

VARIA

EETP Vol. 17, 2022, No. 3(66)  
e-ISSN 2353-7787  
DOI: 10.35765/eetp.2022.1766.05



Submitted: 25.05.2022  
Accepted: 05.07.2022

Jakub Adamczewski

ORCID: 0000-0002-0152-3159  
Uniwersytet Adama Mickiewicza w Poznaniu

Yuki Nagae

ORCID: 0000-0002-2807-0110  
Stockholm University Department of Education

## Come Rain or Shine: Swedish Preschools Philosophy on Learning in Nature

Czy słońce, czy deszcz: Filozofia szwedzkich przedszkoli  
dotycząca uczenia się w naturze

### KEYWORDS ABSTRACT

Sweden, preschool,  
rain or shine  
philosophy, outdoor  
learning, nature

Swedish preschools are known worldwide as they are built on democratic values and love for play and explorative learning. The recent civilization leap is a sign that we should be familiar with other alternatives for child development, such as the Swedish “Come Rain or Shine” philosophy and its approach to learning in nature. The aim of this conceptual article is to describe the outdoor learning philosophy by sharing good practices worked out in Swedish preschool pedagogy over the last century. Our knowledge is largely based on limited data collected through a narrative literature review, dedicated to the topic. This type of knowledge can be seen as a valuable lesson for those countries that are in a need of systematic solutions concerning preschool education.

### SŁOWA KLUCZE ABSTRAKT

Szwecja, przedszkole,  
filozofia *rain or shine*,  
nauka na świeżym  
powietrzu, przyroda

Szwedzkie przedszkola są znane na całym świecie, ponieważ są zbudowane na wartościach demokratycznych oraz zamiłowaniu do zabawy i odkrywczą nauki. Ostatni skok cywilizacyjny to znak, że powinniśmy poznać inne alternatywne rozwiązania dla rozwoju dziecka, takie

jak szwedzka filozofia „Come Rain or Shine” i jej podejście do nauki na łonie natury. Celem tego konceptualnego artykułu jest opisanie filozofii uczenia się na świeżym powietrzu poprzez podzielenie się dobrymi praktykami wypracowanymi w szwedzkiej pedagogice przedszkolnej w ciągu ostatniego stulecia. Nasza wiedza opiera się w dużej mierze na ograniczonych danych zebranych w ramach narracyjnego przeglądu literatury, poświęconego temu tematowi. Tego typu wiedza może być postrzegana jako cenna lekcja dla tych krajów, które potrzebują systemowych rozwiązań w zakresie edukacji przedszkolnej.

## Introduction

The quality of early childhood education is the key to the improvement of the society by preparing children to be successful lifelong learners in a fast-paced world. Moreover, equal access to high-quality Early Childhood Education and Care programs has a good influence on individuals, parents, and society, e. g. in Nordic countries where the indoor learning approach is just as important as the outdoor one. It is worth mentioning that there are several comprehensive publications about the Nordic social pedagogical approach to families, children, and early childhood education, which give more profound insight into the contemporary Scandinavian perspective (Ringsmose&Kragh-Müller 2017; Fleer & Van Oers 2018; Garvis et al., 2019). Knowledge of the key characteristics and values (presented in the national curriculum) of outdoor education ideas in the Nordic region can result in better understanding of the “Come Rain or Shine” philosophy which is rooted in Swedish values and cultural approach to schooling based on teaching in nature. In addition, our paper will be of interest and inspiration to teachers, students, and scholars across a range of disciplines because of its practical and comparative character. We also want to address it to policymakers and politicians as their decisions have a real influence on children’s learning and social wellbeing.

Speaking about different policies and approaches to Early Childhood Education, there are two broad categories of pedagogical practices and traditions described by John Bennett (2005). The first one is called the “pre-primary tradition”, which focuses on cognitive goals and school readiness. It is commonly found in the United Kingdom, the United States, the Netherlands, France, Ireland, and Poland. In the second case, the “social pedagogic tradition”, which is preferred in Nordic countries, emphasizes children’s play and social development with a focus on initiative and self-agency (Bennett 2005: 5-23). This can be reduced to two main goals: cognitive development influenced by the primary school model, and child-centered learning through play and relationships with peers, teachers, and nature, without a strict school structure.

In the case of Sweden, preschool education can take various forms, but each one of them is obliged to follow the curriculum and guarantee “a positive, non-judgmental learning environment for the young (...) instead of assessing a child’s progress by grading or ranking” (Dahlberg et al., 2006: 229). The curriculum itself is a short national framework that was first introduced in 1998 based on the Education Act and revised in 2010 and 2018 in which learning dimensions and values were strengthened.

