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ELEMENTARNA
W TEORII I PRAKTYCE

*Outdoor Education: Problems, Dilemmas
and New Directions*

*Edukacja outdoorowa: Problemy, dylematy
i nowe wyzwania*

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Reception of Froeblian Pedagogy Yesterday and Today in Poland and Abroad
Recepcja pedagogiki froebliowskiej wczoraj i dziś w Polsce i na świecie

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Uniwersytet im. Adama Mickiewicza w Poznaniu

Wprowadzenie

Outdoor education – między doświadczeniem, miejscem a nowymi wyzwaniami dla pedagogiki

Bezpośredni kontakt człowieka z naturą od wielu lat stanowi przedmiot zainteresowania przedstawicieli różnych dyscyplin naukowych, którzy wskazują na jego wpływ na wielostronny rozwój, dobrostan oraz jakość funkcjonowania jednostki. Relacja ta nabiera szczególnej wartości w przypadku dzieci i młodzieży, których poznawanie świata dokonuje się przede wszystkim poprzez aktywność, doświadczenie i bezpośrednie uczestniczenie w rzeczywistości. Edward O. Wilson (1984), odwołując się do koncepcji biofilii, zwraca uwagę na naturalną skłonność człowieka do poszukiwania kontaktu ze światem przyrody i czerpania z niego określonych wartości. Nie jest to jednak wyłącznie kwestia biologicznej potrzeby kontaktu z naturą. Sposób, w jaki człowiek doświadcza świata, pozostaje bowiem ściśle związany z możliwościami podejmowania aktywności, obserwowania, eksperymentowania, rozwiązywania problemów i nadawania znaczeń własnym doświadczeniom.

Kontakt z naturą ma zatem w edukacji znaczenie nie tylko dlatego, że dostarcza dzieciom określonych doświadczeń, lecz również dlatego, że zmienia warunki, w których doświadczenia te powstają. W związku z tym edukacja outdoorowa, rozumiana jako celowe i intencjonalne organizowanie procesu uczenia się poza tradycyjnie pojmowaną przestrzenią klasy szkolnej, w bezpośredniej relacji ze środowiskiem przyrodniczym, społecznym i kulturowym, nabiera szczególnego znaczenia. Jej istotą jest bowiem stworzenie takich warunków, w których uczeń może aktywnie poznawać rzeczywistość, doświadczać jej wielozmysłowo, podejmować samodzielne działania, konfrontować własne sądy z rzeczywistością oraz konstruować i rekonstruować znaczenia w toku bezpośredniego kontaktu ze światem (Beames i in., 2012; Priest, 1986).

W klasycznych ujęciach *outdoor education* podkreśla się przy tym wielowymiarowy charakter relacji, jakie powstają pomiędzy człowiekiem, innymi ludźmi i środowiskiem. Postrzega się ją jako obszar łączący doświadczenia o charakterze przygodowym, interpersonalnym i intrapersonalnym z poznawaniem relacji zachodzących w środowisku naturalnym (zob. m.in. Priest, 1986). Takie ujęcie pozwala dostrzec, że edukacja poza klasą nie może być redukowana ani do aktywności ruchowej, ani do edukacji przyrodniczej, ponieważ jej istotnym wymiarem pozostaje rozwój relacji – z samym sobą, z innymi oraz ze światem, co znajduje swe uzasadnienie także w klasycznych koncepcjach pedagogicznych. W koncepcjach tych podkreśla się rolę doświadczenia, które stanowi kluczowy mechanizm uczenia się. Wartość edukacyjna doświadczenia, na co zwraca uwagę Dewey (1938), wyraża się w sile, która prowadzi do dalszego działania, refleksji i reorganizacji dotychczasowego sposobu rozumienia rzeczywistości. Kolb (1984) zaś ujmując uczenie się jako proces, w którym bezpośrednio doświadczenie, refleksyjna obserwacja, conceptualizacja i aktywne eksperymentowanie pozostają ze sobą w ścisłym związku. Można zatem przyjąć założenie, że środowisko zewnętrzne przestaje być jedynie miejscem, w którym odbywają się zajęcia, a staje się źródłem doświadczeń, kwestii i sytuacji wymagających od ucznia aktywności poznawczej.

Outdoor education otwiera zatem możliwość odejścia od transmisyjnego modelu uczenia się na rzecz uczenia się poprzez działanie i bezpośrednie doświadczanie rzeczywistości. Dziecko poznaje świat wtedy, gdy ma możliwość nawiązywania aktywnej z nim relacji, obserwowania jego właściwości, dokonywania zmian i sprawdzania konsekwencji własnego działania. W tym sensie edukacja realizowana poza murami szkoły lub przedszkola może tworzyć szczególnie korzystne warunki dla konstruowania wiedzy opartej nie tylko na relacji nauczyciel–uczeń, lecz również na relacji ucznia z obiektami, zjawiskami i artefaktami obecnymi w środowisku. Tak rozumiane uczenie się ma charakter aktywny, badawczy i mediacyjny, a jego ważnym elementem staje się możliwość samodzielnego dochodzenia do znaczeń (Bruner, 2007; Hakkarainen i Paavola, 2009).

Przestrzeń, w której przebiega proces kształcenia, sama w sobie może mieć znaczenie pedagogiczne, gdyż nigdy nie pozostaje neutralnym tłem dla aktywności ucznia. Określone miejsca, ich właściwości, dostępność, różnorodność i stopień otwartości tworzą odmienne możliwości działania, obserwowania, komunikowania się i rozwiązywania problemów. Jak wskazują Waite (2007, 2011) oraz Wattchow i Brown (2011), doświadczenie miejsca może stanowić istotny element procesu uczenia się, ponieważ umożliwia łączenie wiedzy z osobistym doświadczeniem, pamięcią, emocjami oraz konkretnym kontekstem społecznym i kulturowym. *Outdoor education* może zatem prowadzić nie tylko do poznawania przyrody, lecz także do poznawania własnego miejsca w świecie.

W kontekście dotychczasowych rozważań jawi się pytanie o to, czym właściwie jest „natura” w edukacji outdoorowej. Czy jest ona jedynie przestrzenią, w której odbywa się proces kształcenia? Czy jest źródłem wiedzy i doświadczenia? Czy może być traktowana także jako partner edukacyjnej aktywności człowieka? Próby udzielania odpowiedzi na te pytania wymagają nieantropocentrycznego sposobu myślenia o edukacji. Ważnym wsparciem w tym mogą być poglądy Latoura (1993), który podważa tradycyjny podział na naturę i społeczeństwo. Wskazuje, że świat społeczny i materialny tworzą sieci wzajemnych relacji między ludźmi, rzeczami, technologiami i innymi elementami środowiska. W takim ujęciu rzeczy i środowisko nie są jedynie biernym tłem ludzkiego działania, lecz współkształtują to, co ludzie robią i jak rozumieją rzeczywistość. Argumentów dla nieantropocentrycznego myślenia o edukacji może dostarczyć także filozofia Albrechta (2019), który posługując się pojęciem symbiocenu, wskazuje na potrzebę ponownego zintegrowania człowieka z innymi formami życia oraz kształtowania sposobu życia opartego na współzależności i symbiozie. Perspektywa ta otwiera przed pedagogiką pytanie o to, czy edukacja może nie tylko przygotowywać człowieka do funkcjonowania w świecie, ale również kształtować sposoby jego odpowiedzialnego współistnienia z tym światem.

Wydaje się, że właśnie w tym miejscu *outdoor education* ujawnia swój szerszy, wykraczający poza metodykę potencjał. Nie jest bowiem wyłącznie określoną formą organizacji zajęć, lecz może być rozpatrywana jako sposób myślenia o relacji człowieka, edukacji i środowiska. Jej znaczenie nie wynika wyłącznie z atrakcyjności zajęć prowadzonych na świeżym powietrzu, lecz z możliwości odmiennego organizowania doświadczenia edukacyjnego. Kontakt z rzeczywistością umożliwia uczniom obserwowanie jej złożoności, dostrzeganie wzajemnych zależności, formułowanie pytań, podejmowanie decyzji oraz doświadczanie konsekwencji własnych działań (Beames i in., 2012; Wattchow i Brown, 2011).

W literaturze przedmiotu wskazuje się na liczne zalety edukacji realizowanej w środowisku naturalnym. Obejmują one zarówno rozwój kompetencji poznawczych, jak i społecznych oraz emocjonalnych. Wśród nich wymienia się między innymi wzrost poczucia własnej wartości, autonomii i sprawstwa, rozwój samokontroli, wytrwałości, umiejętności współpracy i rozwiązywania problemów, a także korzystny wpływ na dobrostan psychiczny i fizyczny dzieci i młodzieży (Dillon i Dickie, 2012; Malone i Waite, 2016; Waite, 2011). Znaczenie środowiska naturalnego dla funkcjonowania poznawczego i emocjonalnego dzieci potwierdzają również badania wskazujące na związki pomiędzy kontaktem z naturą a koncentracją uwagi, samoregulacją czy redukcją stresu (Taylor i in., 2002; Wells, 2000; Wells i Evans, 2003).

Należy tu jednak mocno zaznaczyć, że samo przebywanie poza budynkiem szkoły nie prowadzi automatycznie do wartościowego uczenia się. *Outdoor education* może bowiem zostać sprowadzona do spaceru, wycieczki czy atrakcyjnej formy spędzania

czasu, nie prowadząc do istotnej zmiany w wiedzy ucznia. O jakości edukacji poza klasą decydują nie tylko miejsce i kontakt z naturą, ale przede wszystkim sposób zaprojektowania doświadczenia, zakres autonomii ucznia, rodzaj podejmowanych działań, możliwość refleksji oraz rola nauczyciela jako osoby organizującej środowisko uczenia się (Beames i in., 2012; Waite, 2011).

Właśnie dlatego rozwój *outdoor education* ujawnia szereg problemów i dylematów. Jednym z nich jest napięcie pomiędzy autonomią ucznia a potrzebą kontroli i zapewnienia bezpieczeństwa. Kolejnym – relacja pomiędzy swobodą działania a celowością procesu kształcenia. Istotne pozostaje także pytanie o granice ingerencji nauczyciela: kiedy powinien on organizować, instruować i kontrolować aktywność uczniów, a kiedy wycofać się, pozwalając im samodzielnie obserwować, eksperymentować, podejmować decyzje i uczyć się również poprzez popełnianie błędów. W edukacji outdoorowej szczególnie wyraźnie ujawnia się także problem ryzyka, które z jednej strony może stanowić źródło wartościowych doświadczeń, z drugiej zaś wymaga odpowiedzialnego zarządzania i uwzględnienia rzeczywistych możliwości rozwojowych dzieci (Brown, 2008; Little i Wyver, 2008).

Jednym z ważniejszych dylematów edukacji outdoorowej jest jej dostępność. Jeżeli ma ona stanowić istotny element współczesnego procesu kształcenia, powinna być dostępna dla wszystkich uczniów, niezależnie od ich możliwości, potrzeb rozwojowych czy sposobu funkcjonowania. Jak zatem projektować środowiska edukacyjne, aby sprzyjały indywidualizacji procesu kształcenia? W tym kontekście istotne znaczenie ma postulat projektowania doświadczeń outdoorowych w sposób uwzględniający zróżnicowanie uczniów i ich możliwości uczestniczenia w aktywności edukacyjnej (Beames i in., 2012).

Ważnym problemem pedagogicznym staje się także pytanie o granice pomiędzy szkołą, przedszkolem a światem, który je otacza. Tradycyjna organizacja kształcenia opiera się w dużej mierze na przekonaniu, że właściwym miejscem uczenia się jest sala lekcyjna, a podstawowym źródłem wiedzy pozostają nauczyciel, podręcznik i przygotowane materiały dydaktyczne. Tymczasem rzeczywistość znajdująca się poza szkołą czy przedszkolem może być traktowana jako swoiste laboratorium poznawcze – przestrzeń, w której uczeń nie tylko otrzymuje informacje, ale ma możliwość ich poszukiwania, sprawdzania i interpretowania. W tym sensie *outdoor education* podważa oczywistość szkoły i przedszkola jako jedynych uprzywilejowanych miejsc edukacji i skłania do ponownego określenia relacji pomiędzy szkołą/przedszkolem, środowiskiem życia ucznia i procesem uczenia się (Beames i in., 2012; Waite, 2011).

Współczesna refleksja nad *outdoor education* coraz częściej wykracza zatem poza pytanie o to, czy warto uczyć poza klasą i kieruje się ku pytaniu znacznie bardziej fundamentalnemu: jakiego rodzaju edukacji potrzebuje uczeń funkcjonujący w świecie wzajemnych zależności społecznych, kulturowych i ekologicznych? Edukacja outdoorowa

może być ważną przestrzenią poszukiwania odpowiedzi na ograniczenia tradycyjnego modelu edukacji, opartego na separowaniu wiedzy od doświadczenia, ucznia od rzeczywistości, a szkoły od środowiska życia (Louv, 2014; Wattchow i Brown, 2011).

Problem ten nabiera szczególnego znaczenia w kontekście obserwowanego ograniczania bezpośredniego kontaktu dzieci z naturą. Louv (2014) zwraca uwagę na kulturowe i społeczne uwarunkowania stopniowego oddalania dzieci od naturalnych przestrzeni aktywności. Współczesne dzieciństwo w coraz większym stopniu organizowane jest w środowiskach kontrolowanych, sformalizowanych i podporządkowanych określonym wymogom bezpieczeństwa. Z perspektywy edukacyjnej oznacza to nie tylko ograniczenie możliwości spontanicznej aktywności, lecz również zmniejszenie liczby okazji do bezpośredniego poznawania świata przyrody i budowania z nim osobistej relacji.

Przy czym należy być ostrożnym, by *outdoor education* uznać za uniwersalne rozwiązanie wszystkich problemów współczesnej edukacji. Wymaga ona krytycznego namysłu nad jej założeniami, możliwościami i ograniczeniami. Konieczne staje się pytanie o to, jakie praktyki rzeczywiście prowadzą do wartościowego uczenia się, jakie warunki muszą zostać spełnione, aby doświadczenie nabrało znaczenia edukacyjnego, oraz jakie kompetencje powinien posiadać nauczyciel, aby tworzyć środowisko sprzyjające aktywności, autonomii i odpowiedzialności uczniów. Równie istotne jest pytanie o miejsce *outdoor education* w formalnym systemie kształcenia: czy pozostanie ona zbiorem lokalnych i często okazjonalnych inicjatyw, czy też może stać się pełnoprawnym elementem organizacji procesu edukacyjnego (Beames i in., 2012; Waite, 2011).

Problemy te mają szczególne znaczenie w odniesieniu do edukacji dzieci, dla których bezpośrednio doświadczenie, aktywność ruchowa, kontakt z rzeczywistymi obiektami i zjawiskami oraz możliwość samodzielnego działania stanowią szczególnie ważne warunki rozwoju. Jednocześnie właśnie na etapie edukacji przedszkolnej i wczesnoszkolnej widoczne jest napięcie pomiędzy potrzebą poznawania świata poprzez działanie a praktyką organizowania procesu kształcenia w warunkach silnie kontrolowanych i ograniczonych do przestrzeni instytucjonalnej. Badania dotyczące edukacji dziecięcej pokazują, że potencjał środowiska zewnętrznego nadal pozostaje wykorzystywany w niewielkim zakresie (Ernst, 2014; Maynard i Waters, 2007; Tuuling i in., 2019).

Współczesna pedagogika stoi zatem przed koniecznością ponownego przemyślenia kategorii miejsca, doświadczenia, środowiska i relacji człowieka z naturą. *Outdoor education* może w tym procesie odgrywać rolę nie tyle kolejnej metody czy strategii dydaktycznej, ile swoistego pola problemowego, na którym spotykają się pytania dotyczące uczenia się, rozwoju, autonomii, dobrostanu, relacji społecznych, dostępności oraz odpowiedzialności ekologicznej. Jej znaczenie należy więc rozpatrywać zarówno w wymiarze praktycznym, jak i teoretycznym – jako wyzwanie dla dotychczasowych

sposobów definiowania przestrzeni edukacyjnej, roli nauczyciela i ucznia oraz samego procesu konstruowania wiedzy.

