



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



Arts and Humanities Research Council

ECO-CAPABILITIES  
CREATIVE ADVENTURING IN NATURE

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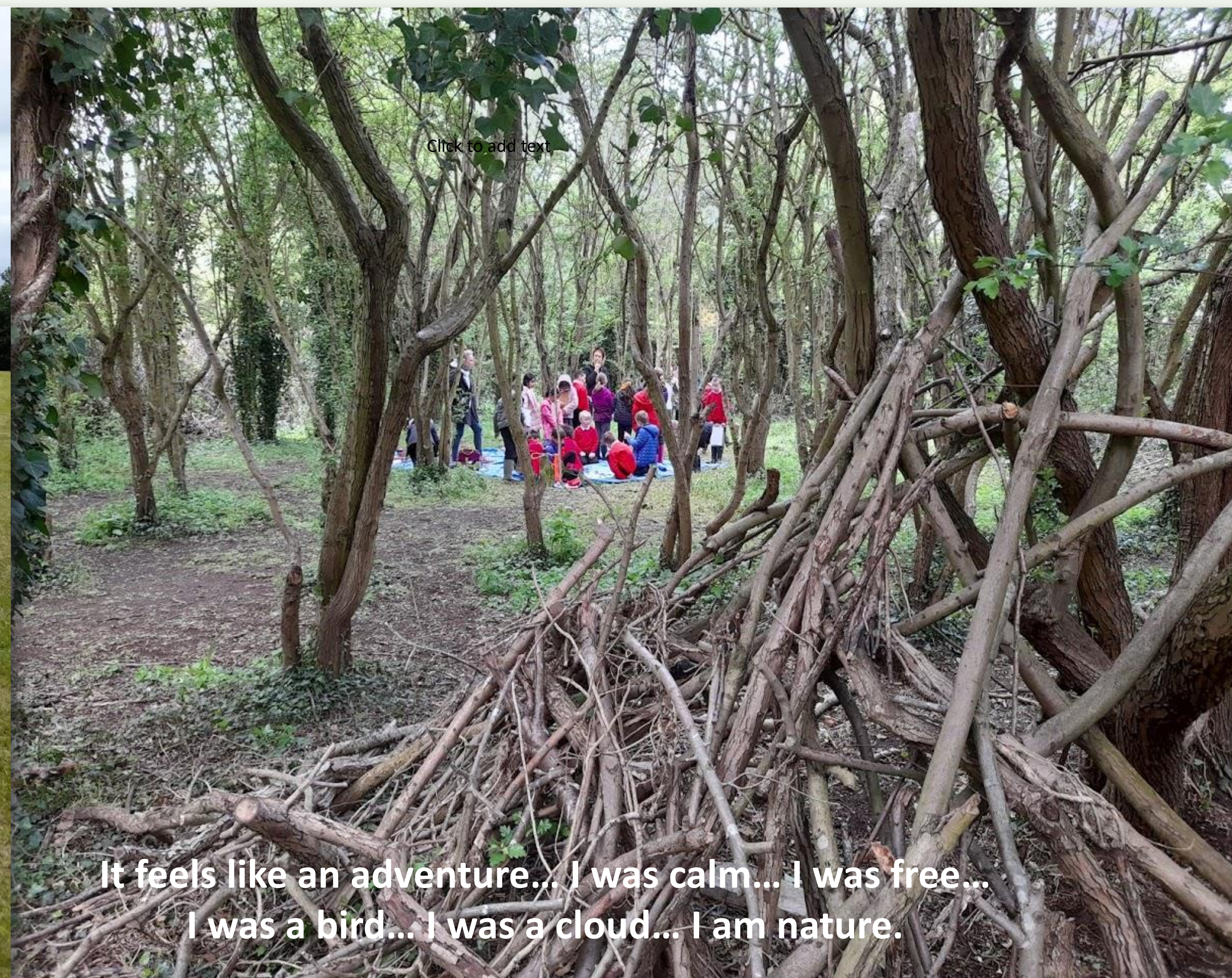
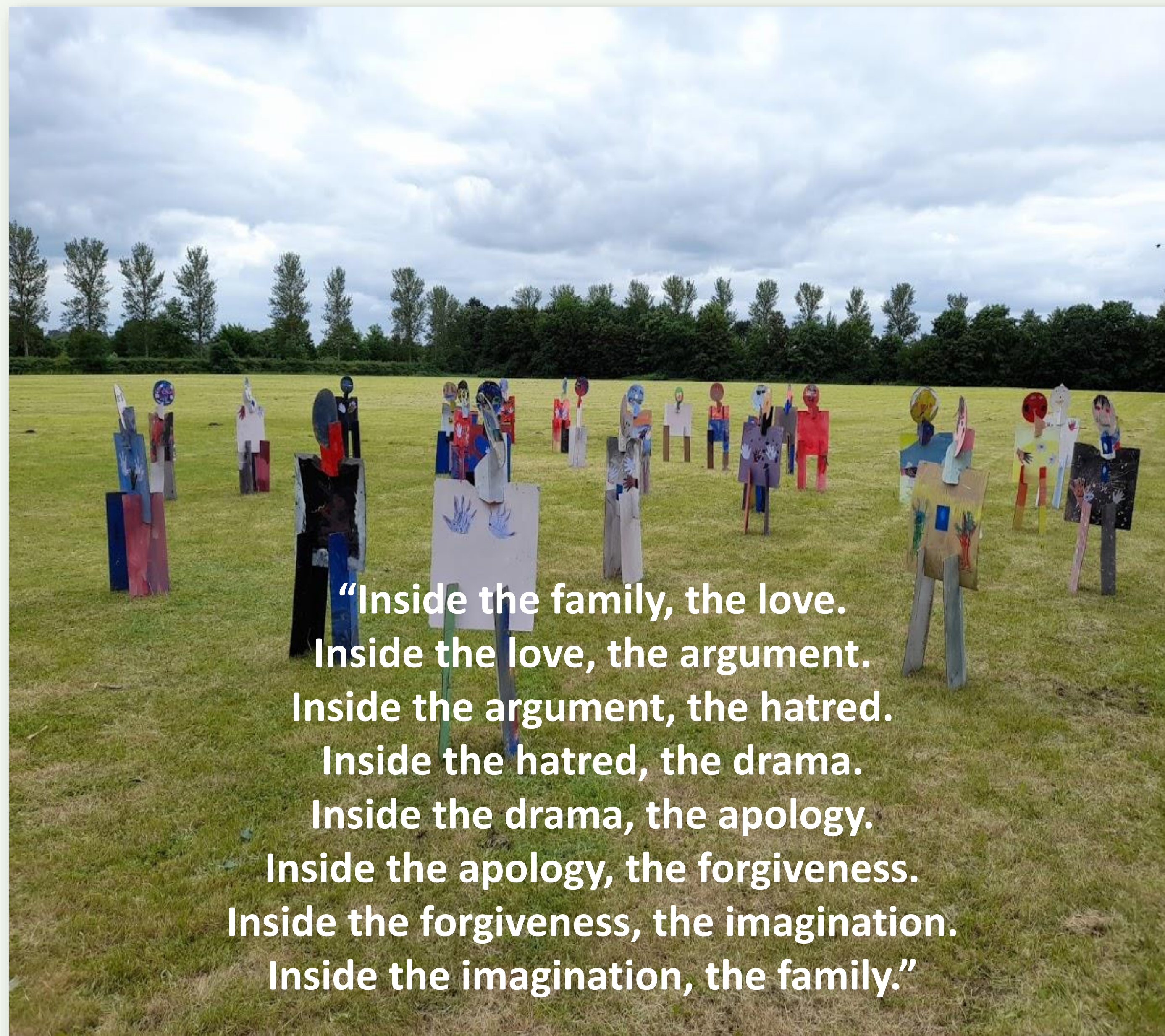


## INTRODUCTION

- ❖ 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 PWI-SC wellbeing questionnaires (Cummins & Lau, 2005).
- ❖ 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.

## REFERENCES

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