Recent educational and geopolitical changes to preschool education, which can be noticed, e. g. in Poland or Japan, include the shortage of teachers and other specialists, overcrowded preschools, multicultural atmosphere, integration of play with learning, not enough education for sustainable development<sup>1</sup>, or indoor education dominating outdoor learning. This made us motivated to search for some good practices from Sweden. Our countries have faced environmental changes related to children. Moreover, Poland has been influenced by the latest political situation in Ukraine and Russia, which resulted in the instability in the educational setting, while Japan has experienced an increasing tendency toward “schoolification” of Early Childhood Education (Kodama et al., 2020). In these social transformations that cause children to stay away from nature, it is necessary to continuously consider what Early Childhood Education can do and be. Sweden is a country that has started a social change from early childhood education in response to the social demands of the time, and tried to place children in the centre of the society, as it will be further discussed. Therefore, we believe that consciousness of other educational perspectives, especially Swedish ones, can be beneficial for Polish and Japanese (but not only) preschool teachers and academics, who strive for high-quality early education and care. It is very important, especially after the Covid-19 pandemic, to connect children with nature and introduce education for sustainable development as early as possible, keeping in mind 2050’s climate crisis. Our paper can be also seen as a part of a debate on a new pedagogical concept called childhoodnature, widely presented in the Research Handbook on Childhoodnature (2022) which “argues that children are nature and are interconnected with and part of the natural world” (Barratt et al., 2020: 760). Furthermore, according to the editors, “the new concept of childhoodnature aligns with a posthuman turn in educational and childhoodnature research and, associated with this, the recognition that humans are having an unprecedented planetary impact on Earth in this time of the Anthropocene” (Cutter-Mackenzie-Knowles et al., 2020: 4). The “Come Rain or Shine” philosophy is only one of the examples how countries such as Poland or Japan may transform their pedagogical approach into more childhoodnature way.

---

<sup>1</sup> In Sweden, ESD is incorporated into governing documents at all levels of the education system, including: Curriculum for the Preschool, Curriculum for the compulsory school, preschool class and school-age educare Swedish Higher Education Act.

The article is structured as follows. After the introduction, we describe an overview of the methodological concept of our paper and the debate on contemporary Swedish preschool. Next, we present the Swedish preschool curriculum through different approaches that have influenced the shape of the current pedagogies. In the following section, we describe outdoor learning and the rain or shine philosophy that is at the centre of our article. The good practices based on Swedish preschool research, in-depth literature review, and our experience, will paint the picture for the discussion at the end of the paper.

### Förskola: policy and curriculum of Swedish preschool

Nature-based preschools and forest kindergartens have been popular in Nordic countries for decades and they serve as a source of inspiration for educators worldwide. In this part, we explore the historical background and principle of the Swedish preschool pedagogy in which children learn by playing in nature. By doing so, we will discuss why Swedish preschool education regards nature as the best environment for children while discovering a common view on the child in Swedish preschool education.

The research design of our paper is a narrative literature review that aims to enunciate up-to-date knowledge about the “Come Rain or Shine” philosophy and its importance in preschool education, based on a Swedish example. By choosing this particular method, we also wanted also to “enrich human discourse by generating understanding rather than by accumulating knowledge”, but we are also aware that “narrative reviews tend to be less focused and more wide-ranging in scope than systematic reviews” (Bryman, 2012: 110). The review was conducted over a period of three months and during that time we collected numerous empirical and theoretical papers until we obtained a comprehensive view on the basis of the work of others. The predetermined research questions weren’t formulated, but specific search strategies and criteria were applied. We decided to examine publications in English and Swedish that have been reviewed by peers and appeared in two online bibliographical databases that provide access to the full text of papers in electronic format: Stockholm University Library and Google Scholar. The search consisted of the four keywords, ‘come rain or shine’, ‘I Ur och Skur-förskola’, ‘outdoor education’, and ‘Swedish preschool’. There is a narrowed amount of literature on ‘Come Rain or Shine’ preschools with a few bachelor’s and master’s theses describing case studies of particular Swedish preschools. Thus, the research focused on the preschool concept, ways of organising the learning process, and outdoor pedagogy, rather than on the philosophy of meeting nature through play. A key criterion for inclusion was that the abstract must match preschool and outdoor education with the “Come Rain or Shine” idea and it must be

significant for our philosophical attitude. Many attempts have been made in English (e.g., Änggård 2010; Sandell&Öhman 2010; McDonnell 2013; Wendin 2014) and in Swedish literature (Drougge 2001; Änggård 2014; Ohlsson 2015; Gustavsson& Söderberg 2021) aimed at popularisation of this Swedish phenomenon, but none of them presented it as an educational philosophy as we tried to accomplish in this paper. As we are learning about Swedish preschool from scratch, together with our readers, we use Christine Bruce's "vehicle approach" to literature review, which is "seen as having an impact on the researcher, because it is perceived as a vehicle for learning that leads to an increase in his or her knowledge and understanding. With this concept, the review acts as a sounding board through which a person can check ideas or test personal perceptions" (Bruce 1994: 223). We chose this conception of experiencing literature review as "using such a vehicle, it is possible to conceive of a researcher exploring a situation and then asking others to explore not only the same situation but also the researcher's own explorations" (Given 2008: 77).

As we stated at the beginning, we aim to make Polish and Japanese readers familiar with the rain or shine philosophy, and inspire them to make it applicable in other preschools or any educational institutions. As far as we are concerned, we were not able to find any Polish or Japanese publications about the "Come Rain or Shine" approach itself, apart from those dedicated to forest preschools (e.g., Szlauzys 2019; Nitecka-Walerych 2020). We are, therefore, all the more delighted to delineate the idea that might help to move "educational pressure" from "pre-primary" to "social pedagogic" tradition not only in our home countries.