Taką właśnie perspektywę przyjmuje niniejszy numer czasopisma: *Outdoor Education – Problems, Dilemmas and New Directions*. Nie chodzi w nim jedynie o wskazanie zalet edukacji realizowanej poza murami szkoły, lecz o podjęcie bardziej złożonej refleksji nad jej miejscem we współczesnej pedagogice. *Outdoor education* jawi się bowiem jako obszar, w którym szczególnie wyraźnie ujawniają się napięcia pomiędzy naturą i kulturą, autonomią i kontrolą, doświadczeniem i transmisją wiedzy, bezpieczeństwem i ryzykiem, indywidualizacją i standaryzacją oraz praktyką lokalną i rozwiązaniami systemowymi. Ich rozpoznanie może stać się punktem wyjścia do bardziej pogłębionego namysłu nad kierunkami rozwoju współczesnej edukacji.

W tym sensie pytanie o edukację outdoorową staje się pytaniem o samą szkołę i przedszkole – o ich granice, funkcje i możliwości odpowiadania na zmieniającą się rzeczywistość. Staje się również pytaniem o to, czy edukacja może przygotowywać człowieka nie tylko do skutecznego funkcjonowania w świecie, lecz także do rozumienia jego współzależności i odpowiedzialnego współtworzenia. Właśnie w tej perspektywie *outdoor education* może być rozpatrywana jako ważny obszar współczesnej refleksji pedagogicznej – nie dlatego, że proponuje proste odejście od klasy, lecz dlatego, że zmusza do ponownego namysłu nad tym, gdzie, jak i z kim człowiek powinien się uczyć.

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Introduction

Outdoor Education – Between Experience, Place, and New Challenges for Pedagogy

For many years, direct human contact with nature has been a subject of interest for scholars across various disciplines, who highlight its impact on the multifaceted development, well-being, and quality of functioning of the individual. This relationship is of particular importance for children and young people, whose understanding of the world is shaped primarily through activity, experience, and direct engagement with reality. Drawing on the concept of biophilia, Edward O. Wilson (1984) points to the innate human tendency to seek contact with the natural world and derive specific values from it. However, this is not merely a matter of a biological need for contact with nature; the way a person experiences the world is inextricably linked to opportunities for engaging in activities, observing, experimenting, solving problems, and assigning meaning to one's own experiences.

Contact with nature is therefore significant in education not only because it provides children with specific experiences, but also because it alters the conditions under which those experiences arise. Consequently, outdoor education – understood as the purposeful and intentional organization of the learning process outside the traditional classroom setting, in direct engagement with the natural, social, and cultural environment – takes on particular importance. Its essence lies in creating conditions that allow the learner to actively explore reality, engage with it through multiple senses, take independent action, test their own judgments against reality, and construct and

reconstruct meanings through direct contact with the world (Beames et al., 2012; Priest, 1986).

Classic approaches to *outdoor education* emphasize the multidimensional nature of the relationships formed between the individual, other people, and the environment. It is viewed as a field that integrates adventurous, interpersonal, and intrapersonal experiences with an understanding of the relationships within the natural environment (see, e.g., Priest, 1986). This perspective reveals that education outside the classroom cannot be reduced to mere physical activity or nature education; rather, a crucial dimension is the development of relationships – with oneself, with others, and with the world – a concept also grounded in classical pedagogical theories. These theories highlight the role of experience as a key mechanism of learning. The educational value of experience, as noted by Dewey (1938), lies in its power to drive further action, reflection, and the reorganization of one's existing understanding of reality. Kolb (1984), meanwhile, defines learning as a process in which concrete experience, reflective observation, conceptualization, and active experimentation are closely interconnected. Thus, one can posit that the outdoor environment ceases to be merely a setting for activities and instead becomes a source of experiences, issues, and situations that demand cognitive engagement from the learner.

Outdoor education thus offers an opportunity to move away from a transmission-based model of learning in favor of learning through action and direct engagement with reality. A child comes to understand the world when being able to actively relate to it – observing its properties, making changes, and testing the consequences of their own actions. In this sense, education conducted outside the confines of a school or preschool can create particularly favorable conditions for constructing knowledge based not only on the teacher-student relationship but also on the student's interaction with objects, phenomena, and artifacts in the environment. Learning understood in this way is active, exploratory, and mediational, with the opportunity to independently arrive at meanings serving as a key element (Bruner, 2007; Hakkarainen & Paavola, 2009).

The space in which the educational process unfolds can itself hold pedagogical significance, as it never serves merely as a neutral backdrop for student activity. Specific locations – along with their characteristics, accessibility, diversity, and degree of openness – create distinct opportunities for action, observation, communication, and problem-solving. As noted by Waite (2007, 2011) and Wattchow and Brown (2011), the experience of place can be a vital element of the learning process, enabling the integration of knowledge with personal experience, memory, emotions, and specific social and cultural contexts. Thus, *outdoor education* can lead not only to an understanding of the natural world but also to a deeper understanding of one's own place in the world.

In light of the preceding discussion, the question arises as to what “nature” actually is within the context of outdoor education. Is it merely a space where the educational process unfolds? Is it a source of knowledge and experience? Or can it also be regarded as a partner in human educational activity? Attempting to answer these questions requires a non-anthropocentric approach to education. Latour’s (1993) ideas, which challenge the traditional dichotomy between nature and society, offer an important point of reference in this regard. He points out that the social and material worlds form networks of mutual relationships involving people, objects, technologies, and other environmental elements. From this perspective, objects and the environment are not merely a passive backdrop for human action; rather, they actively shape what people do and how they understand reality. Arguments for a non-anthropocentric approach to education can also be found in the philosophy of Albrecht (2019); drawing on the concept of the “Symbiocene,” he highlights the need to reintegrate humanity with other forms of life and to cultivate a way of living based on interdependence and symbiosis. This perspective poses a fundamental question for pedagogy: can education not only prepare individuals to function in the world but also shape ways of coexisting responsibly with it?

It is precisely here that *outdoor education* reveals a broader potential that extends beyond mere methodology. It is not merely a specific way of organizing activities but can be viewed as a mindset regarding the relationship between the individual, education, and the environment. Its significance stems not only from the appeal of conducting activities outdoors but also from the opportunity to structure the educational experience differently. Direct engagement with reality enables students to observe its complexity, recognize interdependencies, formulate questions, make decisions, and experience the consequences of their own actions (Beames et al., 2012; Wattchow & Brown, 2011).

The literature highlights numerous benefits of education conducted in natural environments. These encompass the development of cognitive, social, and emotional competencies. Cited benefits include, among others, enhanced self-esteem, autonomy, and a sense of agency; the development of self-control, perseverance, cooperation and problem-solving skills; as well as positive effects on the mental and physical well-being of children and young people (Dillon & Dickie, 2012; Malone & Waite, 2016; Waite, 2011). The importance of the natural environment for children’s cognitive and emotional functioning is further supported by research demonstrating links between contact with nature and attention, self-regulation, and stress reduction (Taylor et al., 2002; Wells, 2000; Wells & Evans, 2003).

However, it must be strongly emphasized that merely being outside the school building does not automatically lead to meaningful learning. *Outdoor education* can easily be reduced to a simple walk, an excursion, or an engaging way to pass the time,

without bringing about any significant change in the student's knowledge. The quality of education outside the classroom is determined not only by the location and contact with nature but, above all, by the way the experience is designed, the degree of student autonomy, the nature of the activities undertaken, the opportunity for reflection, and the teacher's role in organizing the learning environment (Beames et al., 2012; Waite, 2011).

This is precisely why the development of *outdoor education* brings to light a number of issues and dilemmas. One of these is the tension between student autonomy and the need for control and safety. Another concerns the relationship between freedom of action and the purposeful nature of the educational process. Also significant is the question of the limits of teacher intervention: when should the teacher organize, instruct, and supervise student activities, and when should they step back, allowing students to observe, experiment, make decisions, and learn independently – including through making mistakes? Outdoor education also highlights the issue of risk particularly clearly; while risk can be a source of valuable experiences, it simultaneously demands responsible management and consideration of children's actual developmental capabilities (Brown, 2008; Little & Wyver, 2008).

One of the key dilemmas in outdoor education is accessibility. If it is to constitute a significant element of the modern educational process, it should be accessible to all students, regardless of their abilities, developmental needs, or ways of functioning. How, then, can educational environments be designed to foster the individualization of the learning process? In this context, it is crucial to design outdoor experiences in a way that takes into account student diversity and their capacity to participate in educational activities (Beames et al., 2012).

The question of the boundaries between schools or preschools and the surrounding world is also emerging as a significant pedagogical issue. Traditional educational organization relies heavily on the conviction that the classroom is the proper place for learning and that the teacher, the textbook, and prepared instructional materials remain the primary sources of knowledge. Yet, the reality outside the school or preschool can be viewed as a unique cognitive laboratory – a space where the learner not only receives information but also has the opportunity to seek, verify, and interpret it. In this sense, outdoor education challenges the assumption that schools and preschools are the sole privileged sites of education, prompting a redefinition of the relationships between the school or preschool, the learner's living environment, and the learning process (Beames et al., 2012; Waite, 2011).

Contemporary reflection on *outdoor education* increasingly moves beyond the question of whether it is worthwhile to teach outside the classroom, shifting instead toward a far more fundamental question: what kind of education is needed by a student navigating a world of social, cultural, and ecological interdependencies? *Outdoor*

education can serve as a vital arena for seeking solutions to the limitations of the traditional educational model – a model characterized by the separation of knowledge from experience, the student from reality, and the school from the living environment (Louv, 2014; Wattchow & Brown, 2011).

This issue takes on particular significance in the context of the observed reduction in children's direct contact with nature. Louv (2014) highlights the cultural and social factors driving the gradual distancing of children from natural spaces for activity. Modern childhood is increasingly organized within environments that are controlled, formalized, and subject to specific safety requirements. From an educational perspective, this implies not only a restriction on opportunities for spontaneous activity but also a reduction in chances to directly experience the natural world and build a personal relationship with it.

At the same time, caution is needed against treating *outdoor education* as a universal solution to all the problems of modern education. It requires critical reflection on its assumptions, possibilities and limitations. It becomes necessary to ask what practices actually lead to valuable learning, what conditions must be met for the experience to acquire educational significance, and what competencies a teacher should have in order to create an environment conducive to students' activity, autonomy and responsibility. Equally important is the question about the place of *outdoor education* in the formal education system: whether it will remain a set of local and often occasional initiatives, or whether it can become a full-fledged element of the organization of the educational process (Beames et al., 2012; Waite, 2011).

These issues are of particular importance for the education of children, for whom direct experience, physical activity, contact with real-world objects and phenomena, and the opportunity for independent action are crucial conditions for development. At the same time, the preschool and early school settings reveal a tension between the need to explore the world through active engagement and the practice of organizing education within highly controlled settings confined to institutional spaces. Research on early childhood education indicates that the potential of the outdoor environment remains underutilized (Ernst, 2014; Maynard & Waters, 2007; Tuuling et al., 2019).

Contemporary pedagogy is thus faced with the need to rethink the categories of place, experience, environment, and the human relationship with nature. In this process, *outdoor education* can serve not merely as another teaching method or strategy, but as a distinct field of inquiry where questions regarding learning, development, autonomy, well-being, social relations, accessibility, and ecological responsibility converge. Its significance should therefore be considered in both practical and theoretical terms – as a challenge to established ways of defining educational space, the roles of teacher and student, and the very process of knowledge construction..

This is precisely the perspective adopted by this issue of the journal: *Outdoor Education – Problems, Dilemmas and New Directions*. Its aim is not merely to highlight the benefits of education conducted outside school walls, but to engage in a more complex reflection on its place within contemporary pedagogy. Outdoor education emerges as a field where tensions between nature and culture, autonomy and control, experience and knowledge transmission, safety and risk, individualization and standardization, and local practice and systemic solutions become particularly evident. Recognizing these tensions can serve as a starting point for a deeper examination of the future directions of contemporary education.

In this sense, the question of *outdoor education* becomes a question about the school and the preschool themselves – about their boundaries, functions, and capacity to respond to a changing reality. It also becomes a question of whether education can prepare individuals not only to function effectively in the world but also to understand its interdependencies and participate responsibly in shaping it. It is from this perspective that *outdoor education* can be viewed as a significant area of contemporary pedagogical reflection – not because it proposes a simple departure from the classroom, but because it compels us to rethink where, how, and with whom learning should take place.

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THEMATIC ARTICLES

ARTYKUŁY TEMATYCZNE



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The Value of Nature and Education in Nature in Light of Student's Integral Development

Wartość przyrody i edukacja w środowisku naturalnym
w kontekście integralnego rozwoju ucznia

KEYWORDS ABSTRACT

the value of nature,
education in the
natural environment,
nature based
education, integral
development,
didactic innovations

The article aims to demonstrate the opportunities for a learner's integral development through the valuation of nature and natural education. The research question addressed here is: in what ways are the opportunities for stimulating a learner's integral development expressed through education in the natural environment and, thereby, through the actualization of the value of nature? The methodology was grounded in analytical-synthetic method, which relies on critical analysis and synthesis of relevant scholarly literature. The starting point of the conducted analyses is a review of selected definitions of the concept of nature. Within this analysis, Stanisław Zięba's definition of nature was adopted and the notion of the value of nature was conceptualised.

The specific objective of the subsequent stage of the study was to demonstrate the significance of nature for the development of particular dimensions of student's life and functioning. The theoretical foundation of the analyses is provided by Stefan Kunowski's concept of integral development, referred to as the stratified conception of development and education. The significance of the value of nature within individual developmental layers was examined and presented. The last part of the article proposes guidelines for teachers, encouraging them to undertake educational activities within the natural environment while taking into account the stages of the educational process oriented toward the realization of the value of nature.

The final element of the conducted research is the presentation of the educational opportunities offered by education within the natural environment, with particular emphasis on the pedagogical integration of rural and urban environments, as well as on the implementation of didactic innovations.

SŁOWA KLUCZE ABSTRAKT

wartość natury,
edukacja
w środowisku
naturalnym,
edukacja
przyrodnicza,
rozwój integralny,
innowacje
dydaktyczne

Celem artykułu jest ukazanie możliwości stymulowania integralnego rozwoju ucznia poprzez wartościowanie przyrody i edukację przyrodniczą. Problemem badawczym, jaki tu postawiono, jest pytanie: w jaki sposób możliwości stymulowania integralnego rozwoju ucznia wyrażają się poprzez edukację w środowisku przyrodniczym, a tym samym poprzez aktualizację wartości przyrody? Metodologię osadzono w metodzie analityczno-syntetycznej, która opiera się na krytycznej analizie i syntezie literatury przedmiotu. Punktem wyjścia przeprowadzonych analiz jest przegląd wybranych definicji pojęcia przyrody. W ramach tej analizy przyjęto definicję przyrody Stanisława Zięby i skonceptualizowano pojęcie wartości przyrody. Szczegółowym celem kolejnego etapu analiz było wykazanie znaczenia przyrody dla rozwoju poszczególnych wymiarów życia i funkcjonowania ucznia. Podstawę teoretyczną analiz stanowi koncepcja rozwoju integralnego Stefana Kunowskiego, zwana warstwową koncepcją rozwoju i edukacji. Zbadano i przedstawiono znaczenie wartości przyrody w poszczególnych warstwach rozwojowych. W ostatniej części artykułu zaproponowano wskazówki dla nauczycieli, zachęcające ich do podejmowania działań edukacyjnych w środowisku przyrodniczym, z uwzględnieniem etapów procesu edukacyjnego ukierunkowanego na uświadomienie wartości przyrody. Kończącym elementem przeprowadzonych analiz jest prezentacja możliwości edukacyjnych, jakie oferuje edukacja w środowisku przyrodniczym, ze szczególnym uwzględnieniem integracji pedagogicznej środowiska wiejskiego i miejskiego oraz wdrażania innowacji dydaktycznych.

The Definitional Approach to the Concept of Nature

The scholarly literature provides multiple definitions of “nature.” In its most general sense, nature is the totality of things and phenomena in the universe that arise spontaneously – that is, without human intervention. Nature, or *natura*, encompasses the plant and animal worlds, as well as the areas in which these environments exist (Dunaj, 2001, p. 204).

