

Project title:

My friend: nature! Exploring the impact of connecting outdoor learning to the learning for sustainability in primary school.

(ongoing)



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Primary 3 class

Theoretical framework

Nature deficit disorder

According to Richard Louv (2005), “Nature-deficit disorder” is not a medical diagnosis. On the contrary it is a useful term (a metaphor) to describe what many believe are the results of the alienation from nature for human beings . The author names some of these results as following:

- diminished use of the senses
 - attention difficulties
- higher rates of physical and emotional illnesses
 - a rising rate of myopia
 - child and adult obesity
 - Vitamin D deficiency
 - and other maladies.

Research from within the UK’s education system suggests that *“Contact with the outdoors is often limited for many children in modern society, and the vital experience of using the outdoors and being comfortable in nature is being lost”* (L O'Brien, R Murray, 2006).

Benefits of being outdoors/ outdoor play

Outdoor play is of paramount importance for children's health and development but still a significant number of preschool-age children in child care settings do not receive the recommended 60 min/day of outdoor play.

Jayasuriya, Williams, Edwards, Tandom (2016)

Outdoor play also promotes the social-emotional and cognitive development through exposure to nature. Through activities in which children engage outdoors they are developing their problem-solving skills and creativity, and unique opportunities for imaginative group and free play. (Harte, 2013; National Association of Early Childhood Specialists in State Departments of Education,2001).

Outdoor playtime in particular is one of the strongest and most consistent correlates of physical activity in young children, as children play more vigorously when outdoors compared to indoors.

(Dolinsky, Brouwer, Evenson, Siega-Riz, & Ostbye, 2011; Sallis, Prochaska, & Taylor, 2000; Tandon, Saelens, Zhou, Kerr, & Christakis, 2013).

What causes the alienation from nature?

According to Bento & Dias (2017), despite the fact that the evidence supporting the benefits of outdoor play for young children the opportunities to do so are diminishing as a result of *globalisation, technology expansion and global growth*.

In their work they are expressing that the attitude of professionals and parents towards outdoor play indicates the presence of a culture of fear:

Possible hazards

Interactions with strangers

Car traffic

Bento & Dias (2017)

These fears derive from a misinterpretation of reality without having a real expression in society. An example mentioned is that the fear about child's abduction is not linked to an increase in these type of crimes but greater emphasis is given through the media.

Gill (2007)

Outdoor play and parents perceptions

As Buchanan (1999) and Power (2011) highlight children depend on the adults in their lives to access everyday activities. The parents' decisions about which opportunities to offer it is stated that can be influenced, to some extent, by their perceptions of **risk**.

The priority for parents is to support their children's happiness and well-being and this fact promotes them to take these responsibilities seriously, aiming to provide a balance of activities. It is understood that adults entrusted with the care of children may make safety their primary concern.

The question that arises through this fact is whether the children may miss opportunities when safety becomes a greater concern than age-appropriate risk and adventure? Buchanan (1999) and Power (2011) pose the question: **Could 'surplus safety' create a different kind of risk?**

Child care providers have previously described **parent-related barriers** to increasing outdoor playtime. The examples that they express are including parents not providing appropriate clothing for their children and parents' preference for academics over active play.

(Jayasuriya, Williams, Edwards, Tandom (2016).

Link with the current project:

The following idea constitutes a strong link between bibliography and the current project. As stated by (Jayasuriya, Williams, Edwards, Tandom (2016) in their paper, encouraging **communication** between **parents** and **early childhood educators** about the significance of connection with the outdoors, could lead to more universal support and strategies for promoting outdoor and active play opportunities for children, which are important for children's health and development.

Purpose of the study/ Impact

How can we set the foundation of a positive relationship with nature (if this is not present)?

How can we promote learning for sustainability as a result of the positive relationship with nature?

How can we promote **parents/ carers** to access more the local outdoor spaces with their children?

Research methodology:

Mixed method approach

Quantitative - Questionnaires

Qualitative - Thematic analysis of the pupils ideas

Ethics

This investigation followed three principle guidelines for human research:

informed consent, confidentiality and consequences (Kvale, 1996).

The participants have been informed that they were participating voluntarily and could withdraw without penalty at any time.