Education in early childhood has been discussed as one of the key issues in many countries in the recent decades. Such key issues also include the definition of education and childcare in early childhood, and the development of social systems (Weikart 2000; Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD] 2006; European Commission [EC] 2011). In this context, "preschool" in Sweden has a unique history over the past decades and now means not only one year of pre-school education before compulsory schooling, but also early childhood education and care for all ages before school.

When this study mentions the preschool curriculum of Sweden, it is a part of a whole educational system and policy in Sweden and includes education and childcare. Looking back to history, the Swedish early childhood education and care system was unified under the name "förskola" in 1975 to integrate the functions of both early childhood education and childcare sectors<sup>2</sup>. Subsequently, in 1998, the jurisdiction

---

<sup>2</sup> This dynamics was driven by the social demand for childcare for working parents and guardians, as well as the increasingly popular idea that quality education should be provided for all children. Korpi (2007) summarizes the history of early childhood education in Sweden in terms of policy and institutional changes.

was transferred from the Ministry of Social Welfare to the Ministry of Education, and childcare and education of the youngest children are now placed within the public education system as an issue of education policy<sup>3</sup>. As a part of the public system, municipalities provide preschool education such as curriculum development and budget allocation.

The preschool curriculum sets out the goals that the activities should aim for, but not the specific methods. The curriculum, according to a holistic view of the child and an equivalent value in the Swedish preschool education, assumes that “education cannot be structured in the same way everywhere, and that the resources of preschool should not be distributed equally” (Swedish National Agency for Education 2019: 6). This flexibility in the educational curriculum makes it possible for each preschool to have different educational methods and interests.

### Child-Centered approach: principles behind the Swedish preschool curriculum

As Swedish preschool pedagogical practices and traditions are placed in the category of “social pedagogical tradition” (Bennett 2005), emphasizing children’s play and social development with a highlight on initiative and self-agency, there are two essential turning points in the historical transformation of the Swedish preschool curriculum: The Commission on Nursery Provision in 1969, and the Education Act in 1998. Traditional Swedish preschool education regards nature as an important playground for children to become curious, self-reliant, brave, but also responsive adults. Ellen Key, a well-known Swedish teacher and writer of the 19th century, presented in her books a critical attitude towards childhood observed back then and emphasized that “all the time, the child should be allowed to meet the real experiences of life; the thorns should never be plucked from his roses. This is what is least understood in present-day training” (Key 1909: 133). As confirmed by recent scientific research, parents are spending more time with their children than in previous decades, and, as a result, parental over-engagement can sometimes be counterproductive (Obradović et al., 2021).

Friedrich Fröbel was another significant philosopher, who loved nature and had largely influenced Swedish preschool pedagogy until the current policy reforms. Barbara Korpi (2007) claims that some of these basic ideas in the Commission on Nursery Provision issued in 1968, remaining “the romantic spirit of Fröbel”, still support

---

<sup>3</sup> As preschool is an educational establishment, children have the right to attend 15 hours a week at the age of one, regardless of whether their parents are employed or not. In 2018 more than 90% of children aged two to five years old attended preschools nationwide.

modern preschool pedagogy. For example, daily activities, including outdoor play, are considered as a principle of education and an important element of the child's development (Korpi 2007: 23). The newly defined curriculum included in the Education Act of 1998 and onward brought the Reggio Emilia approach<sup>4</sup> to the Swedish preschool policy apart from the existing Swedish pedagogical traditions and culture (Korpi 2007). Swedish preschool education can nowadays be described as the "Reggio-inspiration" because of the mutual exchange for a few decades between the Swedish visitors and the locals of Reggio Emilia in Italy. The latest curriculum was created by the politicians, scholars, and pedagogues from Reggio Emilia, where they place the child in the centre of their creative thinking and process. The influence is visible in preschool's everyday work, for example, a type of documentation at the preschool through paintings, sketches, photography, and film (Lumholdt&Klasen-McGrath 2007), or a recent case study on garden-based learning in Swedish preschool (Kölz 2022). Also, a member of the committee dealing with early childhood education and social welfare policy for young children and their families in Sweden, Gunilla Dahlberg, is one of the founders of the "Reggio Emilia Institutet" in Stockholm, as well as of the scientific board of "Fondazione Reggio Children, Centro Loris Malaguzzi." In the philosophy of Reggio Emilia, according to the founder Loris Malaguzzi, the young child has "surprising and extraordinary strengths and capabilities" (Malaguzzi 1998: 78) and is active, competent, and eager to explore the world (Dahlberg 2006).

This view on the child in Reggio Emilia's approach goes beyond seeing the child as a "natural philosopher" (Matthews 1996), who thinks not necessarily in the oral language but by connecting with the world around them, including not only human beings but also objects, thoughts, ideas, concepts, and environments (Murriss 2016). In this perspective, philosophically and practically, it became more important for children to play in nature, and there is an increasing number of discussions on the position of posthumanism and new materialism, especially in the field of child study and preschool education in Sweden<sup>5</sup>.

By looking at the journey of the Swedish preschool education policy and pedagogy, the current curriculum has considered child-centered learning through play and

<sup>4</sup> The Reggio Emilia approach is now widely-known pedagogy and philosophy in the field of early childhood education. It was created in a city in northern Italy, called Reggio Emilia. Since it began after the end of the Second World War in 1945, a "simple, liberating thought came to our aid, namely that things about children and for children are only learned from children" (Malaguzzi, 1998, p. 51).