In a narrower sense, nature is also frequently described as the “natural environment”. Ewa Nowicka defines the natural environment as

[...] a complex of interrelated phenomena. This complex includes territorial features, that is, landforms (mountains, plains, plateaus) and mineral resources, which can generally be described as geomorphological features; climate, which is influenced by latitude determining solar radiation, humidity, temperature in daily and annual distributions, as well as precipitation, also in daily and annual distributions; and the stock of living organisms, that is, flora and fauna, along with their seasonal variability (Nowicka, 2005, p. 289).

Nowicka also emphasizes the interdependent relationships among individual elements: “Flora depends on soil type and climate; fauna is likewise dependent on these factors, as well as on the flora present in a given area” (Nowicka, 2005, p. 289).

In the *Encyclopedia of Pedagogical Axiology*, Stanisław Zięba defines nature as

[...] the totality of interactive components constructing the ecosphere; specific systems (in terms of organization) for which relations, interactions and interdependencies among elements forming systemic configurations are essential; a set of relationships among phenomena on Earth; processes, chemical forces, and organic and inorganic structures governed by the laws of nature; in physics, a synonym for the physical world; a synonym for the properties of matter and energy; in biology, the totality of biotic objects; in everyday language, the external world – water, air, land with plants and animals; a reality encompassing biotic and abiotic objects (a constellation of animate and inanimate matter in a certain state of order) (Zięba, 2016, p. 916).

This illustrates a holistic and multidimensional approach to the concept of nature, highlighting both the internal structure of its elements and the interrelationships among them. Building on Stanisław Zięba's definition of nature, as well as the definition of value proposed by the present author and developed in numerous publications – as that which is valuable and worthy of human beings, contributing to their integral development and fullness of humanity – the value of nature is understood as an inherent worth embedded in its integrated structure and the external world, including water, air, soil, plants, and animals.

Nature as a Factor in the Integral Development of the Student

Stefan Kunowski distinguishes the following layers: the biological, psychological (cognitive), social, cultural, and worldview-related layers (Kunowski, 2004, p. 197). Alina Rynio defines integral development as “a full, comprehensive, and balanced

sequence of structural and functional changes, dependent on internal and external factors, leading toward higher, more complete and more perfected states of the person and society” (Rynio, 2016, p. 448). In another work, Rynio defines integral development according to its educational and formative dimensions. For this study, according to A. Rynio, integral development is defined as “the holistic external and internal development of the human being and adaptation to life according to an accepted model” (Rynio, 2004, p. 13), that is, the fullness of humanity. It consists of the coordination and harmony of the physical, psychological, social, spiritual, and religious spheres in a life project oriented toward the fullness of human individuality. An indicator of development understood in this way is the coherence of thought, word, and action, rooted in personal good and integrally connected with the common good (Chałas, 2007, p. 11).

Integral development encompasses the whole human being – that is, all layers of human life and functioning. This raises a fundamental question: how is nature expressed in the development of the individual layers of human life and functioning? The point of departure for recognizing nature as a developmental factor in a holistic perspective is acknowledging its value. This requires the interiorization of this value, that is, the internal assimilation of the experience of nature’s beauty, the establishment of spiritual relationships with it, the expression of wonder and admiration, and the conviction of nature’s great, timeless significance to human life on Earth. This is followed by internalization, expressed in the adoption of standards of behaviour toward the value of nature, their recognition as one’s own, and acting in a socially approved manner (Lebuda, 2016, p. 453).

The following sections present opportunities for the development of individual layers of human life and functioning – biological, psychological, social, cultural, and worldview-related – through a child’s positive orientation toward nature.

Nature influences the development of the biological layer. Experiencing nature in an active manner, through gardening activities and plant care, for example, constitutes a factor in the development of manual skills and the strengthening of a child’s physical capacities. An aesthetically pleasing natural environment surrounding the home and school, as well as within these spaces, reduces nervous tension, anxiety, arousal, and stress. Nature inherently possesses the power to “call” individuals toward an active lifestyle, including rest, physical exercise, and movement in open natural spaces, thereby contributing to disease prevention.

Attention should also be paid to the therapeutic potential of nature. Education conducted in a natural environment constitutes a source of rich sensory experience, such as taste, hearing, touch, proprioception, perception of changes in temperature and humidity, and the experience of open, unrestricted space. Nature broadens the range of sensory experiences, supports healing processes, and enhances the effectiveness of

therapeutic interventions, including horticultural therapy and sensory integration therapy (Szewczyk-Taranek, 2024, p. 170).

In sum, the significance of nature for the development of the biological layer lies in both its health-promoting and preventive functions. Its importance is increasingly recognized and disseminated across various countries in Europe and the Americas, as evidenced by the development of concepts such as sensory, health-promoting, and therapeutic gardens (Winterbottom & Wagenfeld, 2015). Horticultural therapy has also found a place in the curricula of pedagogy programs in Poland.

Nature also constitutes a factor in the development of the **psychological/cognitive layer**. The richness of sensory experiences enhances a child's concentration, creativity, vitality, and motivation for cognitive activity. As a source of knowledge, nature embodies the power to "call" one to know it and to explore its mysteries. When a child undertakes this, nature fosters concentration, attention, memory development, conceptual and concrete–imagistic thinking, and imagination, thus contributing to the development of cognitive abilities. Nature acts as a motivator for cognitive activity. To fully utilize this potential within the educational process, it is necessary to integrate four pathways of teaching and learning: learning through assimilation, discovery, experience, and practical action (Okoń, 1987, pp. 194–198). At the center of this didactic integration should be the pathway of discovering knowledge about nature.

It should be emphasized that nature provides a unique opportunity to stimulate all of the senses. However, the teacher must ensure that children's experiences of nature are active in character, involving experimental and research-oriented activities, as well as care- and protection-oriented actions within an ecological perspective. Only then does nature become a significant factor in the learner's cognitive development. The integration of a child's experience of the natural environment with the didactic process enriches the range of cognitive, social, and spiritual experiences, sensitizing the child to stimuli from the natural world and motivating the search for, and awareness of, new sensory experiences. In this way, it supports a child's attainment of greater autonomy and subjectivity.

Nature also constitutes a factor in the development of the **social layer**. Scientific research and World Health Organization statistics demonstrate that nature significantly influences social life, manifested in the integration of individuals around the value of nature (Souter-Brown, 2014). It is a factor of social integration in cultural, normative, functional, and communicative dimensions (Lis & Lis, 2016, pp. 435–440). Recognizing the value of nature by members of a school community helps to integrate the community and, in turn, inspire it to integrate into the larger local community. The realization of this value through its exploration and understanding builds the culture of both the school and the broader community. It serves to shape human attitudes and behaviors, deepen knowledge about nature, and foster engagement with

issues related to its respect and development, in addition to undertaking effective actions in this area. The dynamic transformation of these attitudes and behaviors within a pro-ecological perspective contributes to the development of an internal culture; as this culture grows, cultural integration emerges, manifested, among other things, in becoming someone *for others* and *with others*, someone who prefers and actualizes the value of nature within a developmental perspective.

The identification of members of the school community with the value of culture plays a role in the development of their personalities, manifested in adherence to ethical and moral norms, the formation of habits, and the imitation of authorities who incorporate nature into their own lives and value systems. In this way, nature serves as a factor of normative integration among members of the school community. The higher the level of such integration, the more consistently students act in accordance with the system of norms and values oriented toward respect for and the development of nature that has been shaped within their personalities.

The value of nature also constitutes a factor of functional integration, expressed in the optimization of the organization of tasks undertaken. The type of these tasks includes cognitive tasks related to nature, such as exploring its mysteries and understanding the requirements for its development, tasks connected with nature's care (care-related activities), and tasks aimed at the protection of nature and the provision of conditions for its development (axiological tasks). The implementation of these tasks requires the search for effective forms of organization and management.

Closely linked to the above-mentioned categories and forms of social integration, through the internalization and interiorization of the value of nature by members of the school community, especially students, is *communicative integration*. Understanding nature's value and actualization through the development of one's attitude toward nature, both in the perspective of personal development and the development of nature itself, takes place through various forms of communication: conversation, dialogue, and discussion. Without such communication, neither the initiation nor integration of actions aimed at realizing the value of nature and the goals associated with nature education can occur. In this process of social integration, the child/student plays an active role. The student is both a recipient and a creative subject oriented toward the multidimensional experience of nature.

Nature also constitutes a factor in the development of the cultural layer of the child/student. Visual aspects related to the colors, shapes, and patterns of leaves and flowers fascinate and inspire creative activity in the visual arts, literature, poetry, and theater. The teacher's essential task is to support the continuous discovery of nature's beauty and its expression through various forms of artistic activity. Plants offer a rich palette of colors that changes with the seasons. This dynamic captures attention and

fosters creative imagination, which finds expression in various forms of artistic activity, including visual, literary, and theatrical.

Nature constitutes a factor in the development of the **worldview layer**. A child's or student's immersion in a natural environment, together with the recognition of its immense value, constitutes for them a kind of sanctuary. In this space, an appreciation for the miracle of creation arises. Within the natural environment, a sense of happiness and fulfillment emerges; feelings of wonder, appreciation for nature, and unconditional gratitude toward the Creator are evoked.

The aforementioned values of nature in a child's integral development should be utilized in education, as they justify engaging in learning within natural spaces. Education in an open natural environment can take the form of a gardening area. In rural schools, it may include the local community where the school operates, as well as surrounding villages where children reside. In urban schools, it could involve a designated area, such as a nature garden. A second form could be a set route – a trail through a forest, field, or park designed to provide rich sensory experiences and spatial orientation. A third solution is the sensory enrichment of the natural environment (Szewczyk-Taranek, 2024, pp. 163–164).

One question for teachers working in large and small urban environments is: what methodological, organizational, and technical measures should be undertaken to provide children with opportunities for nature education? The answer, in a programmatic and methodological sense, is to develop an original pedagogical program for nature education and to implement project-based learning methods. Original programs must have a dual educational and formative character. This requires the integration of education aimed at realizing the value of nature with value-oriented (axiological) education focused on nature. Key components of such a nature-based education include:

- Teachers' understanding of nature's value within the hierarchy of values preferred and realized by children;
- Supporting students in understanding the essence and function of nature in human life;
- Assisting students in recognizing the need to respect, protect, and engage in developmentally positive actions toward nature;
- Motivating students to explore, respect, protect, and develop nature;
- Supporting student learning about preserving and developing nature;
- Assisting students in the proper valuation of actions for the preservation and development of nature;
- Inspiring students to participate in community-based activities to acknowledge nature as a great value, respect it, protect it, and contribute to its development;
- Supporting students in their participatory and community-oriented initiatives.

Implementing these components into the formative educational process establishes nature as a great value – one that must be known, respected, protected, and developed (Chałas, 2007, pp. 279–280).

Unrealized Opportunities in Nature-Based Education

The environmental context in which a school operates significantly shapes the possibilities for education in natural spaces. In this respect, particular attention should be given to schools in rural areas and large urban centers.

A rural child lives and breathes nature, with direct access to its knowledge and beauty. No child living in a large city has as great an opportunity for education in natural environments as a rural one. This raises the question: is this opportunity being utilized? Survey research, including interviews with teachers, graduates of rural schools, and representatives of educational institutions, indicates that in many rural schools these opportunities remain largely unexploited. Children do not conduct large-scale, nature-based research; their creative activity rooted in nature is not nurtured; and project-based initiatives aimed at developing green spaces around homes are rarely implemented. This highlights the need to guide teachers working in rural environments on how to capitalize on these natural conditions for nature-based education.

In the context of education in natural spaces, from the perspective of a child's integral development, project-based learning of various types is noteworthy:

- research projects
- artistic projects
- literary projects

Possible topics include:

- *State of nature in the local environment* – research project
- *Threats to local nature and their consequences* – research project
- *My pro-ecological actions* – individual practical project
- *The pro-ecological actions of our class* – group practical project
- *The beauty of nature – creativity as affirmation of nature's value:*
 - artistic project (competition format)
 - literary project (competition format) for stories or poems
 - practical handicraft project (competition format)
 - *Exploring the secrets of nature* – research project
 - *The most beautiful home garden* – artistic/practical project
 - *Nature as God's gift* – knowledge-based project

The use of project-based learning becomes a factor in developing all layers of a child's life and functioning, including:

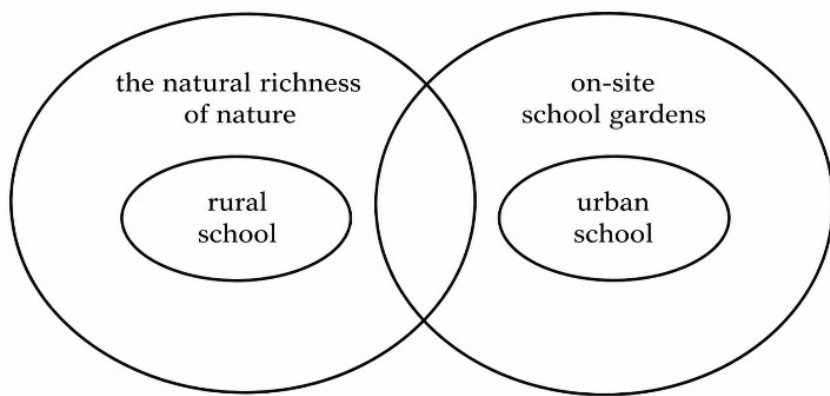
- Biological layer – practical projects
- Cognitive layer – research and knowledge-based projects
- Social layer – group projects
- Cultural layer – projects involving creative work
- Worldview layer – anthropologically oriented research projects

It should be emphasized that didactic tasks conducted in natural spaces, especially in the form of group or collective projects, serve to build social bonds and harness developmental potential, while also facilitating the acquisition of new cognitive competencies and practical skills, as well as fostering joy and contemplation in the creative work.

Nature-based education, or education in natural spaces in schools located in large cities, requires measures that complement the implementation of projects. One such measure is the design and establishment of a nature garden on the school grounds, provided conditions allow. If such conditions are unavailable, securing an external site for an educational garden is recommended. Another solution is to collaborate with a rural school to create a center for nature education.

This approach offers numerous benefits, such as the opportunity to form student communities with deepened interests in nature, as well as teacher communities seeking innovative methods and forms of nature-based education. It also allows children from urban areas to gain insight into rural identity, including the cultural identity of rural children and the village as a socio-cultural environment. A particular advantage is the possibility of holistic experiences of nature, encompassing its health-promoting, cognitive, preventive, social, and spiritual functions. This opportunity should be leveraged, especially by schools operating in large urban centers, although rural schools can also gain considerable benefits from such cooperation. The nature and structure of this collaboration can be illustrated schematically.

Figure 1. *Nature-Based Education in Schools Operating in Rural and Urban Environments*



Summary

The value of nature is apparent across multiple dimensions of life and health. Nature integrated into architecture, particularly in the surroundings of residential buildings in large cities, serves to shape social and psychological traits. Its beauty functions as a catalyst for the development of culture.

Bożena Szewczyk-Taranek emphasizes that nature in the workplace “improves creativity and work efficiency, optimizes brain function and energy, and enhances motivation to work. A beautiful environment stimulates, reduces nervous tension, anxiety, arousal, and stress” (Szewczyk-Taranek, 2024, p. 152).

Nature fulfils important functions in human life, including:

- educational
- cognitive
- therapeutic
- integrative (at both individual and social levels)
- inspirational (for creative activity, including visual arts, literature, etc.)

The multi-functionality and multi-dimensionality of nature obliges educators to implement education in natural spaces. Education in a natural environment stimulates the senses and facilitates a deeper, multifaceted understanding of nature, particularly through active engagement that is both cognitive and practical.

A critical consideration is the choice of methods and forms of nature-based education. Notable approaches include lessons conducted in natural spaces, workshops, and nature camps. In all cases, attention must be paid to the holistic use of nature in the child's development. There is also an urgent need to train future teachers and to develop the skills of current educators in designing and implementing nature-based educational concepts. This requires creating suitable conditions through the use of activating methods, including project-based learning, and organizational forms such as camps, workshops, and debates. Also essential is a deepening knowledge of horticultural therapy, which has found its place in school education and teacher training programs across Europe, the Americas, and Poland.

