"No one will protect what they don’t care about; and no one will care about what they have never experienced"

David Attenborough
Our trails and wild places are becoming choked by plastic pollution. We are witnessing the social and emotional impacts of ‘environmental disconnection’, habitat loss and even ‘eco-grief’ on the mental health and wellbeing of individuals and communities, and we want to make a difference.

THE MISSION:

To reduce plastic pollution on our trails and wild places by 75% by 2025, and reconnect people with nature through purposeful adventure.
Welcome to the Trashmob Academy Toolkit:

A resource for educators looking to improve Nature Connection in the young people they work with.
Why we’re here

We are experiencing a global crisis of both mental and environmental health. Rates of Common Mental Disorders such as Anxiety and Depression have never been higher, especially in young people. The natural world is being exploited, neglected and destroyed in ways we have never seen before.

At the same time, the amount of children that visit nature at all has halved in a generation. 60% of them only play outside once a week, 28% haven’t been on a country walk in the last year, and 20% of them have never climbed a tree (The Guardian, 2016). Now more than ever, we need to connect our children with the natural world around them.

The benefits that researchers have been able to attribute to increases in Nature Connection with regards to improving resilience, stress reduction and overall wellbeing are well established, but many are still not sure of how to make the most of nature and how it can help us. Drawn from existing theories of education and up to date research, this toolkit aims to help with that.

Instilling a sense of belonging, connection, and ownership is so important for healthy and sustainable psychological development, especially in young people. Being part of the Trashmob Academy will help the young people you work with become a part of the Trashmob; taking part in future TFT projects and activations, collecting trash and having a bit of fun along the way.

Improving Nature Connection provokes future Pro Environmental Behaviour. For us to remove 75% of litter from our wild places, and for them to remain clean when we're gone, we need your help.

We hope to help develop a happy, healthy, resilient generation of environmental stewards that care about nature and their own wild spaces. It’s great to have you on board.

Thank you.
Kolb’s Cycle of Experiential Learning

“A dynamic, holistic theory of process of learning from experience” (Kolb, 1984)

Concrete Experience
The learner actively experiments with a concept. Try it out and see what happens!

Active Experimentation
The learner applies the model to a new experiment. Formulate a hypothesis and it!

Reflective Observation
The learner consciously reflects on that experience. Analyse!

Abstract Conceptualisation
The learner attempts to generalise a model of what is experienced. Connect ideas, linking to existing knowledge.

We have based the teachings in this Toolkit on Kolb’s well-established theory of experiential learning, adopted by practitioners of nature-based practice worldwide. It is a non-linear process, whereby each and any element can lead to another through a process of self reflection and awareness.
Carl Rogers’ Requirements for Experiential Learning

“Experience is, for me, the highest authority. The touchstone of validity is my own experience. No other person's ideas, and none of my own ideas, are as authoritative as my experience.” (Rogers, 1961)

Rogers believed that all humans had the ability to learn anything, and it is the role of the teacher to provide what “scaffolding” in order for effective experiential learning to take place. According to Rogers, this should include:

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

Successful experiential learning is facilitated when:

1. The student participates completely in the learning process and has control over its nature and direction
2. It is primarily based upon direct confrontation with practical, social, personal or research problems
3. Self-evaluation is the principal method of assessing progress or success.

Whilst this toolkit will attempt to provide everything needed to facilitate this learning and the Positive Youth Development that it results in, ultimately it comes down to you the educators to facilitate a comfortable learning environment for your students to achieve their full potential. We are more than happy to help!
What is Nature Connection?

”A feeling of kinship and an affective individual experience of connection with nature”
(Mayer & Frantz, 2004)

The construct was first considered in writing by E.O Wilson in 1984. The “Biophilia Hypothesis” states that humans are genetically predisposed to seek out nature. Since then, psychologists have identified different components of nature connection, so that we might be able to understand it more and get the most out of it.

P. Wesley Shultz (2000) was amongst the first to consider the concept scientifically, and his Inclusion of Nature in Self Scale outlined three components of nature connection. He also proposed that the extent to which an individual cared for the environment is directly related to how connected to it they consider themselves.

Since then various researchers have developed the construct, with a number of different measures used to assess the extent to which individuals and groups are connected to nature. What they appear to agree on, however, is that Nature Connection is comprised of three elements – Cognitive, Affective and Behavioural. Through experiential learning and nature based activities, we aim to improve on all of these in the participants of the TrashMob Academy.

Cognitive
The core of Nature Connection. Our Primitive beliefs about how we view our place in the natural world.

Affective
Our sense of care for nature, the emotional reaction towards and relationship we have with it.

Behavioural
The physical component; how we interact with nature and what we do to care for it, if anything..

"A feeling of kinship and an affective individual experience of connection with nature”
(Mayer & Frantz, 2004)
The Children and Nature Network, a Canada based group that look to improve nature connection in children through education recently conducted research that considered existing nature-based interventions for both education and wellbeing. These four factors emerged as elements of such interventions that are integral to education practices and policies that result in significant and sustainable development in young people. This toolkit will allow for each of these factors to be incorporated into your students Trashmob Academy journey, making recommendations as to how to do so throughout.
Consistent Reflection

A constant process of both individual and group consideration allows for memory to consolidate, to make the most of Kolb’s learning cycle. Thinking about what went right and what went wrong, and what they might be able to improve on next time, trying again, and repeating the process, can create meaning from their experiences and contribute to their growth.

