

MOVE4NATURE



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CHAPTER 3

How can hiking be used for education on environmental protection?

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Improving nature connection amongst young people to encourage pro-environmental behaviours

Fewer and fewer children are visiting nature. In the UK, that number has halved in a generation, with 60% of children only playing outside once a week, and 28% haven't been on a country walk in the past year.

Křepelková et al. (2020) found that interaction with nature in childhood is highly influential in future pro-environmental behaviours. Children's emotional connection with nature is an important element in developing pro-environmental behaviour. Researchers found that this emotional bond in childhood was more effective at building pro-environmental behaviours in the future than building environmental knowledge or adulthood nature interactions (Křepelková et al., 2020).

It is vital that we find ways to reconnect children and young people with nature and help to facilitate this emotional bonding with the natural world, as this will be key in ensuring long-lasting behaviours which protect and care for our planet. Research indicates that the best way of doing this is to get children out of the classroom and immersed in nature as their learning environment.

Nature Connection for Healthy Psychological Development

Having a sense of belonging, connection & ownership are vital for young people's psychological development. By bringing young people together to take action to protect the planet, as well as spend time outdoors and with each other, we will help young people to achieve these 3 things.

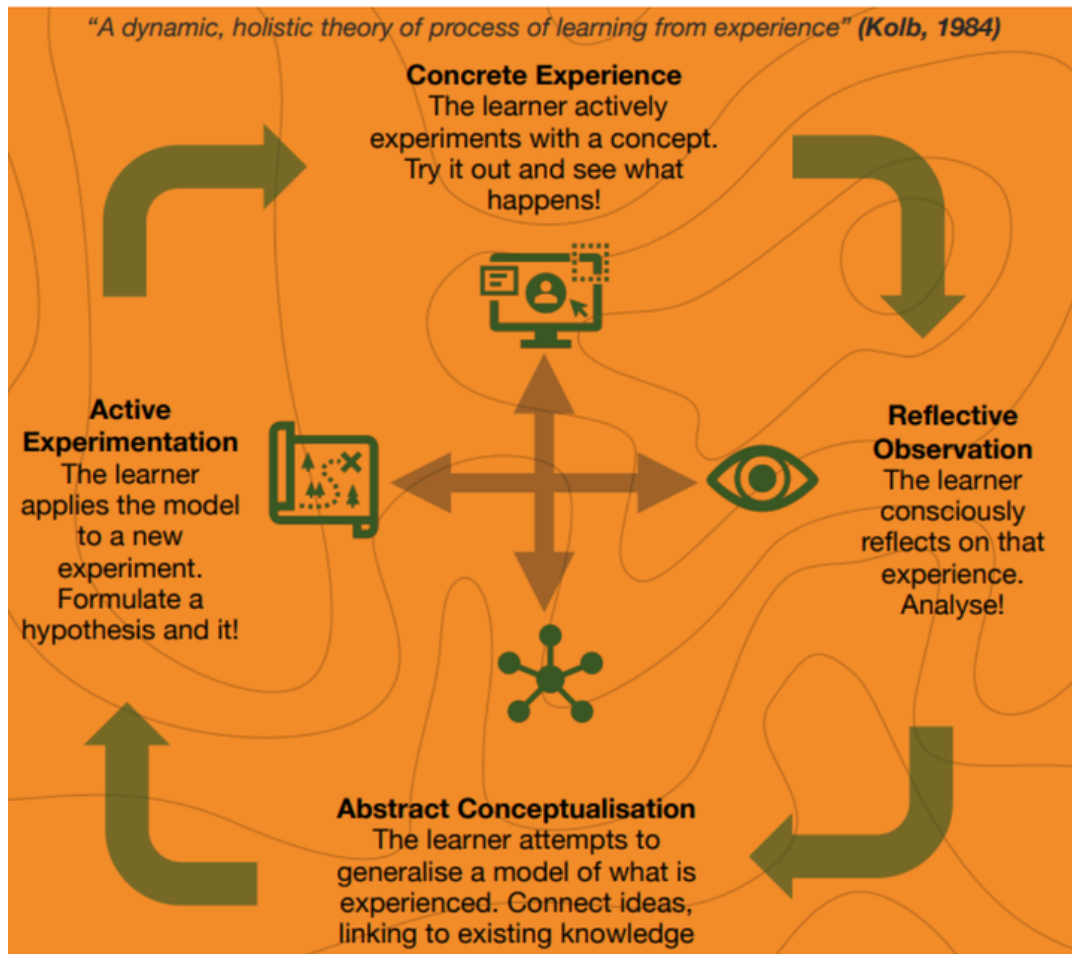
We will now look at existing theories of education to see how nature can be used as a tool to aid young people in learning about the environment.



