

# N&B La natura, l'educazione, i bambini

English transcript

Video narrated by Maurilio Cipparone, member of the CEC and WCPA of the IUCN and Scientific coordinator Department of Protected Areas, Community Science, NèB-Nature is Wellness, of the CURSA University Consortium.

## **Speaker 1 - 00:00**

We want to follow a path between the imaginary and the real, like this one, to discover, better understand, and appreciate the importance of the relationship between education, nature, and protected areas. The Castel Porziano estate is certainly the most suitable guide for such a journey because it is a protected area, a state nature reserve, but not only is it protected by our laws, it is also a site of excellence in the Natura 2000 network created by the European Union with the Habitat Directive for the protection of migratory birds and other species of European importance. Because nature, particularly that of protected areas, is simultaneously the teacher, the classroom, the outdoor laboratory, the academy of a modern vision of education.

## **Speaker 1 - 01:18**

We must consider that since their conception and establishment, parks and, more generally, all protected areas have also had an educational mission. This is confirmed by our national law on protected areas, Law 394/91, which in Article 1 assigns parks and other protected areas the function of education and training. As a protected area, therefore, the estate, with its extraordinary values, is also an instrument of excellence for the promotion of education, training, and scientific research activities. The first steps along the path towards the meeting point between nature and education begin at the Naturalistic Museum of the Estate, a structure available to visitors to better understand the characteristics and inhabitants of its various ecosystems.

## **Speaker 1 - 02:14**

Here we better understand why in Castelporziano, nature is simultaneously the author, director, screenwriter, and main actress in a performance that over the years has involved over 6,300 species of plants and animals and has had as co-stars the legend, culture, and history of our country on a unique stage in the world. We must consider that this stage is about 6,000 hectares large; let us imagine 9,000 football fields placed next to each other, where the actors, or better yet, players or actors as you prefer, are 3,489 species of animals, 1,233 species of plants, and 1,518 species of fungi. Imagine the confusion, animation, and vitality that these football fields, or better yet, this stage, could have. For this reason, we like to imagine the museum as a tool that can play two roles.

## **Speaker 1 - 03:22**

One, that of a fascinating, intriguing display, so rich in colors and suggestions that it invites us to visit an area or go to a theater where nature performs together with its co-stars, which are the history, culture, and legends of our country. Another role can be that of an introduction to an extraordinary encyclopedia also written by a living territory where nature is simultaneously the teacher, textbook, open laboratory that tells and explains experiences and life strategies followed by the inhabitants of this area but which are also important for us.

## **Speaker 1 - 04:13**

To reach the meeting point between nature, education, and the challenges of today and tomorrow, especially for the younger generations, we must reflect on why nature and the parks that preserve it are important for education, but they are especially important for the fruits of education, which are the attitudes, behaviors, and actions that nature itself needs for its survival and ours. So, what are the measurable benefits on the educational level of people, and particularly children, who we must think of

first and foremost, and school-aged children? And how do these benefits translate into pro-environmental behaviors?

**Speaker 1 - 04:59**

There is extensive research in this field, and evidence spans centuries of history across all civilizations that our planet has hosted, and which we hope will continue to host despite the harm we inflict on it through lived experiences, illustrious names, documents, quotations, famous phrases, and who knows what else. Here, we must necessarily limit ourselves to citing only a few examples from the past, highlighting some data from recent research that seemed more significant to us, and proposing some case studies as experiences that might be worth repeating for their effectiveness. Let's imagine encountering a time machine on the path we are walking and opening its door. What will we see? Saint Bernard of Clairvaux, abbot, doctor of the church, who was born and died in France, lived from 1090 to 1153, among other things the patron of Gibraltar and the saint protector of beekeepers and farmers. What does Saint Bernard tell us?

**Speaker 1 - 06:07**

Two things that we can consider aphorisms. "He who does not know does not truly live." And the other, which is extraordinary and fits with what we are doing and the environment we find ourselves in: "You will find more in the woods than in books. Trees and rocks will teach you things that no teacher will tell you." But what might have inspired Saint Bernard to make this statement? I don't believe he had conducted specific scientific research on the subject, but rather, he may have been inspired by the emotion that every contact with nature provokes in us, with its sunrises, sunsets, storms, and landscapes, just as today eminent pedagogues and developmental and educational psychologists believe, who assert that to teach, one must first inspire emotion. Interesting, isn't it? But we'll return to this topic later when discussing scientific research on the subject.

**Speaker 1 - 07:14**

Today, nature, preferably untouched by human activities, is considered by many modern pedagogues as an excellent classroom. The so-called "learning landscape," the teaching environment, allows the child—because we must primarily think of the child—to express all his or her potential, curiosity, and skills. It allows exploration, self-discovery, discovering one's identity, autonomy, and security, but also the ability to communicate with others, peers, and to see their identity and privacy respected. Saint Bernard of Clairvaux has left us, but we are still in the time machine where we discover that starting from the 1700s and throughout the 1900s, many pedagogues addressed the theme of the importance of contact and being in the natural environment for children's development.

