ISSN: 3048-9121 (Online)

.Nature Is a Different Learning Space

Why access to outdoor learning matters, particularly for disadvantaged children
Excellent Educator, 3(19), 4, 2026

🔎 Research in Brief

The study examines teachers' perspectives on the benefits of nature, inequalities in children's access to natural environments and the barriers to outdoor learning in schools. Researchers interviewed 25 primary school teachers from England, Wales and Northern Ireland who participated in Generation Wild, a nature-connection programme for schools in economically disadvantaged communities. The interviews explored experiences of outdoor learning and the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. Four themes emerged: nature's positive impact on children's wellbeing and behaviour; disadvantage as a persistent barrier to access to nature; nature's role in supporting post-pandemic recovery; and systemic constraints on outdoor teaching. Teachers described outdoor environments as offering children greater calm, freedom and opportunities for emotional expression. They considered these experiences particularly valuable for children facing social and economic disadvantage. However, financial constraints, limited access to green spaces, curriculum pressures, standardised testing and insufficient time restricted opportunities for regular outdoor learning.

For school leaders and teachers, the findings highlight an important gap between recognising the value of outdoor education and making it a regular part of school practice. Schools can help reduce inequalities in access to nature by incorporating outdoor experiences into everyday teaching rather than depending entirely on occasional field trips. However, the authors emphasise that lasting change also requires institutional support and educational policies that give teachers the time and flexibility to organise outdoor learning.

✓ Try Tomorrow

- Identify a nearby green space that could support a regular learning activity.
- Plan one curriculum-linked lesson outside the classroom.
- Consider whether all students have equal opportunities to participate in outdoor activities, including those facing financial or mobility barriers.

★ One Key Takeaway

Access to nature should not depend on a child's family circumstances; schools have an important role in making outdoor learning more equitable.

Keywords: outdoor learning, educational inequality, nature connection, student wellbeing, disadvantaged children, teacher perspectives

📖 Source Article

Parkin, N., Hobson, K., Poortinga, W., Stead, M., Newth, J., Reeves, J., & Gattis, M. (2026). 'A completely different space': Teachers' perspectives on disadvantage, access to nature and outdoor learning. *British Educational Research Journal, 52*, 2257–2280. https://doi.org/10.1002/berj.70103