A Theory of Green Education

Experiential Learning

Kolb (1984)'s Cycle of Experiential Learning.



Carl Roger's Requirements for Experiential Learning

'No other person's ideas, and none of my own ideas, are as authoritative as my experience.' Rogers, 1961.

Rogers believed that all humans have the capacity to learn anything, but that it is the role of the teacher to provide the right conditions for experiential learning to take place. These include:



1. Setting a positive environment for learning
2. Clarifying the purposes for the learner(s)
3. Organising and making available learning resources
4. Balancing intellectual and emotional components of learning
5. Sharing feelings and thoughts with learners, but not dominating the conversation.

Experiential learning will be successfully facilitated when:

1. Students fully participate in the learning process and have an influence in the nature and direction of learning.
2. Learning is primarily based on direct experience with practical, social, personal or research problems.
3. Self-evaluation is the main method of assessing progress or success.

Experiential Learning for Nature Connection

Nature connection is an individual's sense of relationship with the natural world, through engaging our senses and immersing ourselves in nature.

Humans are genetically predisposed to seek out nature (EO Wilson, 1984). Shultz (2000) proposed that there is a direct relation between how much an individual cares for the environment and how connected they feel to it.

Psychologists have identified three key components of nature connection:

1. Cognitive: this is the core of nature connection, and is our primitive beliefs about how we see ourselves fitting into the natural world.
2. Affective: our emotional reaction towards and relationship we have with nature.
3. Behavioural: this is the physical component, how do we interact and care for nature?

So how do we incorporate these theories in with actual learning?

The Children and Nature Network conducted research into existing nature-based interventions for education and wellbeing of young people, and found the following 4 factors are key elements are vital to evoking significant and sustainable development in young people:

Integrating unique opportunities provided by nature

Consistent time for individual and group reflection

Inclusively and intentionally building relationships

Providing space that affirms young people's identity, perspectives and leadership

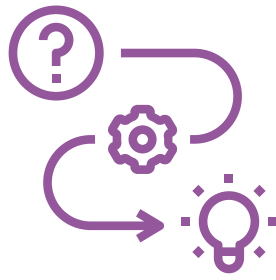
What else can young people get out of green education?

Alongside building a stronger emotional affinity, experiential environmental education can equip young people with a multitude of relevant skills which will help them in their school studies and beyond. These skills include:





Critical thinking



Problem solving



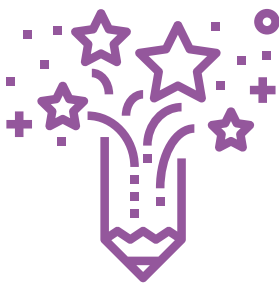
Decision-making



Increases public awareness
and knowledge of
environmental issues



Teaches about
healthy lifestyles



Creativity



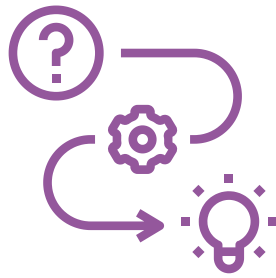
Stress management



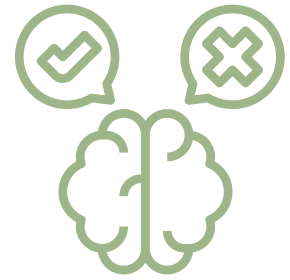
Strengthens
communities



Critical thinking



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Increases public awareness
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Creativity