<sup>5</sup> This discussion on relational materialist ontoepistemology is derived from, Barad, K. (2007). *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.; The theoretical applications of posthumanism and new materialism on child studies are summarised in, Taguchi, H. L. & Eriksson, C. (2021). "Posthumanism/New Materialism: The Child, Childhood, and Education." In: N. J. Yelland, L. Peters, N. Fairchild, M. Tesar, & M. S. Pérez (Eds.), *The SAGE Handbook of Global Childhoods*, (pp. 165–177). SAGE.

relationships with peers, teachers, and nature without a strict school structure both in foundations of the Swedish pedagogical traditions of outdoor activities and the renewal pedagogy of Reggio-inspiration with the latest scientific theories. This background knowledge helps to provide a practical implementation and philosophical translation of education into the modern curriculum, especially one significant Swedish outdoor pedagogy and philosophy called “Come Rain or Shine”.

### The Rain or Shine philosophy

In Nordic countries, it is visible that children and nature belong together, since they learn, explore and spend time outside playing for around 3-5 hours per day, depending on the weather and season. From the historical point of view, we know that the ideas of Friedrich Fröbel and Jean Jacques Rousseau influenced the current shape of Swedish preschool. It was also Fröbel’s decision to call the early childhood institution – *kindergarten*, as he perceived the child as a plant and the teacher as a gardener who helps the plant grow and flourish. This is the reason why the curriculum for the Swedish preschool put emphasis on child’s relationship with nature: “education should give children the opportunity to acquire an ecological and caring approach to their surrounding environment and to nature and society”; and “education should take into account children’s curiosity, and challenge and stimulate their interest in and knowledge of nature, society, and technology” (Swedish National Agency for Education 2019: 8).

The Swedish preschools in which we are interested in particular, are called “I Ur och Skur”, which can be translated as “Come Rain or Shine” or “all-weather” ones. They were developed around 30 years ago within the Friluftsförbundet<sup>6</sup> (eng. Swedish Association for Promoting Outdoor Life) that was itself founded over 100 years ago. It all started as a skiing and ice skating movement to encourage people to learn and do more outdoor activities, but in 1908, due to certain changes, it became an educational organisation with similar goals as the Scout movement. In 1957, the teaching agenda together with a fictional troll-like character called “Skogsmulle” was introduced, and since then the organisation became well-known across the country with more and more members. The methods that are still in use “were developed during voluntary recreational work with small groups of children in the mid-1950s and onwards” (Sandell&Öhman 2010: 121). Due to fast urban development in Sweden, the need for nature was growing, as a result of which outdoor lifestyle transformed

---

<sup>6</sup> In Poland the “Polish Forest Kindergarten Institute” (Polski Instytut Przedszkoli Leśnych) has recently been established, and in Japan the Forest Product Research Institute was created, which play similar roles.



into a social movement that was popularized even more by Astrid Lindgren and her stories for children (Wendin 2014: 170).

Nowadays, over 170 “I Ur och Skur” preschools function in cooperation with Friluftsförbundet around Sweden (mostly as non-profit associations supported by parents, which enables them to maintain their economic autonomy), which means that the national curriculum is integrated with the approach of this organization. For this reason, children learn about flora and fauna, environment protection, survival, and the life of animals, with the imaginary troll named Mulle who lives in the forest and is made from the material of the forest (Änggård 2010: 7-8). The character has a few friends who help him to teach about the natural world and ecological consciousness: Laxe, guardian of the lakes, rivers, and ocean; Fjellfina, caretaker of the Scandinavian high alpine ecosystems; and Nova, an extraterrestrial from an uncontaminated planet who comes to Earth to warn people about dangers of pollution (McDonnell 2013: 9). It is also believed that “in order for the child to really learn and develop, learning must take place in what is considered the child’s natural environment” (Wendin 2014: 171). Outdoor education is also one of the courses that take place during teacher education at Universities in Sweden and Norway. Teachers are trained to experience and practice methods and approaches that use nature to support children’s physical, emotional, social, and intellectual development. Unfortunately, not all the preschool staff has the opportunity to be trained in the official “I Ur och Skur” outdoor pedagogy offered by the Friluftsförbundet.

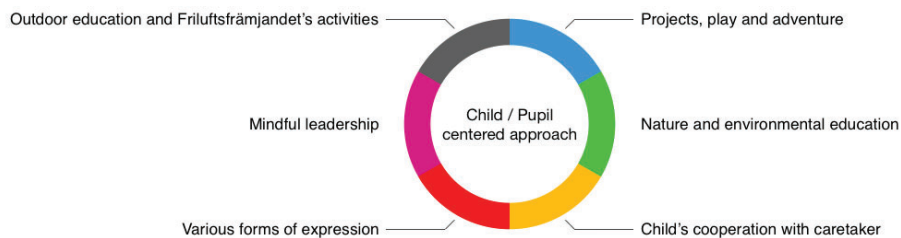
These days, preschool staff can choose if they want to obtain the “I Ur och Skur” license that is given based on the leaders’ training in outdoor pedagogy (with links to national curriculum and education law) that is based on experience-based learning and a co-discovering and cooperative approach<sup>7</sup>. The license agreement with the organization makes it possible for teachers to start a new preschool or school in their municipality or take over an existing preschool, school, or after-school centre. On the website of the organization we may also read that they are in contact with construction companies and property owners, and have extensive experience in the construction or conversion of existing facilities to adapt them to outdoor educational activities. To sign the license agreement, teachers must sign up for membership in the Outdoors Association and 25% of them must complete basic training (within 3 years, 75% of the educators must complete the basic training). However, many other preschools also follow their philosophy, according to which a forest or a school playground becomes children’s natural classroom.

