ISSN: 3048-9121 (Online)

Learning Beyond Classroom Walls

What parents and practitioners value about nature-based early childhood education
Excellent Educator, 3(19), 2, 2026

🔎 Research in Brief

The study explores how parents and early childhood practitioners understand the value of nature-based education and outdoor play. Researchers interviewed 16 participants in England: seven parents of children aged three to five and nine practitioners working in nature-based early childhood settings. The interviews were analysed using reflexive thematic analysis.

Five themes emerged: protecting children's rights; nature as a context for whole-child development; risk, resilience and physicality; communities of learning; and systemic pressures and parental fears. Participants viewed outdoor experiences as important for children's physical, emotional, social and cognitive development. They also emphasised the value of allowing children to encounter manageable risks, develop independence and learn through direct interaction with their surroundings. Learning extended beyond the educational setting, influencing family activities and relationships with nature.

For early childhood educators, the findings highlight the importance of treating outdoor environments as integral learning spaces rather than occasional recreational additions. Teachers can provide opportunities for exploration, movement, observation and child-led discovery. However, the study also identifies tensions between nature-based approaches and conventional schooling, including concerns about safety, academic expectations and the transition into more structured learning environments.

✓ Try Tomorrow

- Replace one indoor activity with an outdoor exploration using natural objects.
- Allow children to investigate manageable physical challenges under appropriate supervision.
- Invite children to share their outdoor discoveries with their families.

★ One Key Takeaway

Nature-based learning is not simply outdoor play; it is an approach that connects children's development, independence and relationships with the natural world.

Keywords: early childhood education, nature-based learning, outdoor play, child development, risk and resilience, parental perspectives

📖 Source Article

Taylor, N., Pringle, A., & Roscoe, C. M. P. (2026). Practitioners' and Parents' Perspectives of Nature-Based Early Childhood Education: Practice, Space and Outdoor Play. *Societies, 16*, 279. https://doi.org/10.3390/soc16090279