Stress management



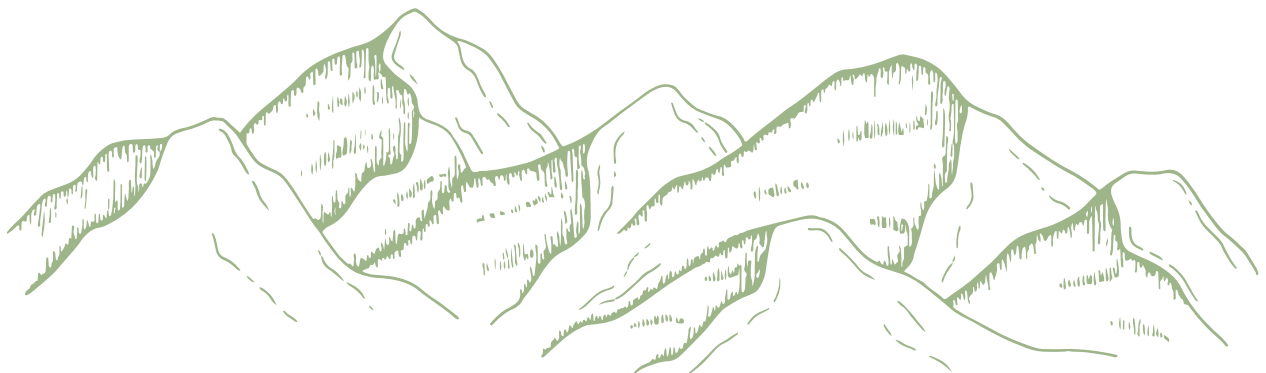
Strengthens
communities

Research has found that environmental education can help students feel more enthused and engaged with their learning, which then raises achievement in other academic areas ([Top 10 Benefits of Environmental Education - Project Learning Tree \(plt.org\)](#)).

Green education is an opportunity for interdisciplinary learning outside of the classroom. Think about how you can integrate science, maths, history, language and the arts into one outdoor activity. This might include activities around the chemical makeup of certain plastic products and how biodegradation works. You could also incorporate art activities and write about their experiences to encourage reflection and consolidate learning.

Environmental education will prepare children and young people to face the impacts of climate change from a responsible citizen's viewpoint. The young people of today are powerful agents for much-needed change, and green education is a key way of equipping this generation with the skills required for green jobs.

The next chapter will show you how we can incorporate these theories of green education with clean-up action hikes.



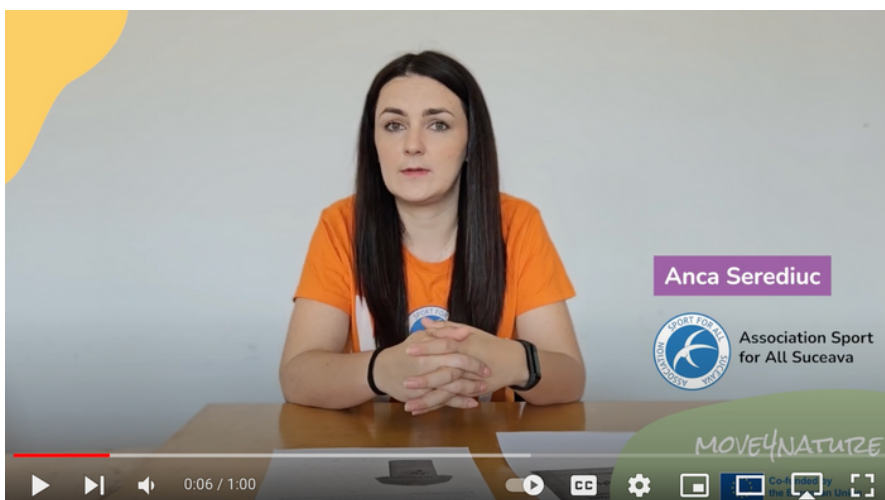
Watch the videos 

Behaviour change in youngsters



[Watch the video](#)

How to motivate youngsters



[Watch the video](#)

Sources

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2. The Influence of Interaction with Nature in Childhood on Future Pro-Environmental Behavior. Krepelkova, Krajhanzl and Kroufek, 2020. [\(PDF\) The Influence of Interaction with Nature in Childhood on Future Pro-Environmental Behavior \(researchgate.net\)](#)
3. What is environmental education? United States Environmental Protection Agency, 2022. [What is Environmental Education? | US EPA](#)
4. Top 10 benefits of environmental education. Project Learning Tree, 2016. [Top 10 Benefits of Environmental Education - Project Learning Tree \(plt.org\)](#)

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