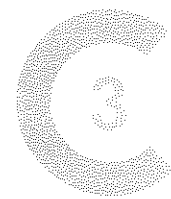


# Breakthroughs in our interaction with nature

## Natural values: Outdoor experiences for all children in the UK



Letting young people reconnect with the natural world

### **Dr Kate Rawles & Dr Chris Loynes, University of Cumbria**

'Young people need outdoor experiences – but a growing number aren't getting any. This project is about reversing their "nature deficit" – by ensuring that teaching and learning in outdoor settings is built into the education system across the board. From early years to secondary level, children's well-being is nurtured by bringing them into frequent contact with the natural world, helping them to develop the values, knowledge and understanding that underpin sustainable lifestyles. We want more schools to focus on this – and to be assessed on how effectively they deliver. Environmental organisations can be their natural allies – with informal education, youth activities and multi-agency services such as Children's Centres all playing their part too.'

**'If we want children to flourish, to become truly empowered, then let us allow them to love the earth before we ask them to save it.'**

David Sobel, US writer and pioneer of place-based education

'Outdoor experiences during childhood are a foundation for developing a personal concern for the environment. Yet we've inadvertently created a situation where Britain's increasingly urbanised children can grow up with no connection with trees, birdsong or where their food comes from. One in five has never ever visited the countryside,

and many spend more time in cars, indoors and in front of electronic screens than they do outside. This project addresses many of the contributing factors, and enlists our schools to provide a remedy. By organising regular outdoor experiences, they can encourage the celebration of nature, a sense of wonder and (for older children) an exploration of the relationship between contemporary values, negative impacts on nature, including the consequences of consumerism and lifestyle choices, and our own wellbeing and identity.'

### **SDC**

'If we're to be suitably ambitious about this whole issue – how the environment contributes to young people's well-being, and how young people contribute to the well-being of the environment – we should aim to make it a sixth objective of the government's Every Child Matters Framework. As a minimum, structures and clear targets for outdoor experiences need to be backed up by strong and consistent incentives. Unless this is properly resourced, children's services, schools and other local partners can't and won't deliver.'

### **What happens next**

There's a fair amount to build on, since across the UK there is significant work already underway and some policies in place to promote children's learning outside the classroom. To move forward, we now need to get agreement on what level of outdoor experience of nature becomes every child's formal 'entitlement', to be met as an integral part of early years and schools provision. Teachers also need the commitment, confidence and competence to turn this into a regular feature of what they do. Identifying, promoting and rewarding exemplary practice would all help, but as a solid base there should be a specific focus on outdoor experience in teacher training, standards for newly qualified teachers, continuous professional development programmes, and qualifications for early years and youth workers. Then there's the child safety dimension. However confident we are that the benefits of outdoor experience outweigh the attendant risks, we'll have to find ways to bring even the most cautious of teachers, parents and governors onside.

### **Contact**

[kate@outdoorphilosophy.co.uk](mailto:kate@outdoorphilosophy.co.uk)  
[chris.threshold@btinternet.com](mailto:chris.threshold@btinternet.com)  
[www.outdoorphilosophy.co.uk](http://www.outdoorphilosophy.co.uk)