**Speaker 1 - 08:18**

In nature, pedagogues have not only seen a healthy living environment but also a learning environment where one can move towards the knowledge of the world, oneself, and others, and grow whole in body, mind, and spirit. The first encounter we make is with Jean-Jacques Rousseau, a Swiss philosopher and pedagogue from the 1700s, considered the father of modern pedagogy. In a novel published in 1762, titled "Emile," Rousseau described that education should be a natural education, growing children in close contact with the natural environment. Focused on the centrality of the child's deepest and most essential needs, respecting their growth rhythms, and valuing the characteristics of childhood. The child, as imagined by Rousseau, grows in the countryside, according to nature, with slow rhythms, learning from experience, and acquiring the right knowledge at the right time. Let us now imagine hearing his words.

**Speaker 2 - 09:30**

In the natural order, since all men are equal, their common vocation is the human condition, and anyone who has been well prepared for that condition cannot fail to fulfill the duties that derive from it. Before parents choose a profession for him, nature calls him to human life. Educational action must be

based on the needs and natural dispositions of man, on the first tools of knowledge of the world that he possesses, which are movement and the senses, our windows to the world. Small children have a natural impulse towards movement and physical activity. We are born with sensitivity, and from birth, we receive different impressions from the objects that surround us. Our first teachers of philosophy are our feet, our hands, our eyes.

**Speaker 1 - 10:33**

This, said Rousseau, and I read his words, still resonates today, 261 years later. We have not yet left the time machine that has brought us to the mid-19th century, where we meet Frederick Froebel, who in 1840 founded in Germany the first kindergarten, what we now call nursery school or early childhood education. For Froebel, nature played a crucial role in the child's education because he said...

An educational system should neither prevent nor impose itself on nature, but rather take care of it from birth as an integral and necessary part of humanity. In this way, the life of the child finds varied and complete fulfillment in communion with nature and the questions it raises, his ardent desire to know nature, which drives him to observe plants and flowers for a long time, and to direct his thoughtful attention to them. Nature seems to be especially favorable to this inclination and occupation, rewarding it with happy success. Intuition and observation of nature are the starting points of all forms of knowledge and education. Formation must occur through the education of the head (cognitive abilities), the heart (feelings and moral capacities), and the hands (practical and artisanal abilities of the child).

**Speaker 1 - 12:22**

In Froebel's kindergarten, or early childhood education, the child grows freely, just like a plant, and is cared for by gardener-teachers who are trained and prepared precisely for this experience. This experience has also been revived in modern times with forest schools. Froebel's image fades as the centuries pass, and we have now arrived closer to our own time, in the early 20th century, when Maria Montessori realized the fundamental bond that exists between childhood and nature and recognized its infinite educational and learning potential. According to Montessori, the time a child spends in nature is the foundation of all future learning because it provides unique experiences. Maria Montessori said that the fears of adults...

**Speaker 3 - 13:16**

...lead to the overprotection of children, preventing them from experiencing nature and its phenomena, and stifling their energy. Children need places where they can spread their arms without being limited by walls or barriers, where they can run without the fear of sudden obstacles. They need to feel free in spaces where it is possible to extend their gaze for miles around and upwards without having their view blocked by urban profiles. This spatial freedom creates a sense of peace in the hearts and minds of our little ones. Playing freely outdoors has many benefits. Imagination thrives, the sense of courage is strengthened, feelings of peace become natural mental states, creativity develops, and the diverse abilities of children are enhanced.

**Speaker 1 - 14:12**

Maria Montessori's teachings are so relevant that they are employed today in hundreds of Montessori schools around the world. But it's time to turn off the time machine, though the echo of these words remains in the air as we continue the path we started, leading us to today's role of protected areas as irreplaceable tools for education. In the early days, education in parks was primarily naturalistic in nature, meaning it told of landscapes, animals, plants, species, and ecosystems. However, over time, more challenging themes have emerged, such as sustainable development, climate change, biodiversity conservation, and especially the theme of everyone's right to a healthy and safe environment. All these themes have gained more prominence.

**Speaker 1 - 15:09**

This is also because it is precisely in our protected areas, where biodiversity is also a community of people, that the people living there must understand these themes through education, and when these

issues arise as problems, they must find solutions through education and training. Today, the educational mission has become a constant in all parks worldwide, which can be considered a true educational community that can contribute to the regeneration of the school system and, in light of environmental challenges, to the construction of a harmonious relationship between humankind and nature.

