



**ECO-CAPABILITIES**  
CREATIVE ADVENTURING IN NATURE

# Eco-Capabilities: Making nature explicit in children's drawings about wellbeing

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## INTRODUCTION

- ❖ Connectedness with nature has been associated with happiness, life satisfaction, vitality and lower stress (e.g. Mayer & Frantz, 2004; Cervinka et al., 2011; Capaldi et al., 2014).
- ❖ Creativity and imaginative play in woodland and outdoors also positively affects children's autonomy, empathy and risk-taking (Milligan & Bingley, 2007; Rudkowski, 2014).
- ❖ There is now growing evidence showing that children's wellbeing is adversely affected by access to nature and outdoor spaces; with young people who live in areas of high socio-economic deprivation being at the greatest risk (Lee & Maheswaran, 2011; Marmot, 2013).
- ❖ Despite these links, children spend little or no time in nature and outdoor spaces, remaining excluded from the benefits to their health and wellbeing (Boyd, White, Bell & Burt, 2018).
- ❖ For this reason, The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals urge for the development and implementation of policies and interventions that improve the engagement with nature and improve the human-nature relationship.

## ECO-CAPABILITIES

- ❖ The Eco-capabilities project aims to explore how the wellbeing of children living in areas of high deprivation can be supported through working with artists in nature and outdoor places.
- ❖ Based on Sen's capabilities approach (2005), children will define what is important for living a good life through environmental sustainability, social justice and future economic wellbeing.
- ❖ Children will participate in eight half-day sessions of creative adventuring in nature that will be facilitated by artists.
- ❖ **Research question: How does working with artists in nature influence children's wellbeing?**
- ❖ In this poster, children's pre-intervention views on wellbeing are presented through their visual illustrations and group discussions of their happy and favourite places.

## METHODOLOGY

- ❖ Constructivist methodological approach (Denicolo et al., 2016).
- ❖ Participatory and arts-based methods (McNiff, 2009).
- ❖ Four classes across two primary schools in areas of high deprivation: a total of 91 children aged 7-8 (Year 3 in the UK).
- ❖ Two methods of data collection:
  1. Drawings of happy and favourite places.
  2. Group discussions on what constitutes wellbeing.
- ❖ Both activities took place just before Covid-19 outbreak with a potential associated impact on children's wellbeing.
- ❖ Thematic analysis undertaken on visual and verbal data.

