



# Making Nature Explicit In Children's Drawings Of Wellbeing And Happy Spaces

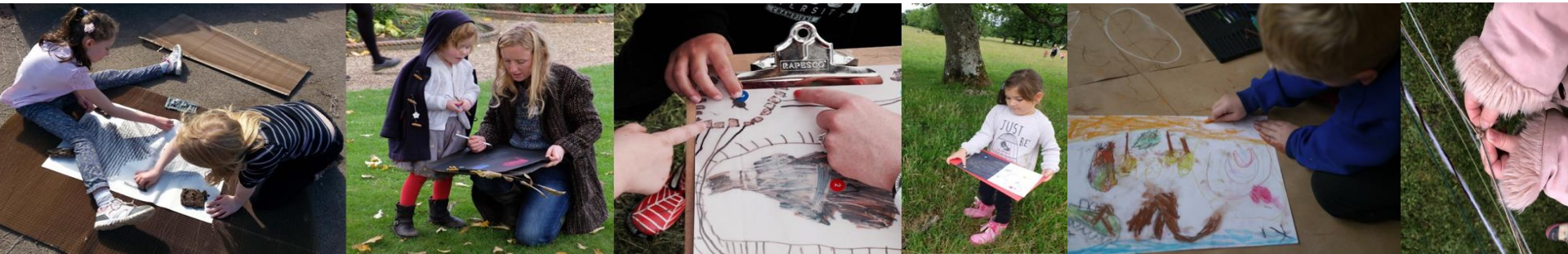
**Professor Nicola Walshe**

Dr Zoe Moula, Dr Elsa Lee



# A context of concern for children's wellbeing and mental health

- One in six children in England suffer a severe mental health illness (NHS, 2020).
- 70% of children and adolescents who experience mental health problems have not had appropriate interventions at a sufficiently early age (Children's Society, 2008; DfE, 2018).
- The Covid-19 pandemic has had a detrimental impact on previously healthy children's mental health (e.g. Loades et al., 2020).
  - Smartphone or internet addiction through lockdown were further associated with increased depressive symptoms (e.g. Duan et al., 2020).





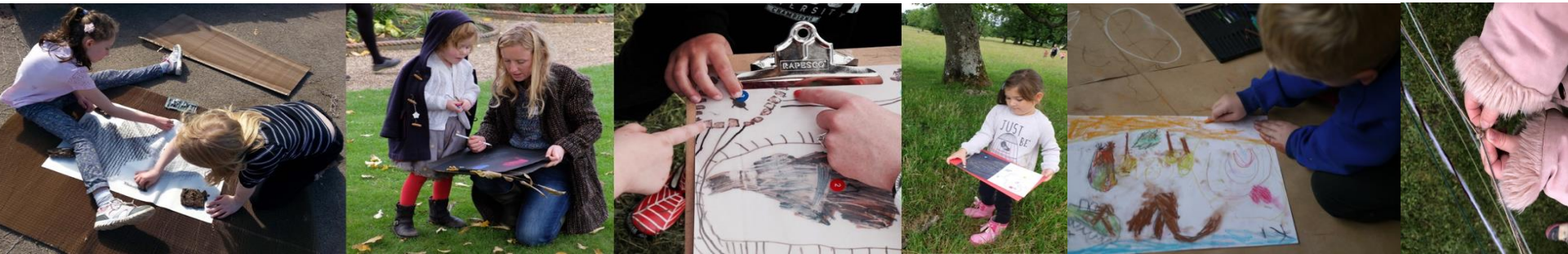
# ECO-CAPABILITIES

## CREATIVE ADVENTURING IN NATURE



# Theoretical Context: Constructs of Wellbeing

- Wellbeing
  - as expressed through indicators, e.g. health, safety, happiness, healthy relationships, wealth (e.g. Maccagnan et al., 2019)
  - as a broad concept to describe quality of life and life satisfaction
  - as a container for physical, psychological, emotional and social elements
- Children's perspectives on wellbeing
  - relationships with family and friends
  - school and local environment
  - physical, emotional and material wellbeing *(e.g. Fane et al., 2020)*