In the context of student education, the elective course "Horticultural Therapy as a Method Supporting the Education of Children with Special Needs" deserves attention. This course has been implemented for students of preschool and early school pedagogy at the John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin, under the guidance of Dr. Katarzyna Karczmarz. The course aims to prepare students for the conscious and responsible use of horticultural therapy elements in educational practice. This goal is achieved through acquiring skills in planning and conducting horticultural therapy activities, and in reflectively integrating theory with practice, including evaluating outcomes (Karczmarz, n.d.).

Such initiatives should be introduced and enhanced in universities educating future teachers in order to ensure that the benefits of nature and horticultural therapy are systematically integrated into teacher training and educational practice. The study constitutes an attempt to present a holistic approach to environmental education in the perspective of integral development (according to Stefan Kunowski's stratified conception), the integration of educational environments (rural and urban), and the implementation of didactic innovations aimed at enhancing the creative activity of students.

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The Aesthetic Dimension of Outdoor Education: Enriched Learning Environments as Integrated Systems for Emotional Regulation and Conflict Reduction

Estetyczny wymiar edukacji outdoorowej.
Wzbogacone środowisko edukacyjne
jako zintegrowany system regulacji emocji
i redukcji konfliktów

KEYWORDS

outdoor education,
enriched learning
environments,
neuroaesthetics,
conflict reduction,
embodied cognition

ABSTRACT

Outdoor Education (OE) faces persistent dilemmas concerning accessibility, safety, teacher preparedness, and curricular integration. The problem undertaken in this paper is a paradigm shift: conceptualizing OE as a deliberately designed Enriched Learning Environment (ELE) – an integrated system where space, pedagogy, and neuroscience converge. Critical review of literature allows to argue that the often-overlooked aesthetic dimension – the intentional incorporation of beauty, sensory richness, and artistic expression – is a critical active ingredient in this system. Drawing on environmental psychology, neuroaesthetics, and embodied cognition, this conceptual theoretical synthesis elucidates how aesthetically curated outdoor environments may modulate emotional states, reduce physiological stress, and help mitigate conflict and anger among learners. The theory is illustrated through international examples, including the Reggio Emilia Approach, Bosco Verticale, NaturBornholm. The paper concludes that a conscious, evidence-based application of aesthetic principles in OE is not a luxury but a neuroeducational necessity to foster psychological well-being, prosocial behavior, and meaningful learning, effectively transforming educational spaces into agents of change.

SŁOWA KLUCZE ABSTRAKT

edukacja
outdoorowa,
wzbogacone
środowiska
edukacyjne,
neuroestetyka,
redukcja konfliktów,
poznanie
ucieleśnione

Edukacja outdoorowa (OE) stoi w obliczu ciągłych dylematów dotyczących dostępności, bezpieczeństwa, przygotowania nauczycieli i integracji z programem nauczania. Problem podjęty w niniejszym artykule dotyczy zmiany paradygmatu: konceptualizacji OE jako celowo zaprojektowanego wzbogaconego środowiska nauczania (Enriched Learning Environment – ELE) – zintegrowanego systemu, w którym przestrzeń, pedagogika i neuronauka się spotykają. Na podstawie krytycznego przeglądu literatury argumentujemy, że często pomijany wymiar estetyczny – celowe włączenie piękna, bogactwa sensorycznego i ekspresji artystycznej – jest kluczowym, aktywnym składnikiem tego systemu. Opierając się na psychologii środowiskowej, neuroestetyce i poznaniu ucieleśnionym, ta konceptualna synteza teoretyczna wyjaśnia, jak estetycznie zaaranżowane środowiska zewnętrzne mogą modulować stany emocjonalne, redukować stres fizjologiczny i pomagać łagodzić konflikty i gniew wśród uczniów. Teorię zilustrowano przykładami międzynarodowymi, takimi jak Reggio Emilia Approach, Bosco Verticale i NaturBornholm. W artykule autor doszedł do wniosku, że świadome, oparte na dowodach stosowanie zasad estetyki w OE nie jest luksusem, lecz neuroedukacyjną koniecznością, mającą na celu wspieranie dobrego samopoczucia psychicznego, zachowań prospołecznych i wartościowej nauki, skutecznie przekształcając przestrzeń edukacyjną w czynniki zmiany.

Introduction: Navigating the Complex Landscape of Outdoor Education's Problems and Dilemmas

Outdoor Education (OE) has undergone a significant evolution, transitioning from its origins in recreational scouting and environmental conservation to a sophisticated, multidisciplinary pedagogical field with empirically demonstrated benefits. Extensive meta-analyses and systematic reviews, such as those by Rickinson et al. (2004) and Fägerstam (2012), have consistently highlighted its positive impact on cognitive development (e.g., improved critical thinking and problem-solving), physical health, social competencies (e.g., cooperation and communication), and emotional well-being (e.g., self-esteem and resilience). In an era increasingly characterized by digital saturation, sedentary lifestyles, and what Richard Louv (2008) poignantly termed “nature-deficit disorder,” OE offers a vital, experiential antidote. Its core promise is to re-engage students with the natural world, fostering not only academic knowledge but also a profound sense of ecological stewardship and place-based identity (Ernst & Stanek, 2006; Sobel, 2004).

Despite this compelling potential, the widespread and meaningful integration of OE into the fabric of mainstream formal education remains elusive, hindered by a series of complex and interrelated problems and dilemmas (Wattchow & Brown, 2011; Quay, 2013). These challenges are not merely logistical but are deeply philosophical and structural:

The Accessibility and Equity Dilemma	Socio-economic disparities profoundly determine which students have consistent access to high-quality, transformative outdoor experiences (Tyson, 2002). Is OE an equitable pedagogy, or does it risk becoming another privilege for the already advantaged, whose families can afford summer camps, wilderness trips, and access to pristine natural areas? This dilemma calls into question the very democratic potential of OE.
The Safety and Risk Paradox	While the managed, pedagogical use of risk is a cornerstone of authentic OE experiences – essential for developing resilience, self-reliance, and sound judgment (Priest & Gass, 2005) – a pervasive culture of liability and a “safety-first” dogma can sterilize these experiences. This over-sanitization strips them of the very uncertainty and challenge that are catalysts for personal growth and authentic learning (Sandseter, 2009).
The Curriculum Integration Challenge	OE is often perceived by administrators, policymakers, and even some educators as an extracurricular “add-on,” a recreational reward disconnected from the “serious” work of academic achievement measured by standardized tests (Dillon et al., 2006). This perception creates a constant pressure to justify outdoor time against the demands of a crowded, performance-driven curriculum, often relegating OE to the margins.
The Pedagogical Preparedness Gap:	Effective facilitation of OE requires a unique and complex skill set that blends deep ecological knowledge, group facilitation and management skills, risk assessment and management expertise, and an understanding of experiential learning cycles (Higgins & Nicol, 2002; Lugg, 2007). Many classroom teachers, trained primarily for indoor, didactic instruction, feel ill-equipped and lack the confidence to lead meaningful learning experiences beyond the school walls.

This paper contends that these dilemmas persist, in part, because OE is frequently implemented in a fragmented and reductionist manner. The solution, we argue, lies in a holistic, systems-oriented understanding of the learning environment itself. We propose the concept of the Enriched Learning Environment (ELE) as a comprehensive framework to transcend these challenges.

Central Thesis: The Enriched Learning Environment (ELE) as an Integrated System

We introduce and define the Enriched Learning Environment (ELE) as a synergistic system composed of three inextricably linked and mutually reinforcing components:

- Space (The Physical Agent): The physical environment – whether a forest, a urban park, a school garden, or a architecturally designed structure – is not a passive container for learning activities. It is an active, potent “teacher” that directly influences cognitive, emotional, and social processes through its design, sensory properties, and aesthetic quality (Ellison et al., 2022; Heft, 2013).
- Methodology (The Pedagogical Process): The pedagogical approaches deployed within an ELE are specifically chosen for their affinity with outdoor contexts. These include place-based education (Smith, 2002), experiential learning (Kolb, 1984), inquiry-based learning, and project-based learning. The methodology is the dynamic process that mediates the interaction between the learner and the space.
- Neuroscience (The Biological Foundation): This component encompasses the empirical understanding of how the brain, body, and environment interact to produce learning, memory, emotional states, and social behaviors (Immordino-Yang, 2016; Bratman et al., 2015). It provides the scientific rationale for why certain spatial and pedagogical choices are effective.

This paper will focus a critical lens on the role of aesthetics – the principles of beauty, harmony, sensory engagement, narrative, and artistic expression – as a potent, evidence-based mediator operating within this triad. By examining how aesthetically curated environments can directly influence neural circuits and physiological processes linked to stress, aggression, and social connection, we provide a robust, scientific rationale for elevating aesthetic considerations from the peripheral realm of “decoration” to the core of OE theory and practice. This approach re-frames beauty not as an amenity, but as a fundamental functional component of a healthy and effective learning ecosystem.

Methodological Approach: A Conceptual Theoretical Synthesis

This paper employs a qualitative, theory-building methodology best described as a conceptual theoretical synthesis with illustrative case examples (Jaakkola, 2020; Gilson & Goldberg, 2015). Unlike empirical research, this paper does not present primary data collection or systematic qualitative analysis. Instead, it develops the Enriched

Learning Environment (ELE) framework through theoretical integration and uses real-world examples for illustrative purposes.

A narrative literature review was conducted across Web of Science, Scopus, ERIC, PsycINFO, and PubMed (1980–2023). Search terms included “outdoor education,” “environmental aesthetics,” “neuroaesthetics,” “biophilic design,” “attention restoration,” “stress reduction,” “conflict reduction,” “embodied cognition,” and “third teacher.” Inclusion criteria were peer-reviewed sources directly relevant to environment, emotion, and learning. A total of 127 sources were included.

Four illustrative examples were selected purposively based on demonstrable success, ability to illustrate different facets of the ELE concept, and contextual diversity: Reggio Emilia Approach (Italy), Bosco Verticale (Italy), NaturBornholm (Denmark), and social art projects (Theaster Gates, 2015; Favela Painting). These examples are presented descriptively, not as systematically analyzed cases. Where claims about outcomes are mentioned, these are based on published reports and community accounts.

The findings were synthesized through an iterative process of abduction (Timmermans & Tavory, 2012), allowing the ELE framework to emerge as a coherent explanation for observed patterns across diverse contexts.

Theoretical Framework: The Tripartite Nexus of Environment, Emotion, and Learning

Environmental Psychology: Restorative Environments and Biophilic Design

Attention Restoration Theory (ART) (Kaplan & Kaplan, 1989) posits that natural environments restore directed attention by offering four components:

• Being Away	A psychological distance from the usual demands and routines that fatigue directed attention.
• Fascination	The presence of “softly fascinating” stimuli (e.g., moving clouds, rustling leaves) that hold attention effortlessly, allowing the directed attention mechanism to rest.
• Extent	An environment that is rich, coherent, and sufficiently vast to feel like a whole other world, engaging the mind in exploration.
• Compatibility	A good fit between an individual’s inclinations or purposes and what the environment supports and offers.

Complementing ART, Ulrich's Psychoevolutionary Theory (Ulrich, 1983, 1991) suggests humans have an innate predisposition to respond positively to unthreatening natural settings, which may elicit positive emotions and reduce physiological stress. These theories are operationalized in Biophilic Design (Kellert & Wilson, 1993; Kellert et al., 2008). However, critiques of biophilic determinism note that individual differences – such as prior nature experience and cultural background – moderate responses to biophilic design (Joye & van den Berg, 2011; Berto, 2014).

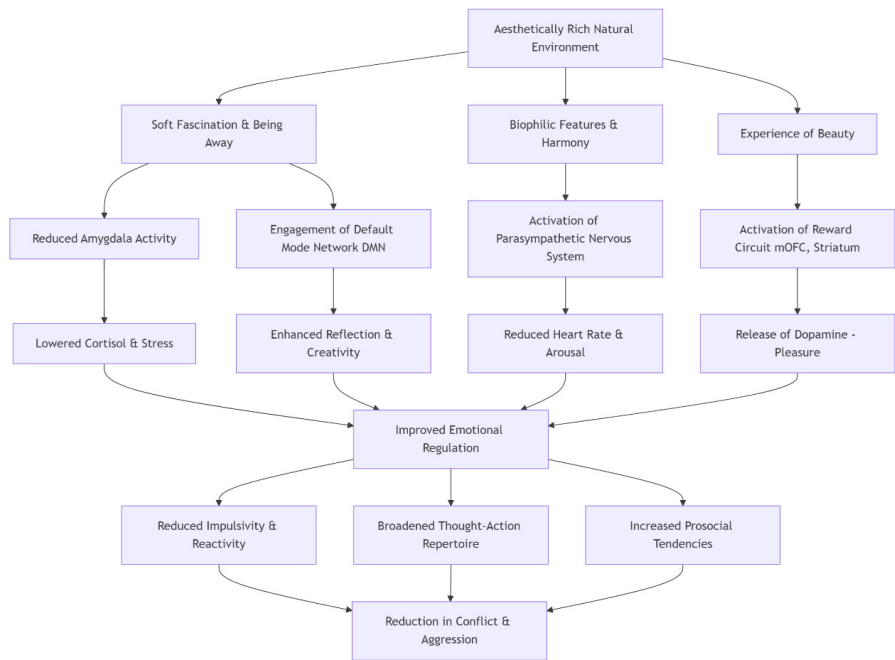
The Neuroscience of Emotion, Stress, and Aesthetic Experience

Neuroscientific research provides the biological substrate that may validate environmental psychology claims, though generalization to real-world educational contexts requires further investigation (Norwood et al., 2019). A study by Bratman et al. (2015) showed that walking in nature decreased activity in the subgenual prefrontal cortex, an area associated with rumination. Nature exposure has also been correlated with reduced amygdala activity (Kim et al., 2010) and lower salivary cortisol (Park et al., 2010). Since stress and impaired executive function drive irritability and reactive aggression (Blair, 2010), this calming of the neural threat system may represent a mechanism for conflict reduction.

The Default Mode Network (DMN) (Raichle, 2015) is active during wakeful rest and mind-wandering, and is crucial for memory consolidation and creative insight (Immordino-Yang et al., 2012). Natural, aesthetically rich environments that promote “soft fascination” may be ideal for DMN engagement.

Neuroaesthetics research has shown that perceiving beauty activates the brain's “reward circuit,” including the medial orbitofrontal cortex and ventral striatum, which may lead to dopamine release (Ishizu & Zeki, 2011; Chatterjee & Vartanian, 2014). However, most neuroaesthetics research uses abstract visual stimuli in laboratory settings, and aesthetic responses vary across individuals and cultures (Vessel et al., 2012; Pearce et al., 2016).

Figure 1. *The Neuroscience of Emotion, Stress, and Aesthetic Experience*



Source: Author’s elaboration

Embodied and Enactive Cognition

Embodied and enactive cognition theories posit that cognitive processes are rooted in the body’s sensorimotor interactions with the environment (Varela et al., 1991; Wilson, 2002). An ELE, rich in textures, sounds, and kinesthetic opportunities, provides “affordances” (Gibson, 1979) – possibilities for action. When a child navigates a stream, cognitive understanding is inseparable from physical action. This full-body engagement channels restless energy into purposeful exploration, reducing boredom and frustration that often lead to conflict in traditional classrooms.

The “Third Teacher”: The Pedagogical Power of Space

The concept of the “Third Teacher” (Il Terzo Maestro), central to the Reggio Emilia philosophy, provides a powerful metaphor for understanding the role of space in an ELE (Edwards et al., 2012; Strong-Wilson & Ellis, 2007). The first teacher is the adult

educator, the second is the peer group, and the third is the physical environment. This is not a passive metaphor; it implies that the space is an active, communicative, and responsive participant in the educational process.

A space that functions as a “Third Teacher” possesses specific characteristics:

- **Intentionality:** It is carefully designed and prepared to provoke inquiry, discovery, and relationship-building. Nothing is left to chance; the arrangement of materials, the quality of light, and the presence of natural and artistic elements are all pedagogically considered.
- **Affordances for Interaction:** It is filled with open-ended, malleable materials (loose parts like sticks, stones, fabrics) that invite manipulation, combination, and transformation. These materials “ask questions” of the children, prompting them to hypothesize, experiment, and create.
- **Aesthetic Provocation:** It is beautiful, cared for, and harmonious. This beauty is not static but dynamic, changing with the light, seasons, and children’s interventions. It communicates respect for the learner and the learning process, fostering a sense of belonging and responsibility.
- **Flexibility and Fluidity:** It is not a fixed, rigid setup but can be adapted and reshaped by the children to suit their projects and interests, promoting agency and ownership.

