

Outdoor and adventure centres

As part of a PE Programme

Pivotal physical activity experiences, which are particularly enjoyable and unforgettable can contribute positively to the lifelong physical activity habits of the participants.

Kretchmar 2008

A visit to an outdoor and adventure centre is certainly one such event that can live long in the memory of the pupils, for all the right reasons. Research suggests that both teachers and pupils are positive about the use of outdoor and adventure as part of a physical education programme (Coulter 2012).

Mary Sheehan from Presentation Primary School, Fermoy, Co Cork, brought her class to Blackwater Outdoor Activities Centre in North Cork and she agreed “it proved to be a school tour full of thrills and excitement. The children were given the opportunity to explore whilst also experiencing the adrenaline rush of the wide range of activities”.

Both water and land based activities are usually offered in these centres with activities including (but not limited to) canoeing, sailing, kayaking, surfing.

Outdoor challenges such as rock climbing, ropes courses, abseiling and archery are also common activities offered.

To prepare for these activities Mary shared with us a few practical tips for the day; “my best advice would be to prepare for all eventualities.

“The essentials would be:

- ✦ comfortable clothing and appropriate shoes,
- ✦ plenty of food and water,
- ✦ and sun cream/rain gear.”

Whilst valuable as a physical exercise in itself, a visit to an outdoor and adventure centre is also valuable in many other ways.

Outdoor and adventure activities encourage children to problem solve, work with and trust others and develop self-confidence and a respect for the environment, many of which are outlined in the curriculum (Department of Education and Science 1999).

Many centres offer tasks that challenge the pupils to think independently, and work together co-operatively for a common goal, raft building, for example. This focus on teamwork and trust can be very valuable in bringing a class group closer together.

A recent study of Irish primary schools found that a staggering 89% of pupils reported not having any exposure to the outdoor and adventure strand of the curriculum (Woods et al 2010). The outdoor challenges strand unit of the curriculum along with the water based activities strand of the fifth and sixth class curriculum will require the use of a local adventure centre to carry out many of the relevant activities. An action packed visit to an outdoor and adventure centre offers one means of ensuring that schools are not neglecting this strand of the PE curriculum.

Teachers have a great opportunity to plan these visits with the relevant strand unit and learning outcomes in mind

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(Coulter 2012). Mary outlined how her visit to a centre was incorporated into her PE plan,

“... it was very closely linked to the outdoor and adventure strand in the PE curriculum. It gave children a very positive and exciting experience of outdoor challenges, water based activities as well as an understanding and appreciation of outdoor and adventure activities which was the topic of discussion for the remainder of the school year.”

Not convinced yet? Want to see what all the hype is about for yourself? Why not come along to the Irish Primary PE Association's 2014 conference which is being held in the unique setting of Carlingford Adventure Centre, Carlingford, Co Louth. This theme for this year is 'Out and About', with plenty of practical hands-on activities and workshops ensuring it will be like no conference you have attended before!

There will be a combination of indoor and outdoor workshops taking place with some of the highlights being challenges, orienteering, photo orienteering,

high ropes, walking trails, dance, yoga and much more! This conference takes place on **1 March from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.** and offers a great opportunity to visit one of the country's leading adventure centres. As places are limited it is important to prebook your place online at www.irishprimarype.com. A special rate of €30 is available until 31 January, with a fee of €40 thereafter. This fee includes your lunch and participation in any of the workshops that tickle your fancy.

Alternatively if you can't make Carlingford, contact your local adventure centre and enquire about teacher try out trips. Many offer reductions (and in some cases refunds) for teachers who first try out the facilities themselves and later return with a class. A google search (google maps also works) will provide details of those centres near your school.

Half day packages generally start from around €15 per pupil upwards with full day visits averaging somewhere in between €30-€40 euro per pupil (dependent on activities chosen and numbers attending). So go on, get out and about with your class, what are you waiting for?

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References

- Coulter, M. (2012). *Teaching Outdoor and Adventure Activities: Describing Analysing and Understanding a Primary School Physical Education Professional Development Programme*. Doctor of Philosophy, Dublin City University.
- Department of Education and Science (1999) *Primary School Curriculum: Physical Education: PE Curriculum*. Dublin: Government Stationery Office.
- Kretchmar, R. S. (2008). 'The increasing utility of elementary school physical education: A mixed blessing and a unique challenge.' *The Elementary School Journal* 108(3): 161-170.
- Woods, C.B., Tannehill D., Quinlan, A., Moyna, N. and Walsh, J. (2010). *The Children's Sport Participation and Physical Activity Study (CSPPA)*. Research Report No 1. School of Health and Human Performance, Dublin City University and The Irish Sports Council, Dublin, Ireland.

Irish Primary PE Association's 2014 Conference

Date: 1 March, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.
Venue: Carlingford Adventure
Centre, Carlingford,
Co Meath