1.3: The context for outdoor learning

Outdoor learning is always influenced by a number of key agendas that drive policy and practice. At the time of writing, these include:

» Increasing numbers of children with mental health disorders[1] and significant percentages of the adult population either overweight or obese[2].

» Growing health inequalities and child poverty[3].

» Increased anxiety levels, post Covid, in children and adults, with overall wellbeing ratings declining across all measures[4].

» Inequitable access to and success in education[5].

» Conflicts around the world leading to community-level challenges[6], demanding empathy and understanding to promote cohesion and integration.

» Digital technologies and artificial intelligence changing the world of education and employment[7].

» Accelerating biodiversity loss and climate change[8].

» Increasing urbanisation, time spent indoors and a loss of 'nature connection'[9].

» Inequitable access to the outdoors[10] and outdoor learning[11].

» The Global Goals for Sustainable Development (known as the Sustainable Development Goals, or SDGs)[12].

For individuals and groups, these challenges have meaning at four levels: intrapersonal, interpersonal, societal and global (figure 1). Outdoor learning interventions on their own cannot address all of these, but with its specific focus on the natural environment, and along with education, health, the arts, youth work and sports-based approaches, they can contribute to them by helping children, young people and adults to thrive[13]. Table 1 connects the potential benefits with the outcomes of high quality outdoor learning.

4 Levels of learning challenges

Planetary/global

Societal

Interpersonal

Intrapersonal

Figure 1. The context of outdoor learning
Based on Hannon, V. (2017) Thrive. London; Innovation Unit

At an intrapersonal level, participants can:

» Become aware of their strengths, where they can develop,
and the choices available to them. **(Outcomes 2, 10)**

» Develop personal responsibility for their health and wellbeing
and recognise how they can achieve this through time spent
in the natural environment. **(Outcome 1)**

» Learn to be comfortable in the outdoors. **(Outcome 6)**

» Seek encounters with nature for enjoyment, recreation
and health. **(Outcomes 1,4,9)**

» Gain the knowledge and skills to safely and enjoyably explore
nature while minimising impact. **(Outcomes 4,6)**

» Gain a sense of self through recognising their place in the world. **(Outcome 7)**

At an interpersonal level, participants can:

» Gain the skills to develop effective relationships
in diverse, ageing and technologised societies. **(Outcomes 2,8)**

» Understand and value interrelatedness between humans
and nature. **(Outcome 3)**

» Develop the skills associated with effective communication,
teamwork and leadership. **(Outcomes 2,8)**

At a societal level, participants can:

» Become equipped to navigate an uncertain and changing landscape of work. **(Outcomes 7,8,9,10)**

» Be prepared to participate effectively in their community and more widely. **(Outcomes 9,10)**

» Develop an understanding and sense of place from both personal experience and academic investigation. **(Outcome 3)**

» Engage with and develop connections to community and place. **(Outcomes 5,9)**

At a global level, participants can:

» Learn to live sustainably within the Earth's resources, taking care of its ecosystem and biodiversity. **(Outcome 3)**

» Develop an emotional connection with the Earth and all living things. **(Outcome 3)**

» Maintain sustainable environmental beliefs and practices informed by principles of ecology, critical thought, judgement and action. **(Outcome 3)**

» Recognise, understand and embrace the differences and the similarities in different cultures and peoples **(Outcomes 2,10)**

Table 1. The potential outcomes of high quality outdoor learning

See also:

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