When the environment becomes the “Third Teacher,” the educator’s role shifts from a dispenser of knowledge to a researcher and facilitator who observes, interprets, and co-constructs learning with the children and within the environment. This shifts the entire dynamic of the classroom (indoor or outdoor) from a top-down transmission model to an emergent, ecological system of learning.

Aesthetics as an Active Ingredient: Proposed Mechanisms of Emotional Modulation and Conflict Reduction

We identify four primary, interrelated proposed mechanisms, supported by the previously discussed theoretical and neuroscientific frameworks. These are presented as theoretical propositions requiring empirical testing.

Sensory Regulation and Neurological Coherence. Chaotic, overstimulating, monotonous, or sensorily impoverished environments can trigger stress responses and cognitive overload. An aesthetically considered environment, in contrast, provides what Kaplan and Kaplan (1989) term “coherence” – a sense of order and legibility that allows the brain to process the scene efficiently. The harmonious arrangement of elements – the dappled light pattern filtering through a canopy, the curated color palette of a flowering meadow, the fractal patterns of a fern – provides a level of sensory

input that is engaging and rich without being overwhelming or chaotic. This regulated sensory input helps to calm the autonomic nervous system, facilitating a shift from a sympathetic (fight-or-flight) state to a parasympathetic (rest-and-digest) state (Porges, 2011). A student whose nervous system is in a state of physiological calm is neurologically primed for learning and is significantly less likely to react with aggression or impulsivity to minor frustrations or social provocations.

Fostering a Positive Affective State through Reward Circuit Activation. As neuroaesthetics has demonstrated, the perception of beauty is intrinsically rewarding. The experience of aesthetic pleasure – from the sight of an intricate spider web glistening with dew, the sound of wind whispering through pines, or the tactile satisfaction of smooth, cool river stones – directly induces positive emotions like joy, wonder, curiosity, and contentment (Fredrickson, 2001). According to Fredrickson’s Broaden-and-Build theory, these positive emotions do more than just feel good; they broaden an individual’s momentary thought-action repertoire, making them more open, flexible, creative, and receptive to new ideas. This broadened, exploratory mindset is the direct antithesis of the narrowed, rigid, and defensive thinking that characterizes anger, fear, and frustration. A group of students collectively experiencing a moment of awe at a sunset or shared satisfaction in a collaboratively built rock cairn is a group that is neurologically and psychologically aligned for cooperation, not conflict.

Promoting Prosocial Behavior and a Shared Sense of Place. Beautiful and well-cared-for environments can function as powerful “prosocial cues.” Empirical research has shown that exposure to natural beauty can increase tendencies toward generosity, trust, and helpfulness (Zhang et al., 2014; Weinstein et al., 2009). When an environment is intentionally made beautiful, either through natural processes or through collective artistic effort, it signals a shared value and can foster a powerful sense of collective ownership, responsibility, and identity. Collaborative art-in-nature projects – such as the transient creation of land art using found materials, the collective weaving of a willow structure, or the communal tending of a garden – require negotiation, shared vision, mutual respect, and coordinated action. This shared aesthetic labor builds social cohesion, strengthens community bonds, and provides a constructive outlet for social energy, thereby directly reducing the potential for inter-personal friction and conflict.

Providing a Non-Threatening Ground for Emotional Expression. For many students, particularly those with a history of trauma, difficulty with verbal expression, or regulatory disorders, traditional classroom settings and direct conversations about feelings can feel intimidating or confrontational. An aesthetically rich outdoor environment, acting as the “Third Teacher,” can serve as a neutral, non-judgmental ground for emotional expression. Through techniques derived from art therapy and expressive therapies (Malchiodi, 2005), a child grappling with unexpressed anger might be

guided to represent that feeling by arranging dark, jagged rocks in a powerful configuration. They might then be invited to represent a desired state of calm by creating a mandala from smooth, white stones and flower petals. This process of externalizing and symbolizing internal emotional states through aesthetic manipulation of the environment is a powerful therapeutic and self-regulatory tool. It allows for a safe distance from overwhelming emotions, facilitates cognitive reframing, and provides a tangible sense of control.

From Theory to Illustrative Educational Examples

Illustrative Example 1: The Reggio Emilia Approach and the Outdoor Atelier

The Reggio Emilia approach provides a quintessential illustration of an ELE where aesthetics are foundational. The outdoor atelier is a deliberately curated space featuring gardens, mirrors, and loose parts. Learning is emergent, project-based, and deeply sensory (Edwards et al., 2012). This practice may cultivate mindfulness and sustained attention. The environment's calmness and beauty may reduce boredom and frustration, reframing disagreements as collaborative problems.

Figure 2. *Reggio Emilia Outdoor Atelier*



Source: Reggio Emilia Outdoor Atelier

Illustrative Example 2: Bosco Verticale (Vertical Forest), Milan

The Bosco Verticale features two residential towers hosting over 900 trees and 20,000 plants on their facades (Boeri, 2015). An OE curriculum can use it as a living laboratory for biodiversity and sustainability studies. Even viewing the Bosco Verticale may provide “soft fascination” and micro-restorative breaks (Kaplan, 2001). By integrating such landmarks into OE, we may address the accessibility dilemma, making ELE benefits available to urban populations.

Figure 3. *Bosco Verticale – Milano*



Source: Boeri-Studio_ph.Dimitar-Harizanov

Illustrative Example 3: NaturBornholm, Denmark

NaturBornholm is a museum partially sunk into a hillside with a grass roof merging into the landscape (Frandsen, 2005). Exhibits are immersive, multi-sensory environments. The pedagogy is experiential and inquiry-based. The aesthetic coherence minimizes extraneous cognitive load, allowing deep engagement. The environment is so captivating that it may naturally minimize behavioral issues.

Figure 4. *NaturBornholm* (ph. Fanella Ovengaard)



Source: NaturBornholm

Discussion: Synthesizing the Evidence and Addressing the Dilemmas

The synthesis of theoretical frameworks and illustrative examples provides support for the ELE model and the proposed role of aesthetics. This framework offers constructive pathways to address the initial dilemmas of OE.

Addressing the Accessibility Dilemma: Examples of Bosco Verticale and community art projects demonstrate that ELEs are not contingent on access to wilderness. They can be created in urban schools and neglected lots through biophilic design and artistic interventions, shifting focus from going to nature to bringing nature and beauty to all learning spaces, promoting greater equity.

Reframing the Safety and Risk Paradox: An aesthetically considered environment is often a well-maintained, legible space. This creates a context where managed risks can be introduced within a framework of respect and intentionality, shifting focus from hazard elimination to mindful engagement.

Overcoming the Curriculum Integration Challenge: In a true ELE, the environment can become the curriculum. Learning standards in STEM, humanities, and arts emerge naturally from interacting with a rich environment, making learning relevant and intrinsically rewarding.

Bridging the Pedagogical Preparedness Gap: The ELE framework provides a structured model for teacher professional development, moving from a daunting list of outdoor skills to a holistic understanding of how to design learning within a “Third Teacher” environment.

Limitations and Boundary Conditions

Several limitations must be acknowledged. First, as a conceptual synthesis, this paper presents theoretical propositions requiring empirical testing. Second, neuroscientific evidence comes primarily from laboratory studies with adults; generalization to children in outdoor contexts remains uncertain (Norwood et al., 2019). Third, individual differences (prior nature experience, cultural background) may moderate responses (Joye & van den Berg, 2011; Berto, 2014). Fourth, illustrative examples lack quantitative outcome data; reported violence reductions are based on community accounts rather than controlled studies. Fifth, implementation of ELE principles may require resources not equally available, potentially creating new equity concerns.

Future Research Directions

Future research should prioritize: (1) longitudinal studies measuring ELE impact on cortisol and behavioral markers of conflict; (2) neuroimaging studies with children during outdoor learning; (3) comparative studies examining individual difference variables; (4) implementation science on ELE adoption in low-resource contexts; (5) randomized controlled trials comparing conflict reduction outcomes; (6) qualitative studies exploring lived experiences; and (7) cross-cultural research on aesthetic preferences.

Conclusion and Implications for Future Practice and Research

The accumulated evidence from environmental psychology, neuroscience, and educational practice suggests that the aesthetic quality of a learning environment may be a critical, active, and non-negotiable component of its educational efficacy. By deliberately designing Enriched Learning Environments that integrate space, pedagogy, and insights from neuroscience, we may be able to create powerful settings that naturally support emotional regulation, foster prosocial behavior, and cultivate deep, joyful, and meaningful engagement with learning. The experience of beauty, far from being an ornamental luxury, may function as a neurobiological “antidote” to the stress, frustration, and conflict that often impede learning and well-being. However, these conclusions are provisional and require empirical validation in authentic educational contexts.

The implications are profound for multiple fields:

- For Educators and School Leaders: To consider intentionally designing and utilizing both indoor and outdoor spaces as “Third Teachers,” prioritizing sensory richness, natural elements, and aesthetic harmony. Pilot projects and iterative implementation are recommended over wholesale adoption.
- For Architects and Landscape Designers: To consider collaborating closely with educators to create schools and learning centers that are themselves ELEs, embodying the principles of biophilic and restorative design while remaining attentive to budgetary constraints and diverse user needs.
- For Policymakers: To consider allocating resources and developing guidelines that support the creation and maintenance of beautiful, nature-rich school grounds and the necessary professional development for educators. Policy changes should be accompanied by evaluation requirements to build the evidence base.
- For Researchers: To conduct further empirical studies, particularly longitudinal and neuroimaging studies, that directly measure the impact of specific aesthetic interventions in outdoor settings on cortisol levels, brain activity, and behavioral markers of conflict in children.

The call to action is not for immediate, large-scale implementation of untested principles, but rather for systematic, evidence-building efforts to determine if, how, and under what conditions aesthetic enrichment of outdoor learning environments produces the hypothesized benefits. It is time to rigorously investigate the transformative potential of beauty in education. By doing so, we may create learning environments that do not just teach about the world, but that actively care for the minds, hearts, and social relationships of those who inhabit them.

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Preschool Gardens as a Source of Child Development

Ogrody przedszkolne jako źródło rozwoju dziecka

KEYWORDS

education, outdoor
education,
embodied cognition,
preschool garden,
development, child
development, nature

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this article is to demonstrate that the preschool garden constitutes a space aligned with children's natural needs and highly supportive of their holistic development. The analysis of the garden's role as an educational environment is embedded within four complementary theoretical perspectives: constructivism, experiential learning, embodied cognition, and outdoor education. These theoretical frameworks create a coherent interpretative model in which the preschool garden is viewed as a constructivist setting (where the child acts as an active constructor of knowledge), a space for direct experience (learning through doing), a context for embodied cognition (emphasizing the role of the body and senses), and a medium of outdoor education (in which the relationship with nature forms the foundation of development). In this perspective, the garden is no longer seen merely as a recreational area, but rather as an integral component of the educational environment that fosters the child's multidimensional development. The article takes the form of a narrative literature review aimed at providing a synthetic presentation of the current state of knowledge on the role of preschool gardens in outdoor education. Literature was selected purposively and included publications from the fields of pedagogy, developmental psychology, and environmental education, with special attention given to studies published within the last 10 years. The qualitative analysis consisted of identifying key theoretical categories, comparing research results, and interpreting the role of the garden. The main limitation of this methodological approach is the lack of procedures characteristic of systematic reviews.

SŁOWA KLUCZE ABSTRAKT

edukacja, edukacja
outdoorowa,
ucieleśnione
poznanie, ogród
przedszkolny,
rozwój, rozwój
dziecka, natura

Celem niniejszego artykułu jest ukazanie ogrodu przedszkolnego jako przestrzeni bliskiej naturalnym potrzebom dziecka i sprzyjającej jego holistycznemu rozwojowi. Analiza roli ogrodu jako środowiska edukacyjnego została osadzona w czterech komplementarnych perspektywach teoretycznych: konstruktywistycznej, uczenia się przez doświadczenie, ucieleśnionego poznania oraz edukacji outdoorowej. Przyjęte ramy teoretyczne tworzą spójny model interpretacyjny, w którym ogród przedszkolny postrzegany jest jako środowisko konstruktywistyczne (dziecko jako aktywny twórca wiedzy), przestrzeń doświadczenia (uczenie się poprzez działanie), kontekst ucieleśnionego poznania (rola ciała i zmysłów) oraz medium edukacji outdoorowej (relacja z przyrodą jako fundament rozwoju). Tak rozumiany ogród przestaje być jedynie przestrzenią rekreacyjną, a staje się integralnym elementem środowiska edukacyjnego wspierającego wielowymiarowy rozwój dziecka. Artykuł ma charakter przeglądu narracyjnego literatury, którego celem jest syntetyczne ujęcie aktualnego stanu wiedzy dotyczącej roli ogrodu przedszkolnego w edukacji outdoorowej. Dobór literatury miał charakter celowy i obejmował publikacje z pedagogiki, psychologii rozwojowej oraz edukacji środowiskowej (ze szczególnym uwzględnieniem prac z ostatnich 10 lat). Analiza jakościowa polegała na identyfikacji kluczowych kategorii teoretycznych, porównaniu wyników badań oraz interpretacji roli ogrodu. Ograniczeniem przyjętej metodologii jest brak procedur typowych dla przeglądów systematycznych.

Introduction

Contemporary education operates in the context of dynamic changes within a highly urbanized, technologized, and stimulus-overloaded world. The increasing amount of time children spend in digital environments has become almost normative. This has significantly limited children's spontaneous outdoor physical activity and direct contact with nature (Stawarz, 2023; Nowakowski, 2023; Bałachowicz et al., 2023). Furthermore, the latest reports indicate that only about 16–20% of children meet the WHO recommendations for a minimum of 60 minutes of daily physical activity (Zembura et al., 2022).

In this context, outdoor education responds to current educational challenges, emerging as an innovative approach, even though it has always been practiced as a natural space for the child's comprehensive development. After all, getting to know nature constitutes the primary mechanism for acquiring experiences that are crucial for human survival and development as a species (Bergan et al., 2024). Thus, the return to nature and the renaissance of outdoor education can be perceived as a kind of homecoming.

In the context of the issues discussed, one of the most accessible yet still insufficiently utilized educational resources remains the preschool garden. In many institutions, it functions primarily as a recreational space or an aesthetic complement to the building's architecture (Klichowska, 2013). Meanwhile, the analysis of empirical research and practical experience shows that a well-designed and consciously used garden can become an integral pedagogical tool with interdisciplinary potential. It encompasses not only nature, health, and ecological education, but also therapeutic activities that are particularly important when working with children with special educational needs (Biernacka, 2023).

Methods and Research Tools

The article takes the form of a narrative literature review aimed at providing a synthetic account of the current state of knowledge regarding the role of the preschool garden as an environment supporting child development in the context of outdoor education.

The selection of literature was purposive and included scientific publications from the fields of pedagogy, developmental psychology, and environmental education. Particular attention was given to studies addressing outdoor education, experiential learning, constructivist approaches to learning, embodied cognition, and the role of children's contact with nature in cognitive, motor, and socio-emotional development.

The review was structured around four complementary theoretical perspectives: constructivism, experiential learning, embodied cognition, and outdoor education. These perspectives were selected due to their prominent and recurring presence in the literature on learning in natural environments, as well as their relevance for interpreting the educational potential of preschool gardens. Each perspective highlights a distinct yet interconnected dimension of the garden as an educational environment: the active construction of knowledge by the child, learning through direct experience, the role of bodily and sensory engagement in cognitive processes, and the developmental significance of interaction with nature. Taken together, these perspectives provide a coherent interpretative framework for a multidimensional analysis of children's learning and development. Although they do not encompass all possible theoretical approaches, they were considered the most appropriate for achieving the aims of the present study.

The analysis included scientific articles published in peer-reviewed journals, academic monographs, and research reports from educational and health institutions. Preference was given to recent publications (from the last 10 years), of an empirical or review nature, and referring to both national and international contexts.