---

<sup>7</sup> More: <https://www.friluftsförbundet.se/detta-gor-vi/forskolor-och-skolor/i-ur-och-skur/bli-en-forskola-skola-inom-i-ur-och-skur/>

Nature in the Swedish context can also be interpreted as a cultural symbol as “there is the opposition between home and nature, where home is related to order and security while nature is connected to wildness and danger. Nature provides resistance; in nature, humans are trained to cope and survive” (Änngård 2010: 6). With this in mind, we can understand why it is important for Swedish preschool teachers to familiarize children with nature as an important resource and a source of knowledge, but also to use it as a space to become philosophical about themselves and their relationship with the wild and chaotic world around them, which has to be mastered. And, what is more, “nature is not a place of the phenomenon that is separated from the human world. It is not just ‘another place’ that you occasionally visit or watch through the media, but it is an aspect of ‘everyday life to be experienced and integrated. In this way, rights and obligations related to natural environment seem to develop as an integrated part of the students’ approach to nature” (Sandell&Öhman 2010: 122). What is particularly interesting is the “Come Rain or Shine” methodology circle created as a guideline for leaders and teachers by Friluftsförbundet. The aim of it is to present the pedagogical approach according to which children’s need for knowledge, activities and company is fulfilled by being in nature.

Fig. 1. Experience-based learning for sustainable lifestyles in practice



Source: the author’s own work based on [https://www.friluftsförbundet.se/globalassets/ovrigt-webbinnehall/forskola-o-skola/i-ur-och-skur/metodcirkel\\_bla.jpg](https://www.friluftsförbundet.se/globalassets/ovrigt-webbinnehall/forskola-o-skola/i-ur-och-skur/metodcirkel_bla.jpg)

Those elements presented above seem to follow the “Come Rain or Shine” approach: child-centered philosophy which is typical of Swedish education projects organized thematically and supported by play and adventure; nature and environmental education to build the relationship between a child and the outer world; mindful leadership and child’s interaction with educated caretakers; various forms of expressions in preschool education and outdoor education in collaboration with the activities suggested by the Friluftsförbundet.

There are many things to remember and think about when implementing the “Come Rain or Shine” perspective in your own preschool, but the most important

part is to understand why it can be perceived as a philosophy. In Sweden, everyone is entitled to walk, cycle or camp on any land in peace and quiet (with the exception of private property), and it is called *freedom to roam* (Allemansrätten). But this right is also a responsibility, as it involves caring about nature and wildlife in accordance with the principle: “Don’t disturb – Don’t destroy”<sup>8</sup>. Children in Sweden learn to respect this law early in preschool education, and those who are part of “I Ur och Skur” families go one step further. The great amount of time they spend outdoors learning and discovering nature throughout the year with the fictional troll and mindful teachers and caretakers makes children develop ethical and philosophical relationships with nature and animals around them that can be called “feeling for nature”. According to Änggård (2010), “such a feeling is thought to emerge in the nature classroom when the children use their senses to explore elements of nature and learn about flora and fauna. (...) Further, there is a notion that the children will experience a feeling of wholeness and harmony through sensory experiences in natural environments, like feeling the wind and the warmth of the sun on their skin, and listening to the wind in the trees and the chirrup of birds. These experiences are connected with the homelike use of nature as a peaceful place to be” (Änggård 2010: 23). In this way, a child becomes a natural philosopher who respects and cares about nature (recycling, gardening, and environmental protection) and, due to the awareness of the suffering of animals, refrains from or limits eating meat. We can call it a “deeper ecology” that acknowledges connections between the self, the landscape, and other species (Naess 1973) in order to develop value-oriented environmental ethics for life. Another concept we can mention here is integral ecology that cares about the planet and its resources, and concentrates on human relations with the internal and the external world, considered a common good. Education carried out in a broad ecological perspective provides a space that serves to integrate the child with nature in its biological and spiritual aspects (Samborska 2022: 12-15). To achieve that we should prevent children from “nature-deficit disorder”, a term created by Richard Louv, a famous American writer and author of the landmark book “Last Child in the Woods”. He points out that this disorder “describes human costs of alienation from nature, among them: diminished use of the senses, attention difficulties, and higher rates of physical and emotional illnesses”, and “if children do not attach to the land, they will not reap the psychological and spiritual benefits they can glean from nature, nor will they feel a long-term commitment to the environment, to the place” (Louv 2008: 36-159). Fortunately, outdoor and environment-based activities experienced at every level of education can be antidotes to this affliction.