At the beginning and end of each TrashMob Academy session, in the classroom and on the trail, we recommend that participants are encouraged to consider what they have taken from the previous session, and what they intend to bring to the next. If possible, creating opportunities for this individually, and as a group will be the most beneficial.

Building Relationships

A fundamental factor in our development as humans is the way in which we interact with others. We shape ourselves in the image of those closest to us and those we spend the most time with and for many, interacting with people of all shapes and sizes can prove difficult. What results is a young person struggling for an identity, a voice, to be heard.

As part of the Academy Sessions, the initiation and maintenance of new friendships through shared thinking, experimentation, experience and reflection is a key factor. Each session, therefore, recommends that all members of the group are given equal opportunities to contribute, and are actively encouraged to work with others in doing so.
Identity

Once called a period of “Storm and Stress” (Hall, 1904), a young person’s search for identity can indeed be difficult for some. It’s important that the people who provide the scaffolding for the psychological development of those young people are able to provide the proper support so that the pursuit of who they are can be enjoyable, productive and encouraging for others (Rogers, Vygotsky).

The TrashMob Academy sessions offer young people the chance to be leaders, taking their peers through a bike check, for example. Giving them the opportunity to put the mastery they have developed through consistent reflection into action, teaching and helping others, allows them to discover more about themselves.

Our pilots have shown that once young people have got a little bit closer to that identity, they are able to contribute to their community, friends and family in ways that were previously unimaginable.

Nature’s Unique Opportunities

The diversity we can experience in nature allows for observations and experiences like no other. Developing an individual or groups connection to nature can allow for those processes to become resources for learning, resilience and progression through that constant cycle of learning.

Participants’ connection to nature is developed using Miles Richardson’s “Pathways to Nature Connection” (2008) – beauty, meaning, compassion, contact and emotion, and they are encouraged to use all of their senses throughout this process – something only nature can provide.

An important note here is that the nature based teachings and learnings within the TrashMob Academy content aren’t limited to nature based settings. Hands on, experimental learning processes through the cycle consistent reflection, experimentation, consideration and experience both individual and shared allows people to convert those “classroom” skills to the real world, to their life, to their relationships, identity and personal development.
Nature Connection, Mindfulness and Kaplan’s Theory of Psychological Restoration

"Mindfulness is a focus on the present moment, in a state of non-judgemental awareness” (Brown & Ryan, 2003)

The practice of Mindfulness is often associated with various wellbeing benefits and has been attributed to developments in nature connection (Barbaro & Pickett, 2016; Howell et al., 2011; Schutte & Malouff, 2018), as it allows individuals to better engage in nature activities, resulting in an improved oneness with or connection to nature.

Kaplan’s (1995) theory of psychological restoration states that contact with natural environments can restore attentional capacity, improving one’s ability to engage fully in such nature based activities. And so, the nature connection–mindfulness relationship can become reciprocal – the more connected to nature, the more able to restore attention people are - each may benefit from the other (Schutte & Malouff, 2018).

Over the years, both research and practice have established the value that nature based activities can bring to the ability of individuals to restore their attentional capacity in their learning environments. The TrashMob Academy content can work in tandem with the mountain bike coaching sessions and have nature based elements within each session. We strongly encourage educators to deliver elements of the content outside, making use of nature’s unique opportunities wherever maximise the benefits of the Theory of Psychological Restoration.

Each session also includes a “mindful minute” – participants are asked to take a minute to close their eyes and connect to the world around them. As short a time as a minute can bring about the benefits discussed above, improving capacity for psychological and attention restoration as well as nature connection.
What’s nature got to do with Wellbeing?

Researchers often consider nature connection in respect to wellbeing. As usual, there is some disagreement as to which elements of wellbeing are better or worse affected by improvements in nature connection.

For example, Capaldi et. al (2014) believe that eudemonic wellbeing – the concept of functioning well, following values and realising potential is thought to have stronger correlations with improvements in nature connection than hedonic wellbeing - the idea of feeling good through the maximisation of pleasure and fulfilment of desire.

However, the consensus is that improvements in nature connection correlate closely with improvements in overall wellbeing, and furthermore the TrashMob Academy programme seeks to improve both eudemonic and hedonic wellbeing throughout the process.

Essentially the scientists can argue about it till the cows come home, but what it comes down to is this.

WE ARE PART OF NATURE, AND ITS GOOD FOR BOTH OF US IF WE ACT LIKE IT!!
Single Use Pollution: Some Facts

- On average over 150 plastic bottles litter each mile of UK beaches.
- 8.3 billion tonnes of plastic has been made since 1950, only 9% has been recycled.
- 48% of the UK population admit to dropping litter.
- Almost every single piece of plastic ever made is still somewhere on the planet.

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