Learning through Landscapes: My School, My Planet

Reading pack and reflection questions for the training week

How should I use this reading pack?

Before you join us for the My School, My Planet (MSMP) training on the 25th August, we’ve included some short extracts that we’d like you to read:

1. In this reading pack you will find **four short extracts** about the project, the issues affecting the communities we are working with and why we feel this project is important to our work here at LtL.
2. For each extract we have included **2 reflection questions** that we’d like you to reflect on. Please take time to record some of your thoughts before the training starts on the 25 August.
3. You should spend no more than **2 hours on this reading task.**
4. Please remember to **bring this reading pack with you to day 1 of the training.**

Extract 1: What is MSMP?

Funded through a Heritage Emergency Fund grant from The National Lottery Heritage Fund, this £275k pilot project aims to support schools during the COVID-19 crisis by re-engaging pupils with their school environment, supporting their wellbeing and encouraging a greater connection to their natural heritage through the delivery of an outdoor learning programme.

“A deeper appreciation of nature is something that has sustained many people during the COVID-19 crisis. This project allows us to test how studying outdoors can help school pupils understand the essential role played by soils, by nature and by our climate in sustaining our planet for the future.”

Drew Bennellick, Head of Land and Nature Policy, National Lottery Heritage Fund.

The project will initially focus on improving the outcomes of children and young people from disadvantaged ethnic groups and low socioeconomic backgrounds who have the least access to their natural environment. The My School, My Planet pilot will support pupils in exploring key environmental issues: ecosystems – climate change – soil degradation. Pupils will be encouraged to connect their learning with their own cultural heritage through a series of practical activities and a bespoke set of curriculum-linked resources.

My School, My Planet will be delivered in 48 pilot schools across the four home nations, engaging with pupils from key stages 2 and 3, upper primary and lower secondary throughout September and October. The delivery team will work with schools using COVID-safe methods to deliver to bubbles of up to 30 pupils per school.

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| **Reflection questions:** |
| What is it about My School, My Planet that is important to you?Another way of getting C & YP New tools fromAccess to outdoors should be an equal opportunity to allTimely with BLMRural areas there isn’t awarenessHopefully will impact on parents and wider communityBLM is immensely important The cultural divide – even in rural communitiesIt’s not just gardening that BAME groups take part inConnecting with YPs own heritageKnowledge, skills representationThe outdoors is for all of usPassion for the environment – for allThrough Covid – people have lost links |
| From this extract what do you think is the core purpose of this project?Love soils – love the soils strand!Testing – core purpose is not just to deliver a core programme, the potential for how this can help pupils understand soilsEvaluation is vitalWe need to build  |

Extract 2: Is generating a greater connection with nature a matter of social justice?

As Spielman, Chief Inspector of Ofsted in England (2019) highlights, high-quality education, built around a rich curriculum, is a matter of social justice. We know that those who are born in more advantaged circumstances get a major head start in life. Spielman continues, the role of education in delivering social justice doesn’t stop at the beginning of children’s education. We know from our research that it is disadvantaged pupils who are disproportionately affected by the narrowing of key stage 2 (upper primary) and the shortening of key stage 3 (lower secondary), or who in various ways become less likely to take more academic subjects in key stage 4 or upper secondary. But the consequence of this narrowing is that pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds do lose out on building that body of knowledge that should be every child’s entitlement. Natural England’s own survey (2016) shows that children from marginalised households are less likely to frequently visit the natural environment (56%) compared to children from non-marginalised households (74%). The side-lining and deprioritisation of the outdoors in mainstream education has created a gap between disadvantaged pupils and their more advantaged counterparts in three main areas (Passy, Bentsen, Gray & Ho, 2019):

1. A narrowing of the experiences that promote pupil engagement with learning, stimulate curiosity and improve social relations.
2. A decline in physical activity, social wellbeing and school motivation.
3. An increasing distance from nature which reduces young people’s sense of responsibility towards the environment.