<sup>8</sup> <https://visitsweden.com/what-to-do/nature-outdoors/nature/sustainable-and-rural-tourism/about-the-right-of-public-access/>

## Lesson from Swedish “Come Rain or Shine” preschools

An Early Childhood Education facility does not determine everything in life, nor is it the only educational institution in the society. Nonetheless, it plays an important role for the society and individuals. The preschool’s social role and its pedagogy are embedded in the context of the society and culture — the social structure, the people, and the environment — so, it is impossible to simply cite educational practice in one country to provide educational suggestions to other countries. Even so, the “Come Rain or Shine” philosophy in Sweden has suggestions for quality education at preschools in Poland and Japan, such as exchanging best practices and sharing experiences connected with outdoor education with teachers and education staff from all over the world, which is one of the goals of Friluftsförbundet. It is by this paper that we, the authors, want to explore and share new ideas and present how they can be put into practice. In this part, the best education practices will be presented in the form of conclusions. We can define them as “a wide range of individual activities, policies, and programmatic approaches to achieve positive changes in student attitudes or academic behaviours” (Arendale 2010: 1). The presented Swedish approach to learning in preschool is not only limited to one philosophy, but it is based on outdoor learning and on the importance of play and freedom in early childhood education. However, in 2019, the Swedish national curriculum for preschool education, the term sustainability was included for the first time.

In the case of Poland and Japan, we would like to focus on three aspects that could be implemented into our preschool systems. First of all, the philosophical approach to nature could be strengthened in preschool education. What we mean is that teachers should teach children environmental protection by making them spend time in nature and develop personal relationships with it. At the same time, the teacher should encourage children to try to answer questions about responsibility for nature, the future of the Earth, and the role of humans in taking care of the natural world. Creating such connections will help children understand that they are part of the surrounding environment and develop an ethical perspective on nature that will last a lifetime. For example, in most of the preschools that we were able to get familiar with through websites, food served in canteens is organic or locally produced, and waste is recycled and children are involved in composting in order to produce rich earth for their own garden.

The second aspect concerns outdoor education and spending more time outside during the preschool day. As academics, we believe that nature can be seen as a learning space that is full of educational possibilities. The feeling of “wilderness” in outdoor education makes learning more interesting, engaging and unusual. The possibility of making toys out of natural things, discovering the “secrets” of animals and plants,

bushcraft, and learning through play in the open air for more than 20-30 minutes per day, are activities that can be very attractive for children. Their goal not only includes physical exercises, but also shaping healthy lifestyle at an early stage. Being closer to nature no matter what the weather is like gives children an opportunity to realize that they can enjoy outdoor play and adventure anytime. Sadly, the opportunity for children to play in an open space is sometimes unattractive for them as they didn't learn proper habits in their formative years. With this in mind, we should remember that "the outdoors, especially environments with plants, animals, and other natural elements like rocks and water, invite children to act on their natural curiosity and, with the endless range of things to explore and question, provide a uniquely engaging environment for unstructured play". What is more, "children's natural curiosity leads to scientific learning – not only specific details of nature but scientific method (...) as the outdoors invites questions" (Charles & Louv 2020: 403). That works especially well during "narrative-pedagogic walks" and hikes during which children listen to magical stories about Skogsmulle and his adventures (a troll born in the forest), climb hills, pick and ask questions about mushrooms, blueberries, and rubbish left in the woods. All of that gives children an opportunity to take risks, test their abilities, and discover the unknown. In addition, to implement this practice, it will be necessary to take into account the need for staff and environmental resource readiness. This will require institutional changes, for example setting the number of children per caregiver and licensing like in the case of the "I Ur och Skur" practitioners. Such changes will make it possible to secure the safety of children playing outside.

Third, the "Come Rain or Shine" model can be an illustrative framework for the preschools that would like to become even more open to nature. Its main goal is to arouse in students an early love and enjoyment of nature. The founder of the first forest school in Sweden in 1985 once said that "if you teach a child to love and respect nature, they will take care of it, because you take care of what you love" (Linde 2010: 4). The methodology circle presented above refers to pedagogic methods that promote "learning through teaching webs of interconnections; embodiment through songs, rhythms, and multisensory engagement in nature; child-led discovery and play; and the unique narrative method called the *Skogsmulle Concept*" (McDonnell 2013: 9).

It can be easily adapted to Polish culture, and the partnership with Swedish Fri-luftsfrämjandet could be replaced with closer collaboration with the Polish Scouting Organizations that are experienced in outdoor education with activities suited to early school age. In Japan, which has a close relationship with nature, as well as is influenced by Fröbel in the modern era like Sweden, each preschool has constructed its own way of outdoor activities on the playground (e.g., Nunomura 2005). It seems that such a "Come Rain or Shine" philosophy can develop in those countries even more.

In this paper, we have tried to outline the “Come Rain and Shine” philosophy which is a popular and recognized concept among parents, teachers, and scholars in Sweden. The ‘love of nature’ is an important element of education and culture in Nordic countries, with the goal of cultivating ecological awareness in children’s early years. If other countries follow the same path as Sweden, they will introduce solid education for sustainable development in the national curriculum, implement more outdoor activities with narrative character in preschool education, and most of all, launch more topics connected to nature pedagogy in the university teacher education programs.

Finally, bearing in mind Fröbel’s kindergarten metaphor, we should try to focus more on nature and the human relationship with it in everyday preschool life. The “Come Rain or Shine” approach may be used as an example to follow not only in private or alternative educational institutions. We are well aware of this so-called educational boom for forest kindergartens in many countries but still, the idea of this article is to strengthen the functioning of public preschools that should provide free and equal educational opportunities for everyone. After all, every child in the world, in order to grow and flourish, needs the same things a tree needs: earth, water, sun, and air.