The participants were assured that their private data would be guarded securely and that their identity would remain anonymous through the use of pseudonyms.

All of the children's parents/carers were made aware of the research aims, with both parties giving their consent to take part in the investigation (Grieg, Taylor, & MacKay, 2007, p. 174).

Baseline questionnaires have been designed and distributed to the students of primary 3 class and their parents.

The data gathered through the baseline questionnaires have shaped the progress of the project.

The baseline questionnaires for both parents and pupils are structured in four main areas:

- importance of outdoor learning
- access to local outdoors
- frequency
- sustainability

Importance of outdoor learning

Students

The 56% of the pupils supported that learning in the outdoors should be an **important** part of the time spent in school.

The 46% supported that that learning in the outdoors should be a **regular** part of the time spent in school.

Parents

The 71,4% of the parents strongly agreed that learning in the outdoors should be an **important part** of the time spent in school.

On the statement that learning in the outdoors should be a **regular** element of learning 42,8% of the parents answered that they strongly agree and 38% (answered 4 on the Likert scale).

Access to local outdoors

Pupils

The 72% of the pupils acknowledged the significance of being outdoors for their emotional and physical development.

Only the 20% of the pupils acknowledged that in the local area there are outdoor spaces that they can have access to.

Parents

The 62% of the parents strongly agreed that being outdoors is an important aspect of children's development.

42,8% of the parents strongly agreed on the statement that in the local area there are local outdoor spaces that they can have access to.

Reasons that the pupils consider barriers to their access to the outdoors:

Pupils

“Maybe there are cars.”

“Maybe its dangerous (it might have rocks).”

“There might be strangers.”

“Your parents might now have money.”

Parents

When the parent were asked to mention any reasons that do not facilitate the access to the local outdoors their answers, the 71,4% did not provide an answer.

“Sometimes the spaces are not properly tidy such as parks or playgrounds.”

“Not much choice.”

“The area I am is restricted to any form of outdoor events. Children are not allowed to paly outside: highly restricted. Playground is recommended for outdoor events.”

Nature deficit disorder

Most of the parents (71,42%) replied that they are not aware of this term and its implications.

Frequency of accessing local outdoor spaces

Pupils Once a week – 40% Rarely -40%	Parents Once a week – 57,14%
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The local outdoor spaces that the Primary 3 class has visited are the following:

Kelvingrove park

Garnethill park

The Canal

Moreover the pupils are getting the opportunity to participate in outdoor learning activities as a part of weekly active learning stations. The frequency is two times per week.

After the visiting the local outdoor spaces named above and engaging in outdoor learning activities, the pupils of the class have been encouraged to discuss these experiences with their parents/carers. On their written reflections the parents/ carers have been asked to indicate whether they have had a conversation with the children about their outdoor learning experiences.

Connection with other areas of the curriculum

Also, working through social studies (making a map), technologies & ICT (using the internet to retrieve information) and expressive arts (draw the parts of the map) the pupils produced a map showing the local outdoor spaces to which they can have free access to (within walking distance) and some outdoor spaces that require some cost to get to.

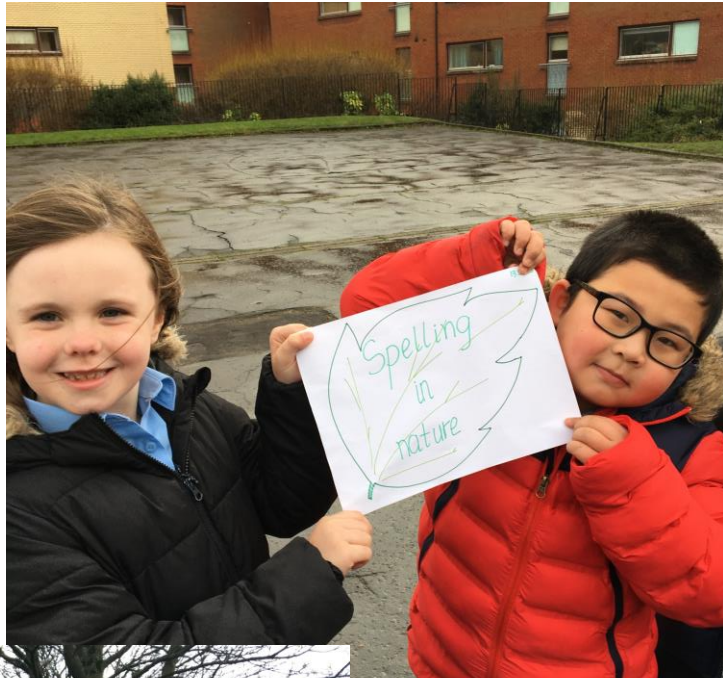
A ***thematic analysis*** of the pupils' written expression of ideas will be used to identify the areas that they expressed that they benefited in through their outdoor experiences.