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| **Reflection questions:** |
| To what extent do you think a project like MSMP could help to close the gap between marginalised and non-marginalised pupils and generate a greater sense of equality amongst pupils?About giving them an interest – about curiosity and asking questionsWorking together – all equal – more asking questionsRespecting the natural world – whatever out background – we are all connectsOpportunity of a level playing field – being outdoors is a great way to do that, idea of the project is not driven to exclude.The project – statistically to help close the gap, but also motivate to carry on exploring outside of schoolBenefit to teaching staff too – vitally importantNot key question – it will contribute a stepping stone towards closing the gapNature literacy – isn’t always there and physical literacy – raising awareness of the importance of thisIntroduce the schools and parents  |
| Why is this important to you? |

Extract 3: How can we get the return to school right? Taken from Life On Hold: Children’s Well-being and COVID-19, Children’s Society 2020

The next most critical change children and young people will experience in their lives is the return to school in August and September. Getting this transition back into the classroom right is a massive challenge but our findings suggest some important things for decision makers to consider. Some of the quotes from children and young people in this report demonstrate the fear, stresses, and challenges young people expect to face next year as they try to “catch-up” on the months of missed, or reduced, education. Without careful planning we risk that children returning to schools will exacerbate the low levels of well-being for some children, brought about by the pandemic. As children return to the classroom, there should be a focus on 4 key areas to improve well-being. Firstly, as the findings highlight, children have struggled with their friendships during the pandemic. Children need to be given the time and space to re-establish their friendships, not just as they return to school, but throughout the academic year. Secondly, a focus on choice will be key. Children have been particularly unhappy with the amount of choice they have had at this time so this needs to be recognised and addressed when planning school catch-up activities. Thirdly, with the national catch-up programme and extra tuition, the additional stress that catch-up plans may put on children needs to be considered. This is particularly important given the concerns expressed by young people regarding missing large chunks of their education. And finally, it is telling that some of the things young people feel have boosted their emotional well-being in lockdown are closely linked to the five ways to well-being. Music, art, connecting with family and friends, and sport have all helped to buttress children’s well-being during this difficult time, these have rarely been the focus of previous reform initiatives from the Government which have focused heavily on a medical model of mental health.

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| **Reflection questions:** |
| Thinking about the 4 key areas described in the extract above, how do you think this project could support children and young people from marginalised communities when they return to school?Reduced stress method of learning Novel space with novel teachersNo prior concept of what success looksAll starting at same point – new topicsOutdoor isn’t a topic for learning – it is a spaceOpening up space for conversations about outdoors and playAll areas link to outdoorsNature of the project highlights Welsh education minister highlighting outdoors on return to schoolTimely and reinforcing to teachers – won’t go back to default’The outdoors doesn’t judge me’Outdoors is safer than indoorsLearning by stealth – takes the pressure offStress reduction – outdoors is fantastic place to teach mindfulness |
| How could this project be used as a vehicle to give children and young people time, space and choice?  |

Extract 4: Why is important to listen to and understand the issues faced by the marginalised communities we’re working with? Extract taken from Choe E.Y., Jorgensen A., Sheffield D.

Does a natural environment enhance the effectiveness of Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR)? Examining the mental health and wellbeing, and nature connectedness benefits

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Reviewed research reveals a lack of young people’s voices articulating if and how urban nature supports their mental health and wellbeing. This paper presents qualitative research with young multi-ethnic urban residents living in a northern UK city and offers an important counter-narrative to the pervasive notion of childhood nature-deficit disorder. Using interviews and creative arts workshops, we explored the value of urban nature for the mental health and wellbeing of 24 young people aged 17–27 years, 9 of whom had lived experience of mental health difficulties. Trees, water, open spaces and views were frequently cited as offering benefits. Deteriorating landscapes, young people’s shifting identities and perceived time pressures disrupted support. Young people expressed how urban nature encounters were experienced as accepting and relational, offering a: stronger sense of self; feelings of escape; connection and care with the human and non-human world.

Our participants, mostly from backgrounds commonly assumed to be less engaged with natural environments (Natural England, 2015), demonstrated not only rich nature experiences in and around a city, but highlighted themselves as active agents of their own mental health and wellbeing. They make choices to engage with nature in many forms, usually outside formal institutional or health care structures. Connections and relationships (Conradson, 2005) were felt across spaces and species (views, street trees, houseplants, wildlife and pets).

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| **Reflection questions:** |
| Why is it important not to make generalisations or assumptions about the connection between marginalised pupils and nature?If you have never walked a mile in someone else’s shoes was brought to mindNot been into a teaching situation with many marginalised groups – maybe socioeconomic but not culturalImportant to find out as much as possible with the first contact with the schoolsNot judging firstFFC – working got YMCAs – different people, forget what you know and what other people do. Going in and not acting like a knob! Coming in and finding out what they know.Cath worked a lot with diverse communities – so a good understanding of working with different and diverse communitiesAnd people who are disadvantaged may well be very connected with natureEveryone is coming with an equally rich cultureMake sure we don’t lump communities together |
| How will consulting with teachers and pupils before the project is delivered in schools help you to get to know more about the children and young people you will be working with?  |