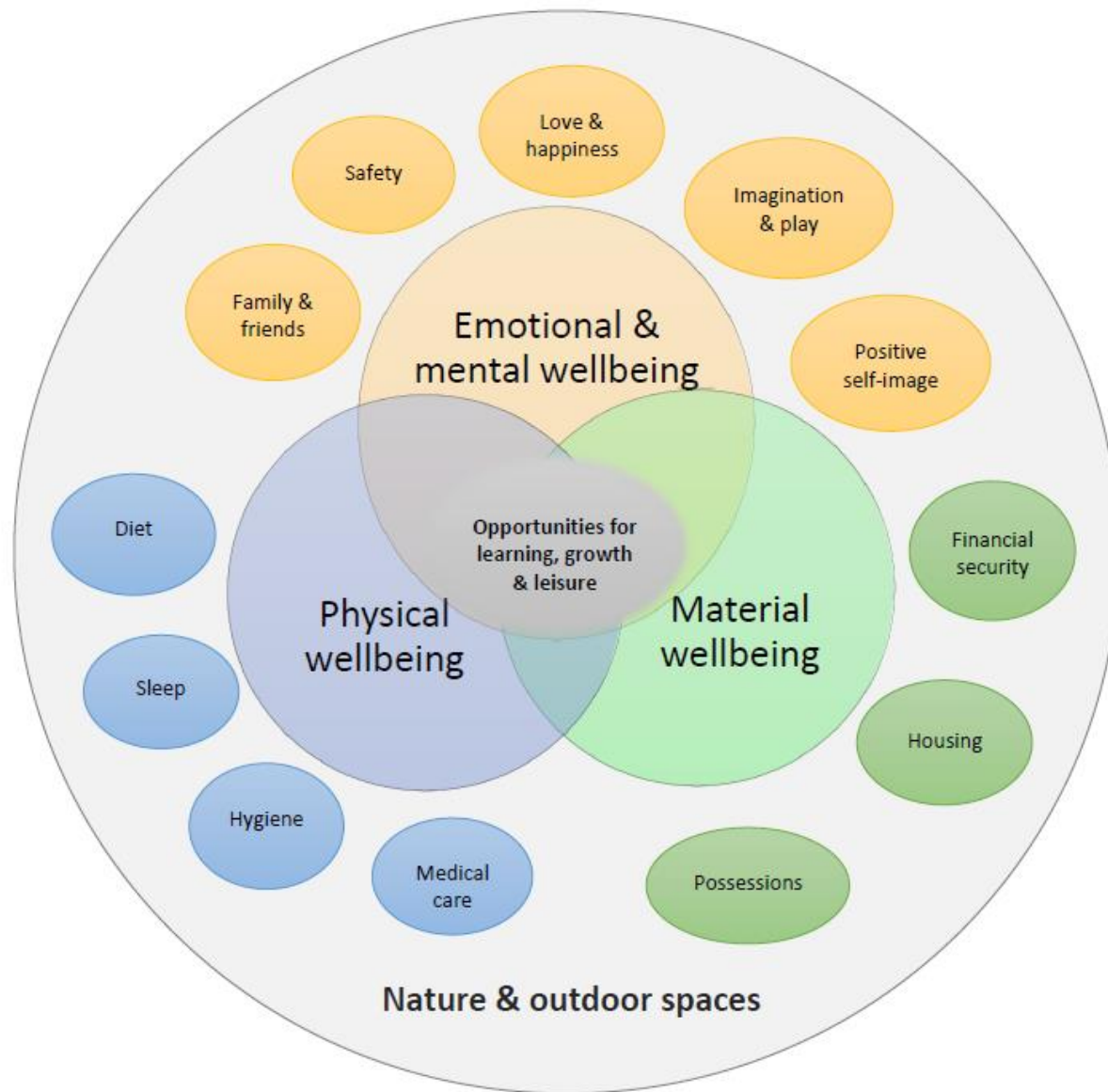


# Methodology

- 91 children (aged seven and eight) from two primary schools in areas of high deprivation
- Participatory and arts-based research methodologies
- Methods:
  - Individual drawings of each child's *happy place*
  - Small group discussion around the concept of wellbeing
- Thematic analysis was performed on both verbal and visual data