Braun and Clarke (2006) define thematic analysis as:

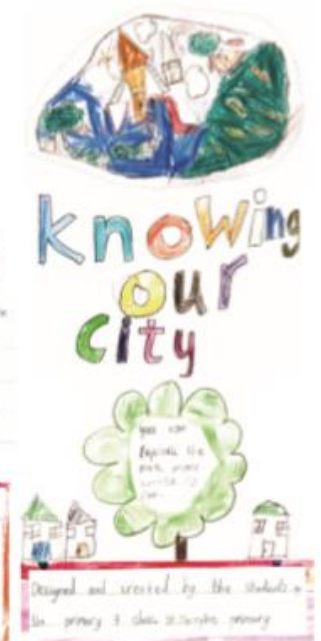
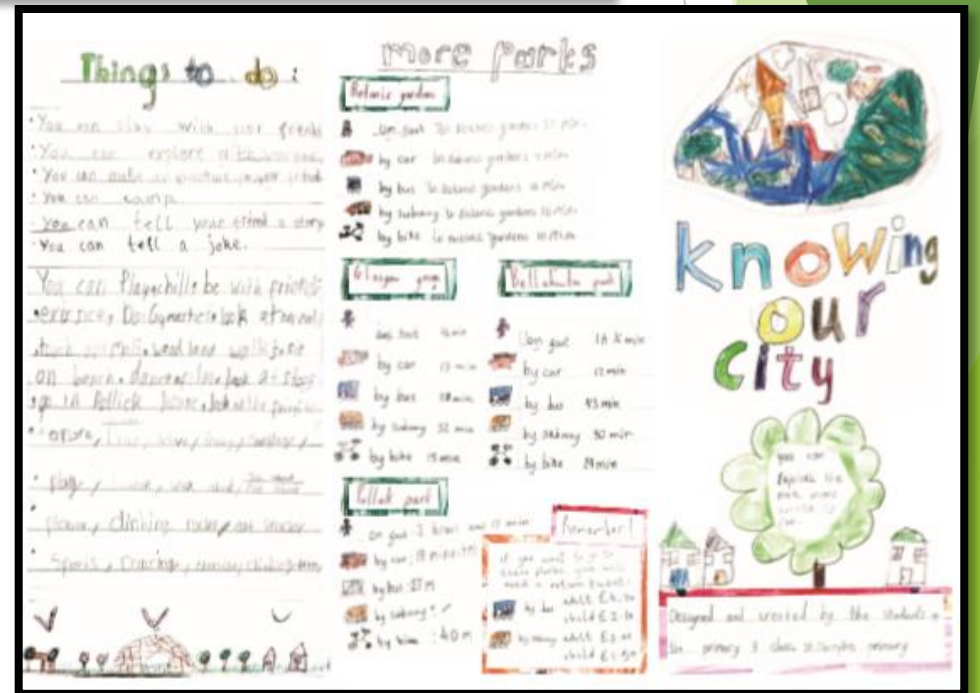
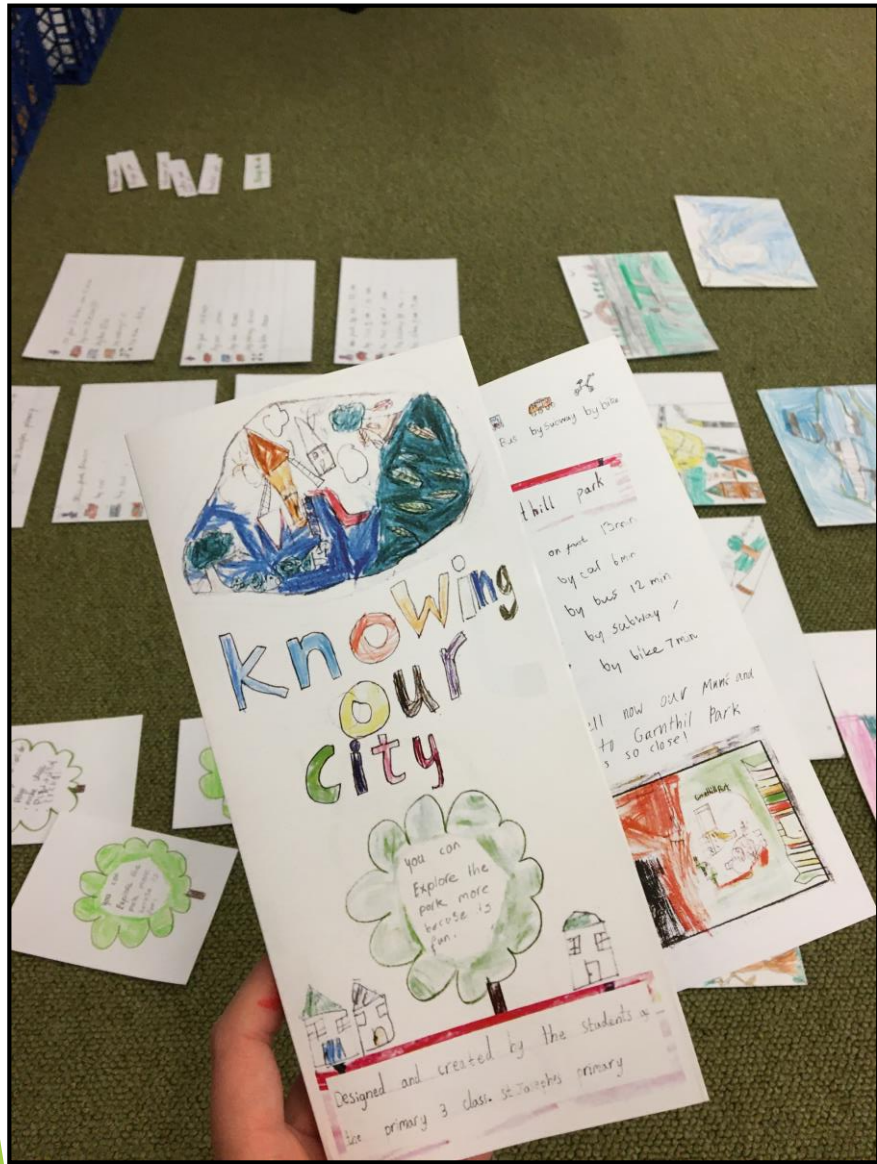
“A method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns within data.” (p. 79)

