacles that you face when getting SEN children to write outdoors?
7. Do you think LOTC can support children with social, emotional and mental health concerns? If so, why?

Appendix C: English lead interview guide

English Lead Interview Questions:

1. Does learning outside the classroom promote dialogue about the surroundings, if so, why?
2. Does dialogue in the outdoors impact children's writing? Please explain your answer.
3. Why should/shouldn't we use outdoor provisions to support children in the writing process?
4. Do you think Learning Outside the Classroom can help support those children with additional learning needs and reluctant writers?
5. At what point in the writing process do you think going outside is the best time, or do you think children should be exposed to the outdoor environment during all points of writing? Please explain your answer.
6. How do you think learning outside helps children with their motivation to write?
7. Do you think learning outside the classroom should be a whole-school approach? Please explain your answer.
8. Would you consider being in the outdoors whilst writing an inclusive process? Why is that?
9. Do you think exposing the children to the environment they are writing about helps them to produce better work? If so, why, or why not?

Appendix D: Child interview guide

1. Do you enjoy learning outside the classroom and why?
2. Do you think learning outside the classroom helps you when you are learning?
3. Does learning outside the classroom help you with your writing?
4. How does learning outside help you with your writing?
5. Do you think LOtC helps the members in your class?
6. Does being in the environment you are writing about help you produce better work?
7. Why is this?
8. Does learning outside make you more excited to learn/write, why?
9. Does LOtC inspire you to write, why?

Children's Interview Code:	Tally
Inclusion	8
Nature Connectedness	22
Practice	8

Appendix E: Questionnaire guide

Questionnaire questions:

What phase of the school do you predominantly work in?
EYFS KS1 KS2

On average, how many times a week do you take the children outside of the classroom to learn?
Less than once a week (e.g. once a month) Once a week Between 2-3 times a week 4 or more times a week Never

If applicable, roughly how many of those sessions are English based?
0 1-2 3+

How confident are you when taking children outside the classroom to learn?
Not confident Somewhat confident Moderately confident Highly confident

Based on your previous answer, explain why you have the level of confidence selected in the previous question.

In what ways do you feel Learning Outside the Classroom can benefit, have a negative impact, or have no impact on children's writing? If possible, please reflect on practice.

What do you feel is the potential for learning outside the classroom? If possible, please relate this to primary writing.

What factors do you consider when deciding whether to take children outside to learn?

Does incorporating talk for writing in the outdoors help children's writing, if so, how?

Rank these quotes depending on which you strongly agree with (1) to the quotes you agree with the least (7) in relation to the teaching and learning of writing.

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Rank these quotes depending on which you strongly agree with (1) to the quotes you agree with the least (7) in relation to the teaching and learning of writing.

"Seasonal changes as inspiration" (Pohoring, 2017, p.17). 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

"High-quality experiential learning experiences engages our classes and stimulates their writing" (Walt, 2011, p.18). 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

"The atmosphere within these spaces also helps with scene setting writing" (Robinson, 2014, p.106). 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

"Engages pupils of all abilities including those with behavioural difficulties and additional learning needs" (Merritt, et al., 2016). 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

"Provides a strong foundation for student's imagination, curiosity and creativity" (Devila, Petras and Ben, 2020, p.11). 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

They can "reflect on what they have learned about the natural setting" (Jörberg, 2020, p.11). 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

"Students who explored the natural environment produced more diverse, imagery-rich language" (Gardner and Mutch, 2018, p. 429). 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Do you believe Learning Outside the Classroom has benefits for children's progression when engaging in the writing process? Please explain your viewpoint and state why you have that opinion.

Code (Questionnaires)	Tally
Inclusion	10
Nature Connectedness	14
Practice	7

Appendix F: Gatekeeper permission form

QTS6004M Research Project Permission form

Student name: _____

SE3 School: _____

Headteacher permissions:

I have read this student's ethical clearance form and give my permission for the conduct of this small-scale research project.

Additional parental passive consent is not required

Headteacher's name: _____

Headteacher's signature: _____

Date: _____

Students:

This completed form must be scanned or photographed and uploaded to the permission submission area on Moodle **prior to commencing your research project and by 27 January 2023 at the latest**

Appendix G: Research project information

QTS6004M Research project information

Project lead: Molly Entwistle Email: molly.entwistle@yorks.ac.uk

Project title: Teacher and pupil attitudes towards Learning Outside the Classroom: Influences on primary writing.

Project information:

I am carrying out a research project during my final school placement as part of my BA Primary Education degree at York St John University school placement SE3.

This research aims to establish both teachers' and pupils' perceptions of LOTC and whether they believe it has an influence on writing. Data will be collected through semi-structured interviews with both the teachers and pupils and additional questionnaires for the teachers.

If permission is given for this project to be carried out in school, a Headteacher permission form will be completed and additional parental consent will be sought if required.

There is no compulsion upon anyone to participate; you are free to decline the invitation. Whilst I would hope that you find participation interesting and enjoyable, your participation/non-participation will not affect the way that you are treated or taught on this placement.

Raw data will not be openly available. If requested, each participant may have access to their own data. There is no need within the research for raw data to be openly available. The research report will present analysis of data.

The project and permissions will be explained to participating children in accessible language. If you have any queries, useful contacts are:

- Project lead: Molly Entwistle
- Programme Lead: Louise Whitfield: l.whitfield@yorks.ac.uk
- Module Lead: Manjinder K. Jagdev: m.jagdev@yorks.ac.uk
- Chair of the Ethics Committee for the School of Education, Language and Psychology: Dr Scott Cole | Senior Lecturer in Psychology York St John University, Lord Mayor's Walk, York, YO31 7EX | 01904 876680 | email: s.cole1@yorks.ac.uk
- University's Data Protection Officer: Amanda Wilcox, University Secretary, York St John University, Lord Mayor's Walk, York, YO31 7EX - tel: 01904 876844, e-mail: a.wilcox@yorks.ac.uk

Thank you,
Molly Entwistle