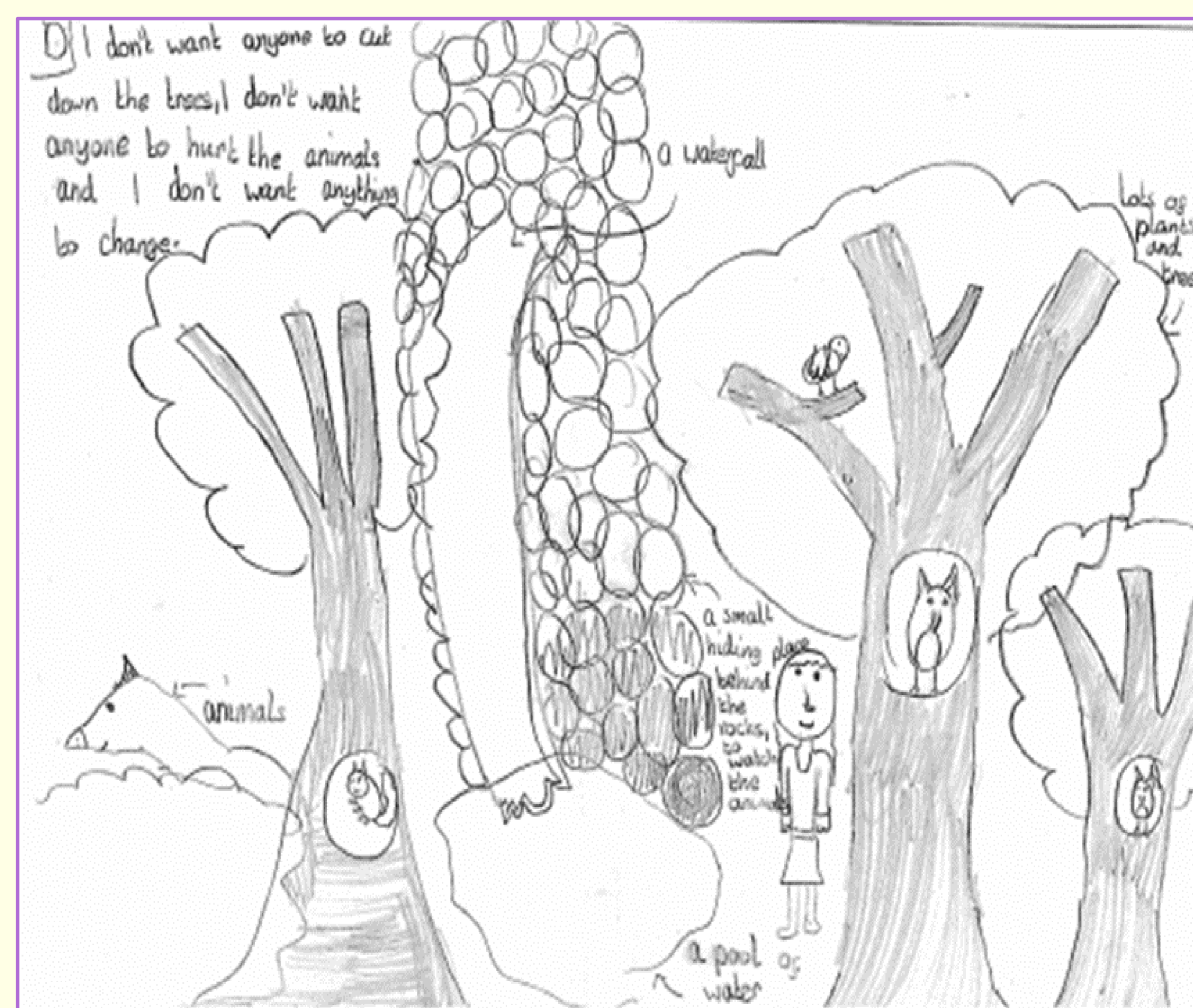
## RESULTS

- Children's perceptions of wellbeing were categorised into five themes: (i) emotional and mental wellbeing, (ii) physical wellbeing, (iii) material wellbeing, (iv) appreciation of and access to nature and outdoor spaces, and (v) opportunities for learning, growth and leisure.
- Representations of nature and outdoor spaces received most attention among all other themes (in 56/91 drawings).
- These representations were linked to affordances of children's favourite spaces for all aspects of emotional, mental, physical and material wellbeing.
- Although other aspects of wellbeing were explicitly articulated on drawings (i.e. safety, love, happiness), connectedness with nature remained only implicit in 39/56 drawings (i.e. on the background, rather than elaborated through verbal/written expressions).
- Drawings potentially elicit elements of wellbeing that are deeper seated.
- This may explain why nature is rarely mentioned when children were asked about wellbeing in previous studies, although further research is required to explore this.



## DISCUSSION

- Where nature was explicit in children's drawings, it represented opportunities for relaxation, creativity and play, thereby impacting sense of happiness and life satisfaction.
- The appreciation of beauty in nature influences one's sense of happiness and life satisfaction (Ulrich's psycho-evolutionary theory [1993] whereby natural environments induce positive emotions).
- Children cultivate positive traits in nature (gratitude, joy, inspiration) that improve wellbeing (PERMA theory of positive psychology; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2014).
- Relatedness to other people was the most explicit contributor to wellbeing. Enhancing children's relatedness to nature can enhance their relatedness to people, and further improve their wellbeing (Burls, 2007).



## CONCLUSIONS

- There is a tendency towards taking nature for granted in discussions around wellbeing.
- If the value of human-nature connection remains implicit, are children likely to engage with efforts to protect and sustain the environment?
- Interventions and services that improve the human-nature connectedness are crucial.
- Eco-capabilities to explore child-nature relationship and make the benefits for children's wellbeing explicit.

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