Thematic analysis is a widely used method of analysis in qualitative research. Braun and Clarke (2006) state that thematic analysis is a foundational method of analysis that needed to be defined and described to strengthen its place in qualitative research.









Reflections upon engaging in an action research project.

Challenges or difficulties

The most significant challenge has been focusing more on the students' parents attitudes towards outdoor experiences, in order to encourage them to use the local outdoor spaces with their children. Linking the learning for sustainability to other areas of the curriculum as well and not solely to outdoor learning.

Self reflection/ evaluation

Professional development

- Developed my understanding on the topic I am working on through exploring the literature.
- How my project could be a part of the whole school's improvement plan.
- **Developed a broader idea about teaching pupils about sustainability as a concept that should be imbedded in many areas of the curriculum.**

Impact on learners experiences

- The learners consider outdoor experiences a very important part of their learning and are motivated to engage in activities outdoors.
- Developing a positive relationship with the local outdoors.
- Promoting communication between school and families/ Promoting parents to access the local outdoor spaces more.

How does this project relate to the GTCS Professional Standards?

Professional Knowledge and Understanding
Professional Skills and Abilities
Enquiry and Research
Learning for Sustainability

How was the learning was linked to global sustainability agenda (such as the SDGs)?



"One of the first conditions of happiness is that the link between Man and Nature shall not be broken."

Leo Tolstoy



Thank you for listening