

## 2.5: Outdoor learning, the environment and sustainable practice

'Sustainable practice' and 'sustainability' are concepts that are increasingly being incorporated into learning programmes, leadership and skills syllabi and curricula. This section takes a practitioner/participant perspective focusing on environmental impact through awareness of climate change, biodiversity loss and responsible engagement with the natural environment. A wider provider perspective also includes business and social elements of sustainability.

High quality outdoor learning has the potential to have a positive impact on the environment, both directly and indirectly. Practitioners engage with the natural environment through their day-to-day practice and must constantly balance the demands on the natural environment for recreation and learning with the challenges of climate change, biodiversity loss and environmental damage. All practitioners should therefore be aware of the impact of their own practice on the environment and the opportunities they have to influence the behaviour of others.

### Personal practice



#### **National governing body and professional associations' coaching and leadership awards all recognise the importance of:**

- ✓ Adopting a minimal impact approach.
- ✓ Keeping up to date with environmental knowledge and having sufficient understanding to engage in relevant conversations with participants.
- ✓ Considering the environment in course and session planning, aiming to reduce negative impact while increasing positive understanding.
- ✓ Promoting positive values concerning conservation and use of the countryside.
- ✓ Acting as a role model for conservation and environmentally sustainable behaviours.
- ✓ Being aware of, and minimising their impact on, local communities, other users, physical environments and settings.
- ✓ Setting and managing expectations for behaviour and outcomes.

## Encouraging in others

Practitioners should seek to develop their own and others understanding of the environment and the behaviours that can positively impact it. Relationship building with the natural environment lies at the heart of developing participants' understanding of sustainability issues<sup>1</sup>.

Research into the relationship between knowledge acquisition and emotional connection has shown that direct experience through spending time in nature is more likely to lead to pro-environmental behaviours<sup>2</sup>.

There is a range of evidence as to how nature connectedness occurs or is fostered in both children and adults, and a growing body of evidence that supports the impact of outdoor learning on nature connectedness<sup>3</sup>.

Initial engagement with outdoor learning can involve simply being outdoors. Spending time in nature in facilitated settings can help children, young people and adults who are not accustomed to time outdoors to become comfortable outside, leading to increased likelihood of further engagement<sup>4</sup>.

Practitioners should understand and plan for progression, recognising that people are at different points in their relationship with nature and have differing opportunities to engage once back in their day-to-day settings.





## Questions to develop practice:

- » In what way are you an advocate for the natural environment and environmentally sustainable behaviour?
- » What opportunities are there to develop a place-responsive approach to practice, engaging with local culture and ecology?
- » What opportunities exist in your practice for participants to experience and interact with nature? What aspects of nature can be experienced through different activities?
- » What opportunities exist in your practice to raise awareness of environmental issues? E.g. through informal discussions around food miles, transport, land use, littering, etc., or embedded practices at outdoor learning facilities.
- » What do you do to foster a culture of respect for self, others and the environment?
- » How do you enable participants to become partners in helping to protect the natural world?
- » What signposting or opportunities do you offer to support participants in being able to continue and develop their engagement with the natural environment?
- » In what ways will you (or do you) provide information about pro-environmental actions that participants can do?
- » How will you (or do you) provide information to participants about how they can engage with nature through play, recreation, work, gardening, studying natural history or geography, caring for wildlife etc.?



## Connecting people with nature:

- ✓ Allow time to encounter nature at participants' own pace, developing their own interests.
- ✓ Take time to notice the natural environment.
- ✓ Allow people to overcome fears in nature or fears of particular species through gradual interactions at their level of comfort.
- ✓ Share examples of people's enthusiasm and care for nature.
- ✓ Enable people to record their observations and experiences in a variety of ways.

(see Chawla, 2020)

## Further reading

**Mountain Leader Candidate Handbook**

**Learning for Sustainability and the GTC Scotland Professional Standards for Teachers**

**IOL Sustainable Practice - Future Footprints**

**UN Sustainable Development Goals**

*Natural Resources Wales* **A Natural Progression**

Chawla, L. (2020) **Childhood nature connection and constructive hope: A review of research on connecting with nature and coping with environmental loss.** *People and Nature*, 2(3), pp.619-642.

## See also

2.0 Understanding quality in outdoor learning

2.1 Underpinning structures

2.2 Safety management and safeguarding

2.3 Equity diversity inclusion and belonging

2.4 Developing relationships

2.6 Theory of change

2.7 Continuity and progression

## References

- 1 Natural England (2020) *Nature connectedness among adults and children in England (JPO32)*. Available at: <https://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/publication/6005041314136064>
- 2 Kuo, M., Barnes, M. and Jordan, C. (2019) *Do Experiences With Nature Promote Learning? Converging Evidence of a Cause-and-Effect Relationship*. *Front. Psychol.* 10:305. doi:10.3389/fpsyg.2019.00305
- 3 Pirchio, S., Passiatore, Y., Panno, A., et al (2021) *The Effects of Contact With Nature During Outdoor Environmental Education on Students' Wellbeing, Connectedness to Nature and Pro-sociality*. *Front. Psychol.* 12:648458. doi: 10.3389/fpsyg.2021.648458
- 4 Beyer, K. M. M., Heller, E. F., Bizub, J. M., et al (2015) *More than a Pretty Place: Assessing the Impact of Environmental Education on Children's Knowledge and Attitudes about Outdoor Play in Nature*. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 12(2), 2054–2070. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph120202054>

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