# Results

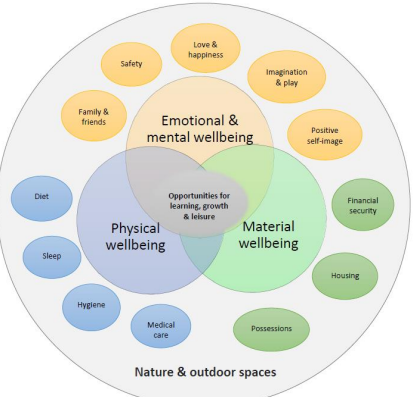


# Emotional and Mental Wellbeing

*“to have someone in your house to love you and care about how you feel”*

*“to give you kisses, hugs and cuddles”*

*“to make sure that people around you are happy too”*



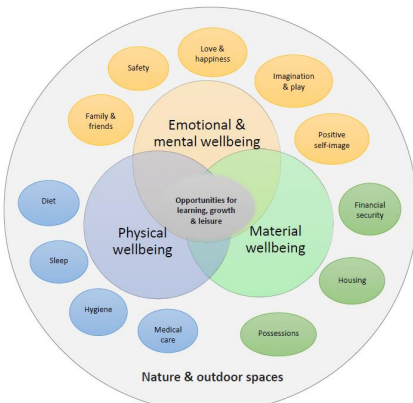
# Emotional and Mental Wellbeing

*“wellbeing is making things that will help you get even better with your imagination”*

*“don’t let others be lonely”*

*“We need all feelings: happiness, sadness, anger, excitement, all of them”*

*“the world would be all grey without all kinds of feelings”*





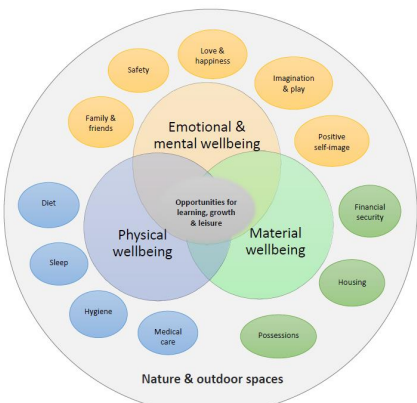
## Physical Wellbeing

*“to have a good brain, bones, eyes, lungs”*

*“you need to be able to take your medicine for free when you feel poorly”*

## Material Wellbeing

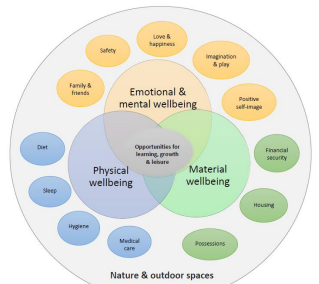
*“to not need money and be able to live for free”*



