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Tracy Hayes, Lecturer in Institute of Health at University of Cumbria and Mark Leather, Associate Professor of Outdoor Learning and Adventure Education at Plymouth Marjon University.

## **Introduction**

BERA's Nature, Outdoor Learning and Play (Nolap) special interest group provides a focus for the wealth of outdoor learning research taking place in the UK and beyond. We encourage critical debate from methodological, philosophical, political, creative and educational perspectives, by creating a forum for academics, practitioners, and students to engage critically in debates around nature, learning and play in outdoor settings. Nature, outdoor learning and play is about much more than fun and games (although these are important). There is a serious side that enables us to explore some of the most pressing problems facing the world, enabling us to find positive ways for humans to coexist with the more-than-human world in a more sustainable way. Playful, nature-based activities provide ways of learning about the outside world and understanding our place within this and enable the development of a positive relationship with nature, other people and with ourselves (Leather, Harper & Obee, 2020; Hayes, 2017; Hayes, 2016). Outdoor practice actively seeks to help make these connections with nature, in natural places, to generate an ethic of care, from the local to the global.

## **A Curriculum for Wellbeing the Nolap way**

There are concerns around contemporary issues such as obesity, poor mental health, and lack of engagement with/poor understanding of natural world. But we cannot ignore that the environment is under threat from what we do, and the way we do it. We argue that a curriculum for wellbeing needs to provide effective ways of addressing concerns about both health and wellbeing of people and of the environment. Defra's 25-year plan (2018) emphasises that our approach to healthy lifestyles is shaped by our early experiences and the environment around us. Therefore, we need to be reflective on our own experiences, consider how they impact on our practice, on the way we design and teach a curriculum for wellbeing. And we need to challenge ourselves to consider different ways of doing things – because what we have been doing, the way we have been doing it, hasn't worked – the pandemic has highlighted that.

Nature has never seemed as vital as it does today as we live through the Covid-19 pandemic. It has been noticeable over the last months, as we adjust and attempt to plan a for *new normal* (whatever that may be), just how important it is for our health and wellbeing to have access to a local outdoor space (see Natural England, 2020). There are many studies to show how being outside can be beneficial to your health (see for example White *et al.*, 2019), whether this involves bird watching, walking, or simply eating lunch in the garden. And there are many initiatives encouraging us to make the most of nature on our doorstep, in our gardens, parks and local green spaces. For many (authors included), nature '...has become our sanctuary', somewhere that offers solace and healing (National Geographic, 2020). However, the pandemic has also highlighted the disparities between those who are fortunate to have private outdoor spaces

(gardens and allotments) and/or access to nearby accessible greenspaces – and those who do not and the impact of the pandemic is felt by outdoor educators around the world (Quay et. al., 2020).

We are witnessing extremes of inequalities that show how access to good quality green space is a social justice issue. The closure of parks disproportionately impacts BAME (Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic) and poorer communities who have less access to shared spaces or private gardens. With the additional closure of/restricted access to many school grounds, first schools, community gardens and city farm parks, there are limited options for many people. People are also reporting reluctance to access outdoor spaces due to concerns about contracting or spreading the virus and/or breaking the guidelines on what is allowed (Natural England, 2020). As a result, much of the outdoor learning sector has been devastated - staff have been furloughed and centres closed. They will need support to recover. The Institute for Outdoor Learning (IOL) highlights that these are difficult times, and how the impact of the virus is causing significant change. They are seeking to ensure that UK and Home Nation Governments are aware of, and fully consider, the impact that Covid19 and associated Government guidance is having (IOL, 2020). This situation is troubling and is something that we need to address as educators and researchers. However, we also need to maintain focus on other pressing problems facing the world, not just the global pandemic, but climate change and biodiversity loss. We need to find positive ways for humans to coexist with non-humans more sustainably and we suggest that viewing the outdoors and learning through a 'place responsive' lens can help shift our perspective (Leather & Thorsteinsson, in press).

### **Looking forward with hope**

In our current work, we are exploring how we can shift perspectives on nature through pedagogical practices. We're asking critical questions around how we may combine science- and arts-based approaches to shift perspectives away from a human-centred view of the world to one that views humans as only one thread in the web of life. We will be offering evidence-based suggestions for incorporating this into teaching practice, with the aim of positively affecting societal and environmental change. Within this, we focus on inclusion, how we can effectively support children, young people and adults with range of differing abilities and opportunities to access their local outdoor spaces (Hayes et al., 2016).

We must find ways to make nature more accessible to everyone through local and national policies, and educational initiatives and perhaps reframe how we conceptualise what we mean by 'nature' (Leather & Gibson, 2019). We need to invest in '... ways of encouraging and creating better quality green space amidst our urban landscapes' (Friends of the Earth, 2020). With the gradual reopening of educational places, outdoor spaces will be vital and therefore we need to consider how best to do this, in a considered and mindful way, that acknowledges the needs of the environment as well as people. We are interested in playful pedagogies, that challenge traditional, more conventional, pedagogies, contributing positively to a range of more positive health and educational outcomes for students and educators. We hope that you will join us, and we welcome your thoughts on how best to do this.

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