## Bibliography

- Arendale D. R. (2010). *What is a Best Education Practice?* [Unpublished manuscript] Department of Curriculum and Instruction, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, MN. <https://doi.org/10.13140/RG.2.2.24683.49442>
- Änggård E. (2010). *Making Use of “Nature” in an Outdoor Preschool: Classroom, Home and Fairyland*, “Children, Youth and Environments”, 20(1), 4–25. <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.7721/chilyoutenvi.20.1.0004>> [Accessed August 2, 2022]
- Änggård E. (2014). *Ett år i ur och skur: utomhuspedagogik i förskolan*. Lund: Studentlitteratur.
- Barratt Hacking E., Cushing D. F., Barratt R. (2020). *Exploring the Significant Life Experiences of Childhoodnature*, [in:] A. Cutter-Mackenzie-Knowles, K. Malone, E. Barratt Hacking (eds.), *Research Handbook on Childhoodnature: Assemblages of Childhood and Nature Research*, Cham: Springer. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-67286-1\\_46](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-67286-1_46)
- Bennett J. (2005). *Curriculum Issues in National Policy-making*, “European Early Childhood Education Research Journal”, 13(2), 5–23. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13502930585209641>
- Bennett J., Tayler C. (2006). *Starting Strong II: Early Childhood Education and Care*, Paris: OECD Publications. <<http://hdl.handle.net/11343/28324>> [Accessed August 2, 2022]
- Bruce C. S. (1994). *Research Students’ Early Experiences of the Dissertation Literature Review*, “Studies in Higher Education”, 19(2), 217–229. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079412331382057>

- Bryman A. (2012). *Social Research Methods*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Charles C., Louv R. (2020). *Wild Hope: The Transformative Power of Children Engaging with Nature*, [in:] A. Cutter-Mackenzie-Knowles, K. Malone, E. Barratt Hacking (eds.), *Research Handbook on Childhoodnature: Assemblages of Childhood and Nature Research* Cham: Springer. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-67286-1\\_29](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-67286-1_29)
- Cutter-Mackenzie-Knowles A., Malone K., Barratt Hacking, E. (2020). *Childhoodnature: An Assemblage Adventure*, [in:] A. Cutter-Mackenzie-Knowles, K. Malone, E. Barratt Hacking (eds.), *Research Handbook on Childhoodnature: Assemblages of Childhood and Nature Research*, Cham: Springer. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-67286-1\\_2](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-67286-1_2)
- Dahlberg G., Moss P., Pence A. R. (2006). *Beyond Quality in Early Childhood Education and Care: Languages of evaluation*, 2nd ed., London: Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203966150>
- Drougge S. (2001). *I ur och skur i skolan: en beskrivning av och riktlinjer för I ur och skur i skolan med integrerat fritidshem*. Stockholm: Friluftsförbundet.
- European Union. (2011). Council conclusions of 15 June 2011 on early Childhood Education and Care: *Providing all our Children with the Best Start for the World of Tomorrow*, Brussels: Official Journal of the European Union. [https://child-hub.org/en/system/tdf/library/attachments/1195\\_childhoodcom\\_en\\_original.pdf?file=1&type=node&id=6518](https://child-hub.org/en/system/tdf/library/attachments/1195_childhoodcom_en_original.pdf?file=1&type=node&id=6518)
- Garvis S., Harju-Luukkainen H., Sheridan S., Williams P. (eds.). (2019). *Nordic Families, Children and Early Childhood Education*, Cham: Springer. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-16866-7>
- Given L. (ed.). (2008). *The SAGE Encyclopaedia of Qualitative Research Methods*, CA: SAGE Publications.
- Gustavsson L. Söderberg L. (2021). *I ur och skur: upplevelsebaserat lärande för en hållbar livsstil i praktiken*. Hägersten: Friluftsförbundet I ur och skur utveckling AB.
- International Handbook of Early Childhood Education*. (2018). In M. Fleer & B. van Oers (Eds.), Springer Netherlands. <https://link.springer.com/book/10.1007/978-94-024-0927-7>
- Key E. (1909). *The Century of the Child*, New York-London: G.P. Putnam's Sons. <https://archive.org/details/centurychild00frangoog/page/n178/mode/2up> [Accessed August 3, 2022]
- Kodama R., Ohta M., Asai S. (2020). *Transitions from Preschool to Primary School Education in Japan*, "Ochanomizu University Studies in Arts and Culture", 16(3), 183–95.
- Korpi B. M. (2007). *The Politics of Preschool: Intentions and Decisions Underlying the Emergence and Growth of the Swedish Preschool*, Stockholm: The Ministry of Education and Research. <<https://www.government.se/49d31b/contentassets/4b768a5cd6c24e0cb70b4393eadf4f6a/the-politics-of-pre-school---intentions-and-decisions-underlying-the-emergence-and-growth-of-the-swedish-pre-school.pdf>> [Accessed August 3, 2022]
- Kölz K. (2022). *Garden-based Learning in a Reggio Emilia inspired Swedish Preschool with a Permaculture Garden: A Case Study* [Master thesis, Gothenburg University], Gothenburg University Library Repository. <<http://hdl.handle.net/2077/70629>> [Accessed August 3, 2022]