# Nature and outdoor spaces

*“see and smell the blossoms and the flowers”*

*“see the rivers that make nice sounds”*



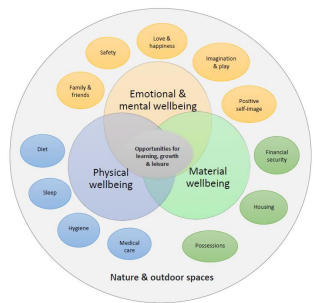
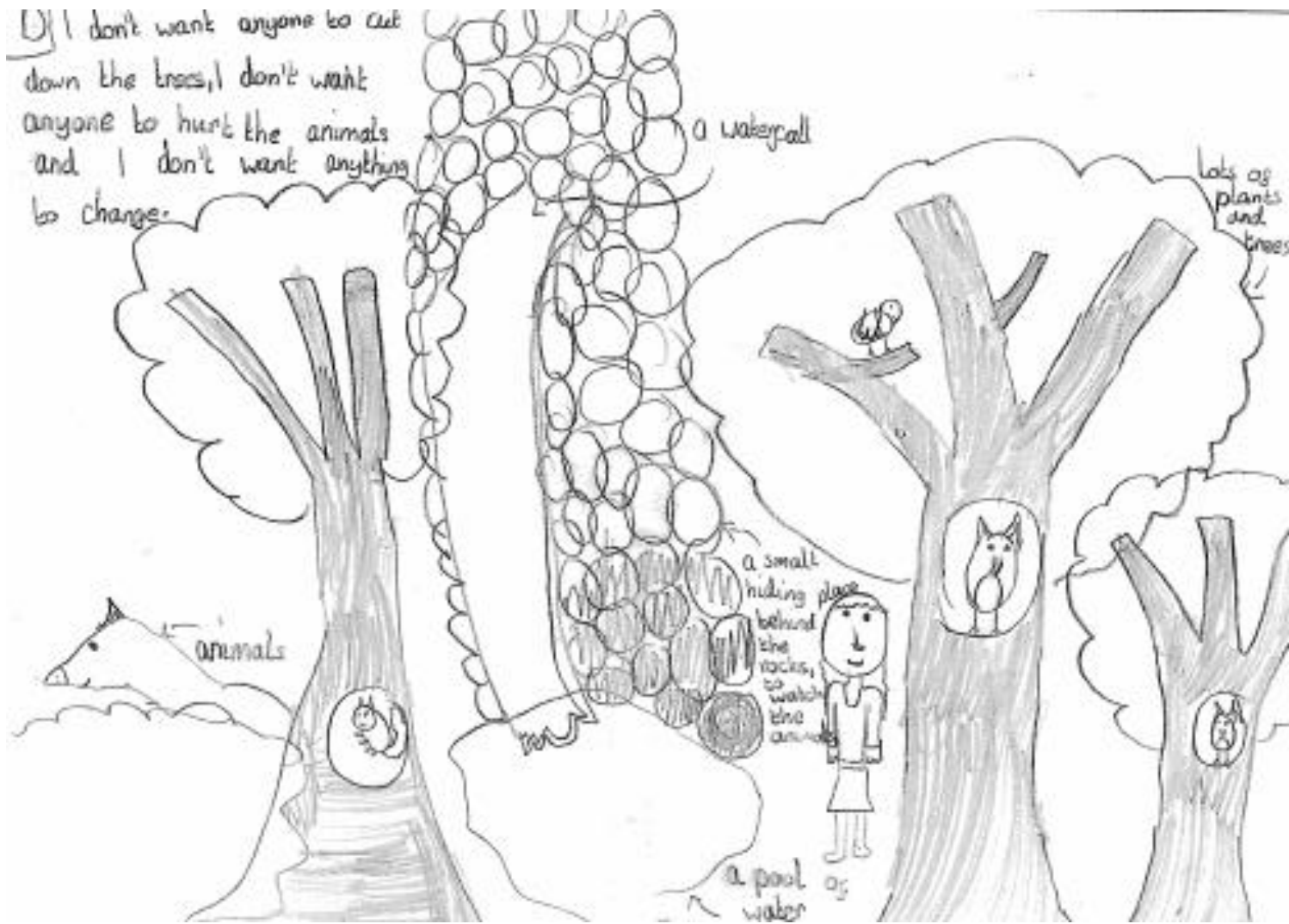
# Nature and outdoor spaces