**Speaker 1 - 15:49**

We can also verify how effective the relationship with nature is on behaviors and actions, and how much this also derives from the emotions experienced, as mentioned earlier, through research conducted in the early 1980s and 1990s by two specialists, two psychologists, educators, and pedagogues, Thomas Tanner and Joy Palmer. Tanner was among the first to study the role of human contact with the environment from prehistory, through very complex research, and how this contact has influenced the evolution of human cultures. And not only on how these contacts can influence the psychophysical development of a person. In research conducted in the USA in 1980, Tanner found that childhood experiences of contact with nature, or experiences in youth, had a "dominant" influence on the development of feelings of care for the environment.

**Speaker 1 - 16:55**

In other words, this confirmed the hypothesis he had already advanced in 1974, that children must know and love nature before they can worry about its care. To this thought of his, I would add another thought from another psychologist, David Sobel, an American, who said, "How can you ask a child to protect the condor if he doesn't even know a robin or a blackbird?" The emotional factor mentioned earlier returns here, which was also confirmed by subsequent research by Dr. Palmer and other authors. Palmer, incidentally, is the author of many books that are truly fundamental for environmental education, among which we should remember "Environmental Education in the 21st Century: Theory, Practice, Progress, and Promise," and another book, "50 Key Thinkers on the Environment," from Confucius to the philosopher and pedagogue John Dewey.

**Speaker 4 - 17:59**

In 1993, Palmer launched a study involving a group of 232 adults, 130 women, and 102 men. However, all belonged to an environmental association in the United Kingdom and were all engaged in the profession of environmental educators. The purpose of the study was to try to discover, if possible, or gather data on why these people had chosen this particular profession, and what the relationship was between their previous experiences and their current professional commitment. The result of this study showed that 91% of the reasons for choosing such a career were attributed to an experience carried out in nature. In second place was the educational experience, carried out in school or other educational contexts, and in third place, experiences carried out with parents.

**Speaker 4 - 19:13**

But the most interesting thing is that in all these experiences, the crucial moment was attributed to the experience carried out in childhood with an association, but especially with parents, because children do not go to parks alone—they go with an association or with parents. This data demonstrated what Tanner had already thought and tried to prove: that contact with nature, the emotion provided by contact with nature, is the most important factor that stimulates attachment to nature, and consequently, care for the natural environment. It also highlights the importance of this element in the process we call learning, and in this specific case, learning about the knowledge, attention, and care of nature.

**Speaker 1 - 20:15**

Moreover, the importance of the role of parents in promoting or facilitating outdoor experiences and activities has been demonstrated. The data obtained from this research, as well as other research of which we are aware, should have strategic implications for public education policies, for school curriculum planning, and for budget allocations, because it should be understood that positive

experiences in nature and the environment are of vital importance for fostering care for it. As for teachers, their training should not only include knowledge of the environment and its issues but also address how this knowledge can be effectively transferred to students, both in the classroom and outdoors. This is what modern environmental education projects do, focusing on teacher training in natural environments.

**Speaker 1 - 21:07**

Finally, the importance of a sense of belonging that must be promoted and developed in young people was highlighted. If, when they become adults, they feel attachment and a sense of belonging to a place, they will be aware of the importance that place has for their lives and will be able to take spontaneous actions to care for it. From the importance of place, we find practical suggestions as we approach the end of our path. Wendell Berry, an American writer, farmer, and environmentalist who strongly influenced ecological thought and educators attentive to the relationship with nature, said, "You don't know who you are if you don't know where you are." From the importance of place for the development of knowledge, skills, and attitudes useful to ensure that love touches the earth, as Wendell Berry said, projects could be born that are defined as PBE, or Place-Based Education.

**Speaker 1 - 22:13**

Place-Based Education, or PBE, can involve students of all ages in the knowledge and appreciation of local natural and cultural heritage, landscapes, stories, traditions, but also the hopes and visions of the communities that give the place its full meaning. Because a place has meaning when it is a site, an environment, a city, or a town lived by people, which has left traces in the history of people, which has left emotions in the history of people. Place-Based Education also gives concreteness to what Simone Weil, the first woman President of the European Parliament and a Holocaust survivor who passed away in 2017, said. Simone Weil stated that having roots, feeling attached to a place, is perhaps the most important and least understood need of the human soul. But if that is the case, what are the goals of place-based education?

**Speaker 1 - 23:23**

And how is it done? Learning takes place locally, even in the school's open spaces, in the community, in the environment, in the town, in the city. Because it focuses on local themes, systems, and content, it builds strong ties between schools, organizations, community members, contributing to a sense of belonging, a sense of place, and quality of life. Place-Based Education also helps to love nature, to cultivate a sense of care and responsibility, leading to pro-environmental behaviors in the management of the territory and its resources.