- Lenz Taguchi H. (2011). *Investigating Learning, Participation and Becoming in Early Childhood Practices with a Relational Materialist Approach*, "Global Studies of Childhood", 1(1), 36–50. <https://doi.org/10.2304/gsch.2011.1.1.36>
- Linde S. (2010). *The Skogsmulle Concept*, "Friluftsförbundet". <<http://www.friluftsförbundet.se/guest/357>> [Accessed August 3, 2022]
- Louv R. (2008). *Last Child in the Woods: Saving our Children from Nature-deficit Disorder*, Algonquin Books of Chapel Hill.
- Lumholdt H., Klasen-McGrath M. (2007). *The Swedish Preschool Class: One of a Kind*, Publication based on a Swedish National Agency for School Improvement. <<https://www.skolverket.se/download/18.6bfaca41169863e6a656ec9/1553960281330/pdf1965.pdf>> [Accessed August 3, 2022]
- Malaguzzi L. (1998). *History, Ideas and Basic Philosophy: An Interview with Lerra Gandini*, [in:] C. Edwards, L. Gandini, G. Forman (eds.), *The Hundred Languages of Children: The Reggio Emilia Approach – Advanced Reflections. Second Edition*, Greenwich, Conn: Ablex Pub. Corp.
- <<http://www.worldcat.org/oclc/37109154>> [Accessed August 3, 2022]
- Matthews G. (1996). *The Philosophy of Childhood*, Harvard University Press.
- McDonnell L. (2013). *Playful by Nature: Transforming the Ecological Imagination through Play and Narrative Learning: The Case of the Swedish "Rain or Shine (I ur och skur)" pedagogy* [Master thesis, Norwegian University of Life Sciences]. Norwegian University of Life Sciences Repository.
- <<https://nmbu.brage.unit.no/nmbu-xmlui/handle/11250/187925>> [Accessed August 3, 2022]
- Morris K. (2016). *The Posthuman Child: Educational Transformation through Philosophy with Picture Books*, Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315718002>
- Nitecka-Walerych, A. (2019). *Forest Kindergartens – Education Response to Children's Needs*, Uniwersytet Humanistyczno-Przyrodniczy im. Jana Długosza w Częstochowie. <https://doi.org/10.16926/p.2019.28.18>
- Nordic Social Pedagogical Approach to Early Years*. (2017). [in:] C. Ringsmose, G. Kragh-Müller (eds.), *International Perspectives on Early Childhood Education and Development*, Cham: Springer. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-42557-3>
- Nunomura S. (2005). *Significance of 'Nature Play' in an Early Stage of Childhood: The Study Conducted by Nomura Yoshie*, "Research on Early Childhood Care and Education in Japan", 43(2), 148–55.
- Obradović J., Sulik M.J., Shaffer A. (2021). *Learning to Let Go: Parental Over-Engagement Predicts Poorer Self-Regulation in Kindergartners*, "Journal of Family Psychology", 35(8), 1160–1170. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/fam0000838>
- Ohlsson A. (2015). *Utombuspedagogik: utveckling och lärande i naturen*. (1. uppl.) Stockholm: Gothia Fortbildning.
- Samborska I. (2022). *Ekologia integralna jako przestrzeń uczenia się szacunku przez dziecko w wieku przedszkolnym*, „Edukacja Elementarna w Teorii i Praktyce”, 17(1(64)), 11–24. DOI: 10.35765/eetp.2022.1764.01.



- Sandell K., Öhman J. (2010). *Educational Potentials of Encounters with Nature: Reflections from a Swedish Outdoor Perspective*, "Environmental Education Research – ENVIRON EDUC RES", 16, 113-132. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13504620903504065>
- Swedish National Agency for Education (2019). *Curriculum for the Preschool, Lpfö 18*, <<https://www.skolverket.se/publikationsserier/styrdokument/2019/curriculum-for-the-preschool-lpfo-18>> [Accessed August 3, 2022]
- Szlaużys J. (2019). *Leśne przedszkole jako alternatywna forma wczesnej edukacji*, „Parezja. Czasopismo Forum Młodych Pedagogów przy Komitecie Nauk Pedagogicznych PAN”, nr 2 (12), 94–107.
- Weikart D. P. (2000). *Early Childhood Education: Need and Opportunity*. Paris: II EP. <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000122380.locale=en>
- Wendin Å. (2014). "All Kids are Monkeys at Heart": *Nature as the Child's Natural Habitat in a Southern Swedish Outdoor Preschool*, [in:] C. Burke, I. Grosvenor, B. Norelin (eds.), *Engaging with Educational Space: Visualising Spaces of Teaching and Learning*, Umeå: Institutionen för ide-och samhällsstudier.

---

**ADDRESS FOR CORESPONDENCE**

Jakub Adamczewski  
Uniwersytet Adama Mickiewicza w Poznaniu  
e-mail: [jakub.adamczewski@amu.edu.pl](mailto:jakub.adamczewski@amu.edu.pl)

Yuki Nagae  
Stockholm University  
e-mail: [yuki.nagae@p.u-tokyo.ac.jp](mailto:yuki.nagae@p.u-tokyo.ac.jp)