*“trees give us oxygen”*

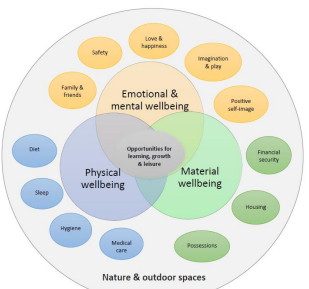
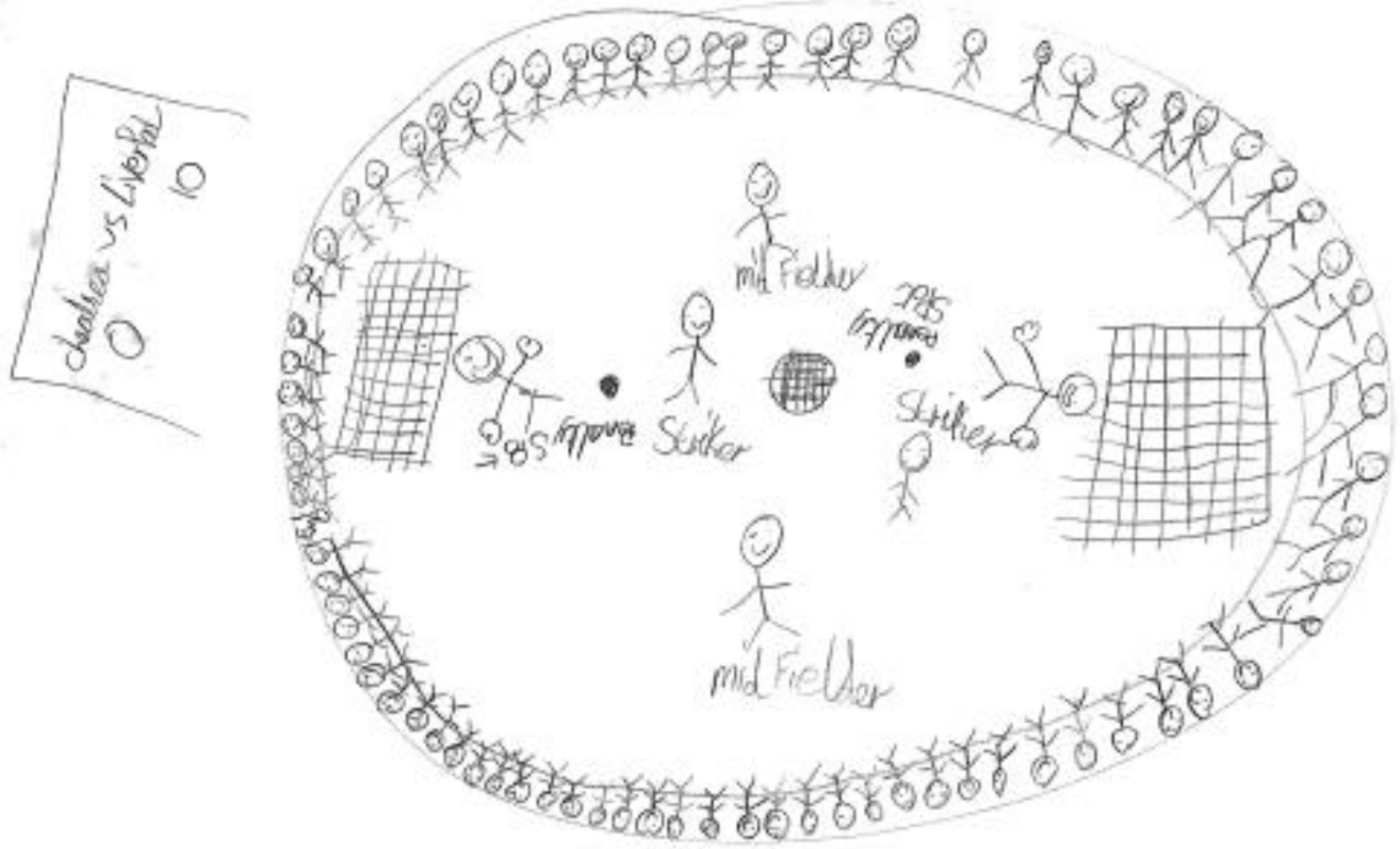
*“trees give us shelter”*