**Speaker 1 - 24:01**

Because a project of education linked to place, or PGE, raises a wide range of questions on a wide range of topics: strictly environmental aspects, such as what changes are associated with the alternation of seasons, when the first snow comes, when the first storm occurred, what plants are typical, what plants are endemic, what plants are no longer there, what animals are known, when migrations arrive, what species known to our grandparents are no longer there and why. Place-Based Education also stimulates questions about aspects of society, to search for, identify, appreciate, and evaluate the testimonies of the presence and use of ancient peoples, our ancestors, but also the customs and habits of today's people. Including people who have come from other countries, thus creating greater social cohesion.

**Speaker 4 - 24:57**

All these questions concerning the history, culture, customs, and nature of the place stimulate responses, and these responses demonstrate the importance of the place as an educational resource.

**Speaker 4 - 25:13**

Because asking and answering stimulate the learning process, and this is perhaps what should be taken into consideration when the educational context, the classroom, the academy, and the park, the nature of the park, is considered. Alongside the fact of taking trips and excursions where there is naturalistic

education, the narrative of what the environment is, the species, the landscape, there should also be a different approach, such as that carried out in the Junior Ranger projects of the American National Park Service or the Europark Federation, which have inspired projects carried out in our country, like those carried out in this region, where we are now, of small guides of nature and culture, where the educational environment is the nature of the place but also the history of the people and the place lived by the people.

**Speaker 4 - 26:17**

And this should be a suggestion, should provide guidance not only on how to create an environmental education project that starts with the formation, the sharing of objectives with teachers, and that lasts throughout the school year with park excursions, reflections, and final events that involve families, but should also involve regenerating the way education is conducted in school and also how teachers are trained so that not only do they have a deeper understanding of nature, the meaning of nature conservation, but also of how teachers can transmit this knowledge and awareness to students, and especially to children.

**Speaker 1 - 27:10**

These projects leave deep traces both for multidisciplinary learning and in the development of children because they also include paths where the knowledge of biodiversity is associated with psychomotricity and the psychophysical health of children. We cannot describe in detail here how the Junior Ranger and small guide projects are carried out. But knowing more is very simple; just browse the internet, and you can find references and suggestions on the GENS program of the Lazio Region, or for example, ask for information from some national park of the Sibillini Mountains, the Lucanian Apennines, the Sila, the Pollino, which have had their small guides for many years.

**Speaker 1 - 27:57**

We have reached the end of our path, which I hope has helped us better understand the importance of the relationship between nature, protected areas, and learning and environmental education, and perhaps also encouraged us to promote, as much as each of us can, a greater relationship, an opportunity for encounter between the world of parks and the world of education. But before we part, I would like to refer to a message and two proofs. We had said that to teach, one must first inspire emotion. Well, this message was conveyed to us by Roberto Piumini, a writer, poet, playwright, artist, and author of children's books. The message is this:

**Speaker 1 - 28:52**

"Children are flowers not to be put in a vase. They grow better outside, with the light full on their noses, with the sun on their foreheads, and their hair in the wind. Children are flowers to be grown in meadows." And the nature of protected areas leaves us precisely with a suggestion that is knowledge, learning, awareness, emotion, memories, commitment, and care. Is it worth accepting this suggestion?

**Speaker 5 - 29:30**

I believe so. The right to be free, to live moments not programmed by adults. The right to get dirty, to play with sand, earth, grass, leaves, water, stones, to jump in puddles. The right to good health, to eat healthy food, to drink clean water, and to feel well, to always breathe clean air. The right to wild nature, to build a shelter, to play in the woods, to have hiding places, trees to climb. The right to smells and sounds, to perceive the smells of flowers and earth. To recognize the scents of nature, to recognize the songs of birds and the calls of animals.

**Speaker 5 - 30:34**

The right to play in the streets and courtyards, to play in the courtyards and freely walk the streets safely. The right to dialogue, to listen and be able to speak, to interact and dialogue, and to be heard even if we are small. The right to silence to hear the wind blowing, the birds singing, the sound of running water, the croaking of frogs. The right to the spectacle of the sky. To admire the shapes of the clouds, to see the sunrise and sunset, to admire the night, the moon, and the stars, and the light of the

clouds. The right to work as we like. To build things, to make toys, a shelter, a magic castle. To plant nails, saw wood, make figures with clay, tie ropes, light a fire.

**Speaker 5 - 32:03**

The tree. A tree with ancient and storytelling branches, like arms stretched towards the sun. Hosts chirping and distant songs that now whirl in the air. Gossiping leaves on your branches never remain silent. They talk about autumn and their upcoming journeys. Your branches rise, try to surpass the sky. They compete, but they can't succeed. So they postpone it to tomorrow.