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TEAN Conference 2023

Abstract by Helen Jones, Lecturer in Education at University of Cumbria. For Research or practice exchange presentation.

Taken from Current Dissertation Project- Masters in Education and Social Justice at Lancaster University.

'Less Sitting Indoors Please' Making Room for nature-based learning and outdoor education within a crowded curriculum.

The purpose of this presentation is to examine the case for an alternative pedagogy within the primary curriculum and will challenge the dichotomy between the need to increase access to nature-based learning and outdoor education for all, and the scope to which this can happen in praxis.

The research is distinctive in the sense that it is based on a focused tutor-supported independent study on pupils' interaction with a bee apiary. This project was conducted with experienced teachers and teaching assistants who were familiar with and worked within the school ethos of embedding outdoor learning experiences into their subject planning. In response, the discussions will also include the author's reflections on changes to her own pedagogical practice that arose from conducting the research.

Further findings from this small-scale study raised questions about the value and importance of inclusive practice when learning outdoors. 'The disparities in access to outdoor spaces between those who are fortunate enough to have access to outdoor spaces and those who do not is a social justice issue.' (Hayes & Leather, 2020)

The project contained an empirical dimension and was driven by a post-positivism-critical realism paradigm (Grix, 2010, p.86) with a broad qualitative approach to data collection. Data was collected through observation, lesson planning analysis and interviews.

Within this current project, we consider firstly, Dewey's encouragement for us to: '...develop the sensitivity to perceive options so that we can engage in critical enquiry on alternative courses of understandings and actions rather than allowing our habits to prevent us from perceiving the nuances in new situations.' (Lowery and Jenrick 2019. p62) Examining this pragmatist philosophy of education, we then return to understanding more fully the need to increase access to nature-based learning for all; echoing what many educationalists have long since argued that this is a good thing. We then consider a range of social justice issues, including pupil well-being and inclusion, cultural perspectives and geographical fairness in accessing safe green space, which support the argument further that through the primary curriculum, more children need to experience and interact positively with the natural environment.

The author then, investigates teachers' perceptions around the value of outdoor education. From here, we examine what teachers perceive as the potential barriers to including outdoor education activities within the curriculum and how, within a crowded curriculum, do teachers (and especially beginner teachers) more confidently plan and implement effective nature-based learning within their programmes?

Grix, J. (2010) *The Foundations of Research*. 2nd edn. Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan.

Hayes, T & Leather, M. (2020) *The Importance of Nature: Before, During and After Covid*.

Available at: [The Importance of Nature: before, during and after Covid-19 | BERA](#) Accessed: 4th March 2021

Lowery, C & Jenlink, P. (2019) *The Handbook of Dewey's Educational Theory and Practice*.

BRILL Publishing. e-book: Accessed: 27th February 2023