The literature analysis was qualitative and involved:

- the identification of key theoretical categories, such as holistic development, experiential learning, contact with nature,
- the comparison of research findings on the impact of the natural environment on child development,
- the interpretation of the role of the preschool garden as an educational space in light of contemporary pedagogical concepts.

Due to the nature of the study, it did not aim at an exhaustive, systematic analysis of all available sources, but rather at a critical synthesis of selected theoretical and empirical approaches. A limitation of the adopted methodology is the absence of procedures characteristic of systematic reviews.

Contemporary Trends in Outdoor Education

Comparative analyses conducted by J. Stawarz (2023), with reference to solutions implemented in selected European countries, indicate that regular contact with the natural environment supports the development of gross motor skills, psychological resilience, and cognitive independence. As a result, “knowledge becomes personally acquired, experienced, and derived from direct engagement and one’s own exploratory activity” (Stawarz, 2023, p. 198).

A preschool garden can serve as a means of implementing the principles of outdoor education, even in urban settings (Stawarz, 2023). However, as the author points out, outdoor education in Poland remains undervalued. Specialists in outdoor education, based on their own research, indicate that currently “the strategy of outdoor education in Polish schools does not support the implementation of principles of sustainable coexistence between humans and nature” (Michalak & Parczewska, 2019, p. 172). They observed that the students studied exhibit a sense of disorientation, not knowing what they are allowed to do in natural spaces and expecting instructions for action. The causes of this situation may be attributed, among other factors, to the contemporary education system, which primarily focuses on the transmission of information without developing children’s ability to use it in practice (Gajdek et al., 2025).

The significance of the preschool garden, considered in relation to the concept of experiential learning and the constructivist model of knowledge construction (Michalak, 2020), indicates that a preschool-aged child learns about the world primarily through action, manipulation, observation, and direct contact with matter – as “an active participant in the process of acquiring knowledge.” Although legislation assumes, as noted by A. Klichowska (2013), that a child completing preschool education possesses basic knowledge about the natural world, it does not specify that

such knowledge should be acquired through exploration of natural environments. As a result, only about 9% of this knowledge is gained through activity in the garden (Klichowska, 2013, p. 318).

This situation invites reflection on the fact that nature is largely taught to children through expository methods; consequently, children do not have the opportunity to truly experience it, but only to hear about it and learn about its mechanisms in an abstract way. At this point, it is worth recalling the well-known statement by Baba Dioum:

“In The End We Will Conserve Only What We Love.
We Will Love Only What We Understand.
We Will Understand Only What We Are Taught”
(Baba Dioum, n.d.).

In the context under discussion, these words can be understood as highlighting the urgent need to educate future generations in the spirit of conscious and sustainable coexistence with nature attitude that can emerge only through direct, embodied experience. In this way, environmental protection, rather than remaining a slogan or a struggle, has the potential to once again become a natural human need.

Developmental Mechanisms Activated in the Preschool Garden

Cognitive Development

The garden offers cognitive situations characterized by a high degree of authenticity. In contrast to structured instructional settings typical of the classroom, contact with the garden enables the child to directly experience the natural world. Learning does not occur here through verbal or symbolic transmission, but through action, observation, and lived experience (Michalak, 2020).

The authenticity of this situation can be understood through the interaction of its two components. On the one hand, there is the child – an individual, unique being with their own history of experiences, sensitivity, and way of perceiving reality. The child engages with the world in an individual manner, interpreting encountered phenomena through the lens of prior experiences and current developmental needs. In this perspective, the learning process is deeply rooted in bodily experiences and in the relationships that the active organism builds with the surrounding natural environment. By acting within the garden space, the child not only observes natural phenomena but simultaneously constructs meanings from what they see, touch, and experience (Michalak & Parczewska, 2019, p. 34; Bergan et al., 2024).

On the other hand, there is the natural space of the garden which never remains static. It is characterized by dynamism, undergoing ever-changing elements and constant change resulting from the rhythms of nature, seasonal changes, weather conditions, and the life cycles of plants and living organisms.

The garden is a space whose defining feature is variability: plants germinate, grow, bloom, wither, and die; new organisms appear; the smell, color, and structure of the environment continuously change. The child's encounter with such a space is always individual and unique. Each experience in the garden is different, as both the child and the natural environment are in a constant state of change. It is precisely within this dynamic dialogue between the developing child and the living, changing garden space that authentic cognitive experience emerges. The garden thus becomes a place where the child not only acquires knowledge about the natural world but, above all, learns through direct participation in the natural processes occurring in the surrounding environment, while also deepening their understanding of themselves (Trina et al., 2024).

Moreover, as noted by K. Biernacka (2023), the experience of the process itself is more important than the final outcome, such as the harvest. Through planning activities, preparing garden beds, planting, and systematically caring for the garden, children engage in meaningful learning. This is particularly significant in work with children, as it allows them to understand where plant-based food comes from. Today, many young people, especially those raised in urban environments, perceive fruits and vegetables merely as products available in stores, lacking awareness of how complex and demanding the cultivation process is, and how much effort is required to produce food. Additionally, it is worth noting that products sold in large stores are often harvested before reaching full ripeness, which affects their taste and aroma. As a result, children do not always know the natural flavor and scent of fresh fruits, vegetables, or herbs. Preschool gardens therefore fulfill an important cognitive and educational function. It is there that children have the opportunity to taste freshly harvested produce for the first time, which, as research shows, may also support the development of healthy eating habits (Taniguchi et al., 2022). Thus, working in the garden is not only a component of environmental education but also enables practical understanding of the basics of food production (Biernacka, 2023, p. 97; Bjørgen et al., 2023).

Motor Development

The natural, uneven terrain of the garden, along with the need to overcome obstacles, bend, squat, dig, carry watering cans, or manipulate gardening tools-contrasted with the delicate touch required for plants-stimulates both gross and fine motor skills

and supports the development of sensory integration, which is crucial for a child's proper development. Unlike flat, synthetic playgrounds, the garden provides diverse proprioceptive and balance-related stimuli (Nanda et al., 2025; Falode et al., 2026).

K. Biernacka (2023) emphasizes the high degree of freedom children have in choosing the type of physical activity and experiencing its various forms in a natural environment. Running across uneven natural surfaces filled with stones, depressions, or branches effectively promotes the development of overall motor fitness. Learning in direct contact with nature engages all the senses due to the richness of diverse stimuli and experiences. This allows the child to build a sensory-based understanding of reality. Independently and creatively arranging play spaces stimulates imagination and ingenuity, while the wide range of movements helps children better understand and control their bodies (Stawarz, 2023, p. 199).

Moreover, research by A. Lundy and J. Trawick-Smith (2021) confirms that active outdoor play enhances children's engagement in tasks upon returning to the classroom. Children demonstrate greater attention span and more easily resume their work.

It is also worth noting that regular activity in the garden can help counteract the recent decline in children's physical fitness (Active Healthy Kids Poland – Zembura et al., 2022), postural defects, and metabolic disorders (AOTMiT, 2025). Alarming, nationwide screening studies indicate that in 2025, over 60% of preschool-aged children exhibit postural disorders (Stępień, 2025).

Emotional and Social Development

Gardening activities are inherently communal in nature. They require task division, coordination of actions, and shared responsibility for outcomes. Children learn planning, cooperation, and mutual support in their efforts, as well as experiencing both the disappointment of failure and the joy of success together. In terms of emotional and social development, contact with nature is associated with reduced stress levels and the development of emotional self-regulation skills. As specialists note, "Children's contact with nature also has extraordinary therapeutic and relaxing properties" (Michalak & Parczewska, 2019, p. 90), including lowering tension related to school-related stressors by providing opportunities to gain positive experiences in and with nature (Michalak & Parczewska, 2019, p. 90). Research further indicates that nature pedagogy can enhance critical thinking skills and communication competencies (Jabeen et al., 2025).

It is worth noting that, despite the clear need for teachers to thoughtfully guide children in work with, in, through, and for the garden, the individualization of the educational process often occurs spontaneously. Children independently adjust their

activities to their current needs and abilities. Therefore, it can be argued that it is even undesirable for a teacher to create overly detailed adaptations, which are currently considered milestones for educators and other specialists working with children. When a space conducive to the child's cognitive process is created, the child naturally follows their needs, unconsciously adjusting to their current psychophysical capacities. As a general principle, work in nature is not bound by rigid frameworks unless a teacher imposes them. Kochanowski and Carr (2014) stress the importance of allowing children to independently set and surpass their own boundaries, which significantly contributes to their holistic development and sense of self-determination.

Within this context, it is worth reflecting on the growing demand for activities that support emotional self-regulation among preschool children (Shanker, 2019). Such activities are clearly important in contemporary times, yet it is valuable to explore why children today specifically need them, given that research and expert opinion consistently highlight the beneficial effects of nature on mind and body. Specialists in pedagogy note a paradox: nature is free, and in today's world, it is sometimes perceived as having little value. This leads to the conclusion that, as a species, we have distanced ourselves too far from our natural surroundings in favor of immaterial products, whose value is often overestimated (Odrowąż-Coates et al., 2024).

Designing the Garden as an Educational Space

Conscious planning and landscaping of the garden should transform it from a recreational space into a multifunctional, integral educational environment. The key element of this process is the designation of diverse zones that support structured learning, therapeutic activities, as well as free, independent exploration and mental restoration (Urząd m.st. Warszawy, 2021).

Specialists in the field recommend establishing zones such as:

- Dramatic play – allowing children to create and assume roles, experience social situations, and practice empathy and storytelling;
- Adventure play – enabling spontaneous transformation of the space according to needs and imagination (building huts, tunnels, forts, or transforming the garden into a jungle, a ship, or a space base);
- Imaginative play – supporting the development of creative imagination through free construction of stories, scenarios, and personal worlds;
- Muscle-strengthening activities – providing opportunities to overcome physical and psychological challenges;
- Manipulative games – fostering psychomotor coordination, precision of movement, visuomotor perception, and planning skills (using natural manipulatives such as cones, sticks, stones, and ropes);

- Contact with nature – including a mini vegetable and herb garden, an insect and bird observation corner, a sensory zone with mud, water, sand, and leaves, an educational compost bin, plant cultivation, and observation of seasonal changes (Michalak & Parczewska, 2019, p. 162).

With such an organized natural space, the preschool garden becomes a site for the holistic development of the child, while teachers gain natural tools for observing and individualizing the educational process.

In the literature on children's garden planning, zones are also categorized according to four key needs of children:

- Quiet zone – for rest and seeking calm, e.g., in a hideaway, treehouse, tipi, hammock, or picnic area;
- Creation zone – for creative activities such as building, exploring terrain, and testing abilities in a sandbox, treehouse, or water play area;
- Contact with nature – fostering multisensory engagement and learning about the natural world;
- Movement zone – following the authors' recommendation to "above all, play, play, and play again!" (Erckenbrecht & Lutter, 2016, p. 15), using natural obstacles both on the ground (walkways, log structures) and in the air (swings, rope parks) (Erckenbrecht & Lutter, 2016, p. 15).

Analyzing these complementary zoning approaches in preschool gardens, one can conclude that designing natural spaces for children should involve the creation of a coherent and holistic system. Such a system balances creative freedom with physical, emotional, and cognitive development, while staying true to children's innate needs. A key aspect is maintaining an appropriate equilibrium between safety and reasonable developmental risk. Excessive adult control and limitations on children's autonomy reduce their sense of agency and undermine the educational potential of the space. By contrast, natural environments provide rich affordances that promote spontaneous exploration and genuine, unrestricted experiences of the world (Trina et al., 2024).

The Garden in the Formal Education System – Challenges and Opportunities

According to the literature review, the main challenges associated with implementing a preschool garden include:

- Financing and long-term maintenance of the space,
- Organizational time required for planning and management,
- Training and professional development of staff,
- Beliefs and attitudes of teachers, school leaders, and parents (Burt et al., 2018).

Clearly, the opportunities offered by a preschool garden are numerous and significant. Most importantly, it allows for full implementation of the preschool curriculum through embodied learning and authentic contact with nature, which fosters ecological and pro-environmental attitudes. Over time, the garden helps reduce stress for both children and teachers and saves time by naturally individualizing activities and reducing the labor-intensive preparation of educational materials. Furthermore, learning emotional self-regulation becomes a partially natural, self-practiced skill, as children, with careful adult support, independently notice that they can relax, rest, and discover new aspects of the surrounding world while outdoors (Michalak & Parczewska, 2019, pp. 28–36).

A significant challenge lies in the creation and long-term sustainability of preschool gardens, which necessitates active involvement of the local community. This circumstance, however, should not be perceived as a limitation. Rather, the joint efforts of teachers, parents, and children enable the development of a genuine, living space that the community will value and maintain for years to come. Consequently, the garden emerges as both a product of collective endeavour and a meaningful symbol that contributes substantially to the holistic development of each child (Burt et al., 2018).

Before this optimistic vision can be realized, initiators may face financial barriers and resistance stemming from the beliefs of staff or parents. While challenging, these obstacles can be overcome. A key element in this process is the conscious building of community partnerships from the planning stage. Research clearly shows that gardens supported by active committees—including parents, teachers, volunteers, and collaborations with local organizations are more sustainable and effective. Such partnerships not only address financial and staffing challenges but also transform the garden into a “shared garden,” ensuring authentic care and stewardship over time (Burt et al., 2018).

Equally important is investing in staff development. Studies indicate that most teachers, even when implementing elements of outdoor education, tend to follow behavioral, transmission-based approaches similar to classroom teaching when taking children outdoors (Michalak & Parczewska, 2019, p. 90). Therefore, practical training – such as workshops on integrating garden activities with the curriculum – can help reduce resistance among teachers and directors while enhancing their sense of efficacy as educators.

Results of the Scientific Analysis and Conclusions

The literature review and theoretical reflection clearly indicate that the preschool garden possesses significant, yet still underutilized, potential as an environment for

the holistic development of the child. Findings from the cited studies consistently emphasize the positive impact of contact with nature on children's cognitive, motor, and socio-emotional development, a pattern confirmed by both national and international literature.

Regarding cognitive development, the analyzed studies show that natural environments promote learning through experience and exploration, in line with the principles of constructivism and embodied cognition. In a garden setting, the child is not a passive recipient of information but an active participant in the cognitive process, constructing knowledge through action and direct interaction with a dynamic environment. In this sense, the preschool garden represents a space conducive to deep learning, offering a clear alternative to the transmissive model of education prevalent in many formal institutions. At the same time, practical activities such as planting and caring for plants, observing seasonal changes, and exploring natural phenomena create opportunities for inquiry, experimentation, and problem-solving, illustrating how knowledge is constructed through embodied interaction with the environment.

In terms of motor development, research highlights the clear advantage of natural environments over artificially designed spaces due to their varied terrain and rich sensory stimuli, which, in the context of increasing health challenges among children such as reduced physical fitness and postural defects, give the preschool garden particular importance as a setting for preventive health measures. This potential stems from features such as uneven ground, natural obstacles, loose natural materials, and opportunities for climbing, balancing, digging, or carrying objects, all of which provide varied movement experiences that encourage active engagement with the environment.

From a socio-emotional perspective, contact with nature has a regulatory effect that supports children's mental well-being, with the reviewed sources emphasizing its role in reducing tension, enhancing self-regulation, and fostering social relationships based on cooperation and shared responsibility, which gives the preschool garden not only an educational but also a therapeutic function, particularly through activities such as collaborative gardening projects, shared responsibility for living elements of the environment, and cooperative outdoor play, which contribute to the development of empathy, responsibility, self-regulation, and a sense of agency.

The analysis of the reviewed literature suggests that the educational value of the preschool garden extends beyond supporting discrete developmental domains. Rather, it provides a setting in which cognitive, motor, and socio-emotional development unfold simultaneously and in mutual interaction. Consequently, the preschool garden may be understood as an environment conducive to the implementation of a holistic approach to early childhood education, grounded in the principles of constructivism,

embodied cognition, and outdoor education, where learning emerges through children's active engagement with the natural environment.

