

Making the Leap from Outdoor Instructing to Classroom Teaching and Back Again

by Glen Probert

"...alongside my NGB's and outdoor experience I have a qualification which has enabled me to fully appreciate professionalism and self analysis, true hard work and pressure to improve."

Professional
Development

*“Teaching? Ahh, that’s easy.
Home by half three and 12 weeks
holiday a year.....”*

I remember these conversations with visiting members of teaching staff very well. It all sounded so easy, sat in my staff room at the outdoor centre I had been working at for 4 years.

I knew everything there was to know about interacting with children. I had taught thousands of different children in some very difficult and dangerous activities over the years. I had a couple of NGB qualifications and thought of myself as a true outdoor ‘professional’.

Two years later, stood in front of my own class of 30 year 6 individuals on a cold September morning, I can look back on myself and realise just how naïve I was! I didn’t really know anything about children – their needs, psychology or how to really enhance their learning. And as much as I thought of myself as a ‘professional’, again I was way, way off the mark.

Making the move...

I needed to do something. I had been at the centre on and off for a while and I was comfortable. I knew the activities, I knew the staff, who had become some of my best friends, and I knew the ins and outs of the centre. However, I was restless. I had become stagnant and complacent with my work – I wanted more responsibility and to have a greater say in how the centre was run and the experience the children were having. I have heard of these feelings in other instructors I have talked to and know that this is a common feeling in the industry.

I knew I was capable of much, much more – but how? Looking around the centre, I could see my options in my colleagues and it looked like this: I could stay at the centre as an instructor, earning a pittance, and fight my way up to more senior positions by gaining more NGB’s. I could move around various centres doing the same thing, but again this would take time and involve moving away. Or I could become a teacher, as were the Head, deputy Head and assistant centre manager.



I already had my degree in Outdoor Leadership from what is now the University of Cumbria and with the funding and loans available I would be on the same wage as I was when I was instructing.

All I needed to do was to get onto the correct course. Again there were options for me; I could either take a four year degree course, a GTP which is based in and supported by a school who were willing to

have me, or a PGCE which would entail one year of training with a balance of university lectures and classroom placements.

Due to my experience with teaching year 5 and 6 in outdoor education, I opted for a PGCE in Primary Education specialising in Key Stage 2 at Newman University College in Birmingham.

Learning the lessons...

My PGCE year was an eye opening experience and it was here that I first began to understand the term ‘professional’. As a teacher, everything you say or do is underpinned with years of pedagogical theory, research and Government initiatives. The academic side of the course was based upon the learning of all of this, ready to apply practically in the classroom.



[O](#)previous page

Furthermore, being a primary teacher requires a full and in-depth knowledge of Numeracy, Literacy, and Science as well as all the other curriculum subjects – none of which I had really used since I was at primary school!

This proved to be one of the more difficult parts of the course and continued to be throughout my NQT year. The subject knowledge required is substantial and delivered to you quickly, with a large amount of studying required outside of the lectures in order to absorb it all.

A recent Government initiative is to 'fast track' graduates with specific subject knowledge to gain QTS within 6 months, however based upon my hectic experience I feel that this will be ineffective for primary teachers as the curriculum is far too broad to be absorbed in such a short time and will only result in churning out significantly unprepared teachers.

In order to apply the vast amount of knowledge that the University was supplying us with, the course also required me to undertake three school-based placements; two with our chosen Key Stage and one with the other.

With my experience being mainly practical, I was hoping that this would be my time to shine and

for my years of outdoor education teaching to give me an advantage.

However, as with the rest of the course I was quickly finding out that the difference between instructing and classroom teaching is substantial. The way in which I addressed the children, the gestures I made, the use of my voice, the lessons I planned and differentiated – all were evaluated in detail and advised on.

Slowly but surely I progressed through the course, learning one vital lesson above all – to be a professional demands that you absorb and act on all advice given, and that self assessment and reviewing is essential for progression. It is incredible to think that for years I have been teaching this to children at the centre, yet I was not following my own advice!

Perhaps this is where my shortcomings as an instructor were based – for all my self confidence and self assessment of what I thought I was capable of or what I had accomplished, what I was not doing was reviewing what others thought I was capable of, or what I was not capable of doing.

Finding my Feet...

I am now coming to the end of my NQT year, where I have been teaching 32 year 6 children. I have found that training as a teacher is very similar to passing

your driving test: you practice to pass your test, but you really learn to drive through experience afterwards.

Alongside the application of all my PGCE knowledge I have also had to attend to the pastoral care of my class, continually assess and adapt to the attainment of the children in accordance with national guidelines and work alongside fellow professionals to ensure that the school is delivering the highest quality education possible – all of which lead to a busy, pressurising job where there is always room for improvement.

Despite all the hard work transforming into a teacher has been – there is a fruitful reward at the end. Now, alongside my NGB's and outdoor experience I have a qualification which has enabled me to fully appreciate professionalism and self analysis, true hard work and pressure to improve.

Full Circle

This has resulted in my recent appointment to assistant centre manager at a partner outdoor centre to the one at which I once worked.



To this position I feel that I will be taking a completely different instructor to the one I once was.

Becoming a teacher demands that you apply yourself in all aspects of your job and look for ways to progress your teaching. It requires you to fully understand and interact with the children and harness their ability to achieve. But most of all, it requires you to display yourself as a professional – to the children, to the visiting members of staff and to your colleagues.

Would I recommend becoming a teacher to all outdoor practitioners?

No, as I appreciate that what was beneficial for me may not be for others. What I would recommend though, is taking the time to think very carefully about your own strengths and weaknesses, where you want to go and how you could get there. Evaluate each session you teach to make sure that the next one is even better and remember; the whole reason for this is that the children we teach deserve the best possible experience from outdoor education.

Oh, and as for the three thirty home time? Not once – more like six thirty. And the 12 weeks holiday? I've spent six of them marking books, planning and recovering... ■

Glossary

GTP - Graduate Teaching Programme
PGCE - Post Graduate Certificate in Education
NQT - Newly Qualified Teacher
QTS - Qualified Teacher Status
Key Stage - Primary schools are split into 2 Key Stages, KS1 being Reception to Year 2, KS2 being Y3 to Y6.

About the author

Glen Probert is currently a Year 6 teacher at John Wheeldon Primary School in Stafford and will start as the assistant centre manager of Shugborough Outdoor Education Centre in September.

Glen has a BA Hons in Outdoor Leadership, alongside a PGCE with QTS and is studying for an MA in Education. He holds a number of NGB's including ML and SPA, and has a range of outdoor experience in both the public and private sector as well as having worked as a practitioner in the USA.

Photos - all from the author.