



NATURE, OUTDOOR LEARNING AND PLAY

SIG CONVENORS

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The aim of this SIG is to provide a focus for the wealth of outdoor learning research taking place in the UK, and beyond. We aim for this SIG to work closely with existing SIGs and to encourage critical debate from methodological, philosophical, political, creative and educational perspectives.

Traditional elements that spawned the Scout Association, Outward Bound, the Duke of Edinburgh Award and the Sail Training Association still continue in the educational landscape. Other traditional forms of nature study and natural history provide ways of learning about the outside world and understanding our place within this as seen in the educational work of organisations such as the National Trust, The Wildlife Trusts, RSPB and Woodland Trust (amongst others).

Notable contemporary initiatives include OPAL which aims to support learners to “explore your environment and learn more about the nature right on your doorstep” and the phenomenal success of *The Lost Words* – a new book by author Robert Macfarlane and artist Jackie Morris with learning resources provided by the John Muir Trust which is “set to bring literacy and nature to the fore in education settings across the UK”. This move towards a heightened awareness of nature has included a petition to the government in 2017, calling for the development of a GCSE in natural history and the ‘People’s Manifesto for Nature’ launched 22nd September by Chris Packham (<http://www.chrispackham.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/Peoples-Manifesto-Download.pdf>).

Alongside this, there is a general acceptance of the importance that children of all ages “...should experience the world beyond the classroom as an

essential part of learning and personal development” and this extends to a wide range of places and types of activities. Concurrently, Forest Schools have become an identifiable brand and approach to outdoor learning and play, particularly in early years education.

The SIG will create a forum for academics, practitioners, and students to engage critically in debates around nature, learning and play in outdoor settings, and by bringing together colleagues with diverse interests it will make a significant contribution to knowledge development and exchange.

The aims of the SIG are, therefore, to:

- Advance research quality and raise the profile of nature, outdoor learning and play research within BERA by encouraging publications, hosting seminars and events;
- Build research capacity by supporting collaborations between established and early careers researchers, practitioners and educators;
- Foster research engagement through enabling inter/transdisciplinary discussion of new and complementary theoretical insights from other SIGs;
- Encourage research across the lifespan into nature, outdoor learning and play by engaging in critical dialogue about the health, wellbeing and educational benefits that may be provided within a range of educational contexts.

The first three are identified as BERA strategic priorities; the fourth highlights a specific strategic priority of the SIG.

Find out more about this SIG and BERAs other networks and communities: www.bera.ac.uk/communities