However, despite abundant evidence of the effectiveness of outdoor education, the literature reveals a significant gap between theory and educational practice. In many cases, the preschool garden still functions primarily as a recreational or aesthetic space rather than as an integral educational environment. Several factors contribute to this situation:

1. Insufficient teacher preparation for working in outdoor settings. Studies indicate that even during outdoor lessons, teachers often replicate traditional, transmissive teaching methods, limiting the educational potential of the space.
2. Beliefs and attitudes of teachers and parents, which may promote excessive control and restrict children's free exploration. This creates tension between ensuring safety and allowing children to take developmental risks, an essential component of the learning process.
3. Systemic limitations, such as inadequate funding, infrastructure that is not adapted to outdoor learning, and the absence of clear curriculum guidelines regarding outdoor education, which marginalize the garden as an educational space.

In light of these findings, actions to redefine the role of the preschool garden within the education system are warranted.

The literature analysis indicates that the effective use of a preschool garden's potential requires not only a well-designed physical environment but also the development of a culture of shared responsibility for its functioning. For this reason, the co-creation of the garden by the entire local community including children, parents, teachers, parent councils, and other community stakeholders is recommended. Equally important are initiatives that actively engage the preschool community and strengthen participants sense of agency, responsibility, and identification with the shared space.

Particular attention should also be given to the development of teachers competencies in designing and facilitating learning experiences in natural environments, as well as to fostering pedagogical awareness of the value of experiential and embodied learning. Consequently, regular training opportunities and professional development activities should be provided to support the perception of the garden as an integral educational environment.

At the same time, activities conducted in the garden should be continuously adapted to children's needs, interests, and developmental capabilities. As an educational space grounded in exploration, the garden requires a child-centred approach and flexibility in planning learning experiences. It is equally important to ensure the inclusivity of this environment by adapting both the space and the activities to the diverse developmental needs of all children.

Furthermore, the long-term effectiveness of garden based educational practices depends on the systematic and ongoing evaluation of both their implementation and outcomes, as well as on openness to modifications informed by the experiences of teachers, children, and parents. Only under such conditions can the garden become a permanent component of the preschool educational environment rather than merely an occasionally used recreational space.

It should also be noted that, despite the growing number of studies confirming the positive impact of contact with nature on child development, there remains a shortage of empirical research conducted in the Polish context, particularly long-term studies. This highlights the need for further analysis to better understand the mechanisms through which natural environments influence development and to develop effective models for implementing outdoor education in preschool practice.

In conclusion, the preschool garden emerges as a space with high educational potential, the full utilization of which requires a paradigm shift in thinking about education – from a transmissive model toward a constructivist approach that recognizes the importance of embodied cognition, autonomy, and child agency in the learning process.

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Nature as a Teacher? Social and Cultural Determinants of Outdoor Education: A Case Study of a Private Forest Preschool

Natura jako nauczyciel? Społeczne i kulturowe uwarunkowania edukacji *outdoor*: studium przypadku niepublicznego leśnego punktu przedszkolnego

KEYWORDS ABSTRACT

outdoor education,
early childhood
education,
educational
environment,
educational culture,
case study

The article examines the social and cultural determinants of outdoor education in the context of early childhood education, recognized as the notion of nature as an educational environment. The aim of the study is to identify the factors shaping the implementation of outdoor education in Poland and to analyze the tensions arising from its incorporation into the formal education system. The main research question concerns how social and cultural determinants influence educational practices in a forest preschool. The study was conducted within a qualitative research paradigm using a case study approach. Institutional documents, educational materials, and secondary data were analyzed. The article is structured into theoretical, methodological, and analytical sections, the latter focusing directly on the selected case. The findings indicate that outdoor education responds to children's diminishing contact with nature while simultaneously revealing constraints resulting from cultural norms, the institutionalization of education, and social inequalities. The originality of the study lies in integrating theoretical analysis with an empirical case study of a specific educational institution and demonstrating the local adaptation of global outdoor education models.

SŁOWA KLUCZE ABSTRAKT

edukacja *outdoor*,
edukacja
elementarna,
środowisko
edukacyjne, kultura
edukacyjna,
studium przypadku

Artykuł podejmuje problem społecznych i kulturowych uwarunkowań edukacji *outdoor* w kontekście wczesnej edukacji dziecka, ujmowanej poprzez kategorię natury jako środowiska edukacyjnego. Celem tekstu jest identyfikacja czynników determinujących funkcjonowanie edukacji *outdoor* w Polsce oraz analiza napięć wynikających z jej implementacji w systemie oświaty. Główny problem badawczy dotyczy pytania, w jaki sposób uwarunkowania społeczne i kulturowe wpływają na praktykę edukacyjną realizowaną w leśnym przedszkolu. Badanie przeprowadzono w paradygmacie jakościowym, z wykorzystaniem metody studium przypadku. Zastosowano techniki analizy dokumentów instytucjonalnych, materiałów edukacyjnych oraz danych wtórnych. Struktura artykułu obejmuje część teoretyczną, metodologiczną oraz analityczną, odnoszącą się bezpośrednio do badanego przypadku. Wyniki wskazują, że edukacja *outdoor* stanowi odpowiedź na deficyt kontaktu dzieci z naturą, jednocześnie ujawniając ograniczenia wynikające z norm kulturowych, instytucjonalizacji edukacji oraz nierówności społecznych. Oryginalność artykułu polega na powiązaniu analizy teoretycznej z empirycznym studium konkretnej placówki oraz ukazaniu lokalnej adaptacji globalnych modeli edukacji *outdoor*.

Introduction

Contemporary early childhood education is undergoing dynamic transformations driven by social, cultural, and technological changes, as well as by the escalating ecological and climate crisis. In this context, increasing attention is being paid to the relationship between humans and nature and to the role of education in shaping this relationship. A growing body of research indicates that children's limited contact with the natural environment negatively affects their psychological, physical, and social well-being.

At the same time, educational theory has revived the question of nature's role in the educational process – a theme already present in classical educational philosophy, particularly in the work of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, who emphasized the importance of direct experience and contact with nature for child development (Rousseau, 1955). Contemporary approaches further develop this perspective by highlighting its relevance in the context of the ecological crisis and the urgent need to foster environmentally responsible attitudes.

In response to these challenges, outdoor education has gained increasing recognition. This educational approach views the natural environment not merely as a backdrop for learning but as an active context in which learning occurs. Within this framework, nature becomes a co-participant in the educational process, supporting children's cognitive, emotional, and social development.

These developments reflect both the effects of globalization and the growing concern for children's mental and physical well-being, as they increasingly grow up in environments dominated by digital technologies and characterized by limited contact with nature. In response, alternative pedagogical approaches have emerged, redefining learning environments as well as the roles of teachers and learners within the educational process (Dahlgren & Szczepanski, 1998, pp. 9–15; Sobel, 2004, pp. 21–29).

One of the most significant developments has been the growing interest in outdoor education, also referred to as nature-based education or outdoor experiential learning. This approach puts nature as the primary learning environment, where experience, exploration, and direct engagement with the surroundings play a central role. In this perspective, the natural environment is not only a setting for educational activities but also an active factor supporting children's holistic development (Louv, 2008, pp. 23–35; Waite, 2017, pp. 12–18). Consequently, moving education beyond the walls of the classroom can be understood as a purposeful and natural way of introducing children to the natural world. The essence of this approach lies in adopting a more active and open understanding of education, allowing children to explore the world holistically while fostering their overall development.

Moreover, outdoor education offers an alternative to traditional instructional models, which are often based on the transmissive delivery of knowledge and restrict students' learning activities to the classroom. The literature emphasizes that this approach promotes the development of key competencies, including independence, creativity, cooperation and problem-solving skills. Furthermore, numerous studies have demonstrated its positive effects on children's mental and physical health, including stress reduction and improved concentration (Kuo et al., 2019, pp. 137–145; Mygind et al., 2019, pp. 5–11).

In Poland, outdoor education remains an emerging field whose implementation is shaped by both enabling factors and numerous constraints. Among the most significant determinants are cultural traditions concerning perceptions of education, the organization of the educational system, teacher preparation, and access to appropriate infrastructure and natural environments (Parczewska, 2019, pp. 50–58; Winiarski, 2015, pp. 29–45). Equally important are broader social changes, including growing environmental awareness and increasing concern about addressing children's "nature deficit" (Louv, 2008, pp. 36–41).

The aim of this article is to answer the following research question: **What social and cultural determinants shape the implementation of outdoor education in Poland?** Examining this issue contributes not only to a better understanding of the specific conditions under which outdoor education is implemented within the Polish educational system but also to identifying potential directions for its further development.

Literature Review

Outdoor education is rooted in the traditions of experiential pedagogy and constructivism, emphasizing the active role of the child in the learning process and the importance of direct interaction with the surrounding environment. A central theoretical foundation of this approach is the concept of experiential learning developed by John Dewey, who argued that education should be based on learners' activity and their interaction with the environment (Dewey, 2014, pp. 25–27). In the Polish context, these ideas have been further developed within experiential pedagogy and alternative education, where particular emphasis is placed on educational situations embedded in children's real-life experiences (Kupisiewicz, 2000, pp. 143–145; Nalaśkowski, 2010, pp. 98–102).

The significance of contact with nature for child development has been extensively discussed by Louv (2008), who introduced the concept of *nature-deficit disorder* and highlighted its adverse consequences for children's health and general functioning (pp. 36–48). Similar conclusions have been drawn in Polish literature by scholars specializing in environmental education and environmental health, who emphasize that regular contact with nature supports children's sensory, emotional, and cognitive development (Dymara, 2009, pp. 67–72; Sobel, 2004, pp. 54–60). Researchers have also highlighted the role of natural environments in reducing stress and alleviating attention span difficulties (Formański, 2020, pp. 181–185).

Research further demonstrates that engagement in natural environments contributes to the development of social competencies and self-regulation (Gill, 2014, pp. 10–15). Polish studies similarly indicate that outdoor learning enhances cooperation, responsibility, and problem-solving skills in group (Bąk, 2014, pp. 89–94; Parczewska, 2019, pp. 50–58). Through outdoor experiences, children learn to negotiate meanings, make decisions, and manage risk in ways appropriate to specific situations, all of which contribute significantly to their social and emotional development.

From a sociological perspective, access to outdoor education is closely associated with families' cultural capital, as participation largely depends on parents' resources, values, and educational aspirations (Bourdieu, 1986, pp. 243–248). Polish research on alternative education indicates that institutions such as forest preschools are frequently chosen by families characterized by a particular cultural habitus, including higher educational attainment and environmentally conscious lifestyles (Mendel, 2017, pp. 56–60). Consequently, outdoor education may simultaneously reproduce existing social inequalities while also offering opportunities to challenge them through inclusive educational practices.

Attention should also be paid to the development of the forest preschool movement in Europe and its adaptation in Poland. As scholars have noted, this educational

model originated in the Scandinavian countries and Germany, where nature-based education has a long-standing institutional tradition (Knight, 2013, pp. 33–40). In Poland, by contrast, forest preschools represent a relatively recent yet rapidly expanding phenomenon, reflecting broader efforts to develop alternative forms of preschool education (Parczewska, 2019, pp. 50–58). Research indicates that forest preschools provide children with greater autonomy, exposure to diverse environmental stimuli, and opportunities to learn through exploration and un.

Outdoor education draws upon both classical and contemporary pedagogical traditions. Jean-Jacques Rousseau argued that nature constitutes the primary environment for children's development and that education should be grounded in direct experience (Rousseau, 1955). Contemporary educational theories extend this perspective in response to emerging civilizational and environmental challenges. In particular, Sharon Todd emphasizes the importance of sensory experience in education, highlighting the roles of embodiment and human engagement with the surrounding world (Todd, 2015). Similarly, Claudia Ruitenberg argues for a reconceptualization of education in the context of the ecological crisis, stressing its ethical aspect and responsibility toward future generations (Ruitenberg, 2015). From this perspective, outdoor education can be understood not merely as a pedagogical method but also as a response to the deeper crisis in the relationship between humans and the natural world.

Research Methodology

The study was conducted within a qualitative research paradigm using the case study method, which enables an in-depth analysis of outdoor education as it operates within its natural social, cultural, and organizational context.

The aim of the study was to identify the social and cultural determinants of outdoor education based on the example of a private forest preschool.

The main research question was formulated as follows:

How do social and cultural determinants influence the practice of outdoor education implemented in the studied institution?

The specific research questions were:

1. What pedagogical assumptions support the educational practice of the institution?
2. What social factors influence the functioning of outdoor education?
3. What cultural determinants shape the implementation of outdoor education?

The research material consisted of existing documents (desk research), including:

- the statutes and organizational description of the studied forest preschool;
- information published on the websites of the preschool and the foundation operating it;
- promotional and educational materials provided by the institution (including the description of the educational program, pedagogical assumptions, and information for parents);
- documents concerning the organization of the preschool, the implementation of the national core curriculum, and the adopted safety procedures;
- documents related to the certification of the institution by the Polish Institute of Forest Preschools.

In total, 14 documents produced between 2020 and 2025 were analyzed. These included organizational documents, curriculum materials, information published on the institution's website, and documentation related to the certification process. The documents were selected purposively based on their direct relevance to the organization of the educational process and their potential to identify the social and cultural determinants of outdoor education. The analyzed materials included, among others, the educational program description, informational materials for parents, presentations of the pedagogical assumptions, website content, and promotional materials. Particular attention was paid to how the roles of nature, the child, and the teacher were conceptualized, as well as to the declared educational objectives.

The analysis was conducted in several stages. First, the documents were selected, followed by repeated readings and content analysis in light of the research questions. Finally, the main analytical categories relating to the social and cultural determinants of outdoor education were identified. The analysis was qualitative and employed an inductive-deductive approach: some categories were derived from the predefined research questions, whereas others emerged during repeated analysis of the empirical material. The documents were subjected to qualitative content analysis focusing on the identification of categories related to the institution's pedagogical assumptions, the organization of the educational process, and the social and cultural determinants of outdoor education. The analytical categories corresponded to the research questions and included: the educational model, the child–nature relationship, the teacher's role, safety, work organization, cooperation with parents, and institutional determinants.

The analysis also included secondary data comprising:

- national and international scientific literature on outdoor education;
- research findings on forest preschools;
- studies addressing the social and cultural determinants of alternative education;
- reports and publications concerning the impact of children's contact with nature on their development.

The secondary data were used primarily to interpret the findings of the case study and were comparing the analyzed educational model with conclusions presented in both national and international literature.

Case Description

The institution operates as an educational system implementing the national curriculum in natural conditions. Educational activities take place primarily in a forest setting, where children's learning is based on exploration, play, and direct experience. The institution has been operating since 2020.

The case was selected purposively. The studied institution was treated as an information-rich case, allowing for an in-depth analysis of outdoor education within the Polish context. It was chosen because it is one of the few private forest preschools operating in the Silesian Voivodeship. The selection was based on the availability of documentation, the length of the institution's operation, its implementation of outdoor education as the primary educational approach, and its certification by the Polish Institute of Forest Preschools.

The institution's fundamental mission is to provide education in a natural environment, with children spending most of their time outdoors regardless of weather conditions. Although the educational program follows the national curriculum established by the Ministry of National Education, its implementation differs substantially from traditional teaching methods. Learning takes place through direct experience, exploration, and free play in the forest. Educational practice involves elements of outdoor pedagogy, adventure education, the Montessori approach, Waldorf education, as well as environmental and intercultural education.

The preschool operates with mixed-age groups, supporting the development of relationships, empathy, and cooperation among children. A central role is assigned to the adult – the teacher as a guide – who supports children's development through attentiveness, empathetic communication, and dialogue based on the principles of Nonviolent Communication (NVC). The institution also strongly emphasises an individualized approach to each child and provides access to specialist support, including pedagogical, speech and language therapy, and psychological services.

The institution's promotional and educational materials emphasize that this model of education supports children's holistic development – physical, emotional, and social – while fostering independence, resilience, and an awareness of the surrounding world. The preschool has been awarded a certificate by the Polish Institute of Forest Preschools, confirming the high quality of its educational practice (Marzec & Miecznik-Warda, 2025, p. 130). This educational model is consistent with the

constructivist approach to education, in which the child is regarded as an active participant in the learning process.