*“when it rains we go under the trees”*

*“we need to plant and feed more trees, plants and flowers”*



# Learning, growth and leisure

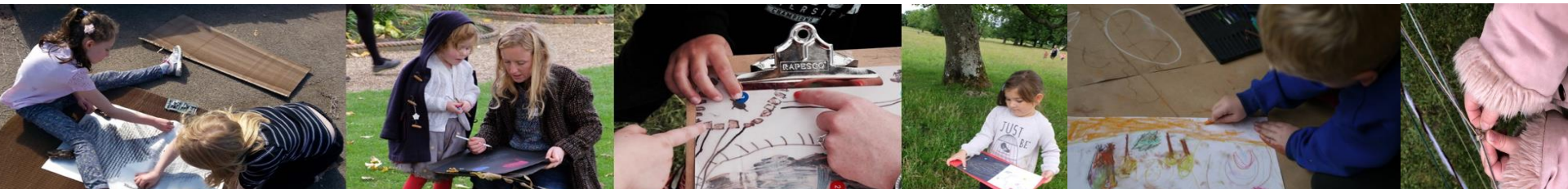


# Themes for Discussion

- Explicit vs implicit acknowledgement of the relationship between wellbeing and nature
  - Humans have an innate affiliation with natural environments (Ulrich, 1993); natural environments induce positive emotions and feelings
- Relatedness and belonging
  - Positive relationships and engagement with others can lead to positive emotions and an enhanced sense of meaning in life (Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi, 2014)
  - Through belonging and relatedness, children can progress towards the development of autonomy, agency and mastery over their own life (Deci & Ryan, 2008)
- Social and moral responsibility: caring for others

*“to give love and happiness”*

*“to show respect and fairness”*





**ECO-CAPABILITIES**  
CREATIVE ADVENTURING IN NATURE

# Eco-Capabilities: Teacher and artist reflections on nature-based art interventions for children's wellbeing

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Arts and  
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## INTRODUCTION

- Global interest in children's wellbeing is now central to major international policy documents regarding children's life quality (e.g. UN SDG 3: Good Health and Wellbeing).
- However, one in five children and young people (1.1 million) in the UK say that they feel unhappy with their lives since Covid-19 (Children's Society, 2021); 70% believe that the pandemic will have a long-term negative effect on their mental health (Young Minds, 2021).
- At the same time, the People & Nature Survey England (Natural England, 2020) revealed that 42% believe that nature is more important than ever.
- The same survey showed that 46% of parents believed their children seem happier outside, and 28% said that learning outside or about nature is especially important.
- There is evidence that arts education can improve both wellbeing and social inclusion (Kinder & Harland, 2004). Current evidence also suggests that the pandemic provided new creative opportunities (e.g. virtual activities) and home-based arts engagement linked to higher ability to cope with emotions during lockdown (Mak, Fluharty & Fancourt, 2021).
- The Eco-capabilities project, funded by the AHRC, is situated at the intersection of these issues; it considers how working with artists in nature influences children's wellbeing, in particular exploring the role of the development of children's conceptions of, and connections with, nature.

## METHODOLOGY

- The overarching research question being addressed by Eco-Capabilities is: How does working with artists in nature influence children's wellbeing?
- Across the Eco-Capabilities project, 120 children aged 7-10 from schools identified as being in areas of high deprivation participated in nine days of artist-led teaching sessions, described as creative adventuring in nature.
- The study drew on arts-based research methodologies with data collection including drawings of happy places and walk and talk focus groups with children, as well as interviews, focus groups and weekly reflections from artists, teachers and researchers.
- Drawing on Sen's capabilities (1980), we also invited children to define what is important to them for living a good life through environmental sustainability, social justice and future economic wellbeing (what we term eco-capabilities).
- This poster explores preliminary findings, in particular qualitative data from reflections and observations from artists, teachers, and researchers.



## PRELIMINARY FINDINGS

Through the creative adventuring days, artist and teacher reflections identified observed changes in what we conceptualise as children's eco-capabilities:

- Increased resilience, both as outdoor adventurers and learners;
- Increased capacity for risk-taking;
- Greater collaboration and empathy between children, within and beyond the nature-based days;
- Strengthened relationships between children and teachers, particularly those children who struggle with more traditional classroom environments;
- Developed sense of being able to articulate emotions not easily verbalized;
- Greater sense of belonging in / existence as part of nature;
- Enhanced recognition and appreciation of biodiversity (including articulation of nature as a space for calmness and inspiration); and
- Developed understanding of the importance of environmental sustainability.



## NEXT STEPS

- Undertake wider qualitative analysis of children's drawings, interviews and focus groups.
- Undertake analysis of pre-, post- and 3-month follow-up adapted PNI-SC wellbeing questionnaires (Lomas et al., 2018).
- Identify 'critical incidents' within artist practice which facilitate development of eco-capabilities.
- Explore potential relationship between children's eco-capabilities and pro-environmental behaviour.
- From this, develop recommendations for policy and practice, including resources for teachers.
- Obtain funding for follow-up, nationwide impact and dissemination project.

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