The analysis of the institution's documents and educational materials indicates that outdoor education is implemented through children's daily, extended stays in the forest environment. Particular importance is attached to free exploration, which replaces traditionally understood classroom-based instruction. From a social perspective, the profile of the families choosing the institution is significant, as they are predominantly families with high levels of cultural capital who consciously opt for alternative forms of education. This finding supports the argument that access to outdoor education remains socially selective.

The analysis of the cultural determinants, in turn, reveals a tension between the principle of free exploration and societal expectations concerning safety and supervision. The institution's documentation demonstrates an effort to balance these two dimensions by introducing formal safety procedures while simultaneously preserving children's autonomy.

Social Determinants

Nature Deficit

The analysis of the institution's curriculum documents and informational materials indicates that one of its primary objectives is to counteract children's nature deficit by ensuring their daily contact with the forest environment. This finding is consistent with Louv's (2008, pp. 36–48) conclusions. The phenomenon referred to as *nature deficit* manifests itself not only in the reduction of children's spontaneous outdoor activities but also in the deterioration of their psychological and physical well-being and the weakening of their social competencies. Polish scholars have observed that contemporary children increasingly grow up in highly structured environments closely supervised by adults, which limits their opportunities for independent exploration and discovery of the world (Nawrat-Borowska, 2018, pp. 318–321). At the same time, numerous studies emphasize the importance of regular contact with nature for children's sensory, emotional, and cognitive development (Sobel, 2004, pp. 54–60; see also Chawla, 2015, pp. 438–440). Within this context, forest preschools represent an attempt to mitigate the negative consequences of what has been described as a "closed childhood."

Changing Models of Childhood

Within the educational model under study, the child is regarded as an active participant in the learning process, reflecting contemporary pedagogical approaches that emphasize free play and exploration as central educational principles (Waite, 2017, pp. 20–25). From a constructivist perspective, children are viewed not as passive recipients of knowledge but as active co-constructors of meaning, while the natural environment serves as a space for experience, inquiry, and experimentation (Klus-Stańska, 2018, pp. 67–72). Polish educational scholarship likewise highlights a shift away from transmissive models of teaching toward approaches grounded in experience and meaningful interaction with the surrounding environment (Śliwerski, 2015, pp. 203–205). Forest preschools exemplify this educational orientation by providing children with greater autonomy and opportunities to learn through action, thereby fostering agency as well as social competence.

Family-of-Origin Cultural Capital

Access to outdoor education is closely associated with families' values and resources, which may contribute to its selective and potentially elitist character (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 245). Families choosing this type of educational provision often possess substantial cultural capital, reflected not only in their educational attainment but also in their lifestyles and beliefs regarding child-rearing and education (Bourdieu & Passeron, 2011, pp. 88–92). Within the Polish context, alternative forms of education – including forest preschools – remain more accessible to middle-class families, which may reinforce existing educational inequalities (Szymański, 2021, pp. 134–136). Consequently, despite its inclusive educational philosophy, outdoor education may simultaneously contribute to the reproduction of existing social inequalities.

Cultural Determinants

Safety Versus Risk

Contemporary culture draws a lot of attention to the children's safety, which may restrict educational practices based on exploration and risk-taking, thereby conflicting with the fundamental principles of outdoor education (Gill, 2014, p. 12). The literature suggests that excessive adult supervision limits children's autonomy and their ability to assess and manage risk independently (Ball, 2002, pp. 45–47). Polish researchers likewise argue that the social perception of risk has changed considerably, with preventive and risk-averse approaches now predominating. Such attitudes may

hinder the development of children's adaptive competencies (Wojnarowska, 2010, pp. 98–100). Outdoor education offers an alternative perspective by treating risk as an integral component of the learning process rather than solely as a source of danger.

Institutionalization of Education

The institution operates within the formal requirements of the education system, creating tension between pedagogical flexibility and standardization. The obligation to implement the national core curriculum limits the flexibility of educational practice and requires spontaneous learning activities to be aligned with predefined curricular objectives. As the literature indicates, the institutionalization of education is closely associated with the bureaucratization and standardization of pedagogical practice (Potulicka & Rutkowiak, 2012, pp. 56–60). In the context of forest preschools, this necessitates continuous negotiation between the principle of free exploration and formal educational requirements, often resulting in compromises regarding the organization of educational activities.

Adaptation of International Models

Outdoor education in Poland has been strongly influenced by Scandinavian educational models; however, their implementation requires adaptation to local social and climatic conditions (Waite, 2020, pp. 30–33). In countries such as Denmark and Sweden, forest education has a long-standing institutional tradition and is deeply embedded in the cultural context, whereas in Poland it remains a relatively recent phenomenon (Bentsen et al., 2010, pp. 31–34). Adapting these models involves not only responding to different climatic conditions but also transforming public attitudes toward children's education and learning (Dymara, 2010, pp. 77–80). Consequently, the process requires the reinterpretation of international educational models within the framework of local cultural norms and the Polish educational system.

Within the Polish context, a significant challenge lies in the predominance of the traditional classroom-based model of education, which has long reinforced the belief that formal instruction is inherently more valuable than experiential learning (Dymara, 2010, pp. 81–83). As a result, despite its growing popularity, outdoor education is still frequently perceived as a complementary or alternative educational approach rather than an equally legitimate method of teaching. The literature emphasizes that changing this perception requires both systemic reforms and grassroots

educational initiatives, such as forest preschools and field-based schools (Jagodzińska & Strumińska-Doktor, 2019, pp. 63–66).

Another important aspect of adapting Scandinavian models concerns Poland's climatic conditions. Compared with the relatively mild climate of the Nordic countries, Poland experiences more variable and often harsher weather conditions, requiring appropriate infrastructure and well-prepared educational staff (Okoń, 2003, pp. 154–156). In practice, this involves providing children and teachers with suitable outdoor clothing and preparing alternative learning scenarios for periods of extreme weather. At the same time, research indicates that regular exposure to changing weather conditions contributes to the development of psychological resilience, independence, and adaptive competencies among children (Jagodzińska & Strumińska-Doktor, 2019, pp. 63–66).

The example of the *Mysikrólik* Forest Preschool in Rogoźnik demonstrates that the adaptation of international outdoor education models does not involve their direct transfer but rather their creative reinterpretation in accordance with the local socio-cultural context. The institution combines elements of nature-based education with the implementation of the national preschool curriculum, thereby integrating formal and informal educational approaches (Ordon, 2019, pp. 111–121). This educational model facilitates the gradual acceptance of outdoor education among both parents and the local community, who often expect the achievement of conventional educational objectives.

Another important issue concerns the social perception of safety. In Poland, education conducted in natural environments is frequently regarded as more hazardous than classroom-based instruction, influencing both parental decisions and the attitudes of educational authorities. However, research demonstrates that well-designed outdoor education can be equally safe while offering substantial benefits for children's physical and emotional development (Ordon, 2019, pp. 111–121). In this context, increasing public awareness through parent education and the dissemination of good practices appears to be of particular importance.

In summary, the adaptation of outdoor education models in Poland requires a multidimensional approach regarding organizational, cultural, and attitudinal change. Forest preschools play a particularly significant role in this process, serving as a bridge between the traditional education system and contemporary, environmentally oriented approaches to teaching and learning.

Discussion

The findings of the study confirm that outdoor education can be interpreted as a form of pedagogical innovation that responds to contemporary social challenges, including children's diminishing contact with nature, declining levels of physical activity, and the growing dominance of digital environments. These findings are consistent with the existing literature, which demonstrates that education based on direct experience and interaction with the natural environment support the development of children's social, emotional, and cognitive competencies (Andrzejewska, 2020, pp. 152–155).

The analysis of the case study demonstrates that outdoor education redefines both the role of the teacher and the educational environment. The teacher takes on the role of a guide and facilitator of children's learning experiences, while the natural environment becomes a setting that encourages exploration, independent discovery, and knowledge construction (Dylak, 2000, pp. 63–82). At the same time, nature does not replace the teacher; rather than that it provides a context that supports the learning process. Its educational potential can only be fully realized when combined with purposeful pedagogical guidance and the deliberate design of learning experiences (Budniak, 2017, pp. 63–65).

The findings also indicate that the implementation of outdoor education is strongly shaped by its social and cultural context. On the one hand, its development is facilitated by growing environmental awareness among parents, increasing concern about children's diminishing contact with nature, and the search for alternative educational approaches. On the other hand, the expansion of outdoor education is constrained by prevailing social norms concerning children's safety, the formal requirements of the educational system, and selective access associated with families' cultural and economic capital. This suggests that the successful implementation of outdoor education depends not only on its pedagogical assumptions but also on broader social acceptance and supportive institutional conditions.

The findings therefore support both the classical principles of nature-based pedagogy and contemporary concepts of environmental education while simultaneously highlighting the constraints imposed by the local social and cultural context. The analysis suggests that outdoor education has considerable potential to promote children's holistic development. However, its wider implementation requires changes not only in pedagogical practice but also in educational policy and public perceptions of learning taking place beyond the traditional classroom environment.

The present study is exploratory in nature and is based on the analysis of a single case; therefore, its findings cannot be generalized to all institutions implementing outdoor education. The analysis relied exclusively on documentary sources and

educational materials without incorporating interviews or participant observation. Consequently, the findings should be interpreted as an in-depth analysis of a particular case, offering insight into the possible social and cultural mechanisms that shape the implementation of outdoor education.

Conclusions

The study made it possible to answer the main research question concerning the influence of social and cultural determinants on the practice of outdoor education. The analysis demonstrated that the functioning of the investigated private forest kindergarten is determined not only by its adopted pedagogical assumptions but, above all, by the interaction of social, cultural, and institutional factors. The development of outdoor education is supported by parents' growing environmental awareness and their search for alternative educational models. At the same time, its wider implementation is constrained by prevailing safety norms, the formal requirements of the education system, and unequal access resulting from families' cultural and economic capital.

The findings confirm that outdoor education is a valuable form of early childhood education, supporting children's cognitive, emotional, social, and physical development. At the same time, its effective implementation requires appropriate teacher preparation, close cooperation with parents, and the development of organizational and legal frameworks that facilitate education in natural environments.

In light of the findings, nature cannot be regarded as an autonomous "teacher." Rather, it constitutes a significant component of the educational environment whose potential is realized only when combined with teachers' reflective pedagogical practice and the intentional design of the learning process. This suggests that the educational significance of nature is constructed through both pedagogical practice and broader social processes.

Given the exploratory nature of the study and its focus on a single case, the findings are not intended to be representative but rather to indicate directions for future research. Future studies should be extended to include interviews with teachers, parents, and children, participant observation, and comparative research involving different types of institutions implementing outdoor education. Such approaches would provide a more comprehensive understanding of the mechanisms shaping the development of outdoor education in Poland.

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(Re)defining Farmed Animals in Outdoor Education: An Analysis of the Pedagogical Potential of Educational Farms in Greater Poland

(Re)definicja zwierząt hodowlanych w edukacji outdoorowej. Analiza potencjału pedagogicznego zagród edukacyjnych w Wielkopolsce

KEYWORDS

outdoor education,
educational farms,
non-anthropocentric
pedagogy,
animal studies,
farmed animals,
symbiocentrism

ABSTRACT

This article examines the pedagogical potential of educational farms from the perspectives of animal studies and outdoor education. The study examined how farmed animals and human–animal relationships are represented in materials of educational farms. The analysis covered 18 educational farms in Greater Poland belonging to the National Network of Educational Farms. Farm descriptions, programmes, lesson plans, and scenarios were examined using qualitative and quantitative content analysis. The categorization framework included animal functions, language, species, references to animal products and production, human–animal relationships, and forms of interaction. The results indicate that animals were represented primarily in educational and utilitarian contexts, while care-oriented and partnership-based representations were less frequent. Objectifying language was more common than anthropomorphizing and emotional language. Alongside conventionally farmed species, alpacas and miniature goats were also represented. Interactions with animals and references to animal products and production were frequent, whereas references to slaughter or animal death appeared once. From the perspectives of animal studies, the findings indicate potential for developing outdoor education through greater attention to the ethical dimension of human–animal encounters, inspired by a symbiocentric perspective. Farmed animal sanctuaries may offer complementary educational contexts for encounters with animals outside production settings.

SŁOWA KLUCZE ABSTRAKT

edukacja
outdoorowa,
zagrody eduka-
cyjne, pedagogika
nieantropocen-
tryczna, *animal
studies*, zwierzęta
hodowlane,
symbiocentryzm

W artykule analizowany jest potencjał pedagogiczny zagród edukacyjnych z perspektywy studiów nad zwierzętami (*animal studies*) oraz edukacji outdoorowej. Celem badań było określenie sposobu przedstawiania zwierząt hodowlanych oraz relacji człowiek–zwierzę w publicznie prezentowanych materiałach zagród edukacyjnych. Analizie poddano materiały dotyczące 18 zagród edukacyjnych w województwie wielkopolskim, należących do Ogólnopolskiej Sieci Zagród Edukacyjnych. Przeanalizowano opisy zagród, programy edukacyjne oraz scenariusze i plany zajęć, stosując jakościową i ilościową analizę treści. Opracowany schemat kategoryzacyjny obejmował funkcje zwierząt, język, reprezentowane gatunki, odniesienia do produktów pochodzenia zwierzęcego i produkcji, relacje człowiek–zwierzę oraz formy interakcji. Wyniki wskazują, że zwierzęta przedstawiano przede wszystkim w kontekstach edukacyjnych i użytkowych, natomiast reprezentacje oparte na trosce i partnerstwie identyfikowano rzadziej. Częściej występował język uprzedmiotawiający niż antropomorfizujący i emocjonalny. Obok konwencjonalnych gatunków hodowlanych przedstawiano także alpaki i kozy miniaturowe. Częste były bezpośrednie interakcje ze zwierzętami oraz odniesienia do produktów pochodzenia zwierzęcego i produkcji, podczas gdy odniesienia do uboju lub śmierci zwierząt pojawiły się w jednym przypadku. Z perspektywy *animal studies* wyniki wskazują na możliwość rozwijania edukacji outdoorowej poprzez większe uwzględnianie etycznego wymiaru kontaktów między ludźmi a zwierzętami, inspirowane perspektywą symbiocentryczną. Azyle dla zwierząt hodowlanych mogą stanowić uzupełniające środowisko edukacyjne, umożliwiające kontakt ze zwierzętami poza warunkami hodowli.

Introduction

Education is recognized as important for sustainable participation in society (Holfelder, 2019; Piao & Managi, 2023; Uralovich et al., 2023; Žalėnienė & Pereira, 2021). In the context of climate change, global conflicts, and technological change, its role in addressing socio-environmental challenges of the Anthropocene is increasingly emphasized (Chutorąński, 2020). Environmental education aims to support a sustainable future (Akinsemolu & Onyeaka, 2025), while in Poland its development is shaped by institutional and pedagogical conditions, educational paradigms, and learning theories (Michalak & Parczewska, 2019; Rubacha, 2006).

This study adopts a constructivist perspective, viewing learning as active meaning-making (Bruner, 1997; Vygotsky, 1978). This aligns with outdoor education, where learning emerges through interaction with the environment, including nature (Michalak, 2020).

Contact with natural environments supports wellbeing (Martin et al., 2020; Stangierska et al., 2023; White et al., 2019), pro-environmental attitudes and behaviours (Bratman et al., 2019; Chawla, 2015; Otto & Pensini, 2017), and children's engagement, social skills and learning outcomes (Mann et al., 2022).

Nonetheless, children in urbanized societies increasingly spend less time outdoors, a phenomenon described as the *extinction of experience* or *nature-deficit disorder* (Louv, 2008; Soga & Gaston, 2016), associated with socio-cultural and technological changes, including screen time and urban lifestyles (Larson et al., 2019). Polish outdoor education remains unevenly implemented, facing institutional and practical barriers (Parczewska, 2019). Recent developments, including forest education and forest kindergartens (Łoboda, 2023; Szlauzys, 2019), increasingly draw on non-anthropocentric pedagogy, questioning conventional human–non-human relationships in education (Chutorański, 2020, 2022).

Outdoor education can be examined through animal studies, particularly in relation to farmed animals. Although non-anthropocentric and more-than-human perspectives are increasingly discussed, their application to farmed animals remains limited (Lloro-Bidart & Banschbach, 2019; Pedersen, 2010). This study draws on Albrecht's concept of the *Symbiocene*, emphasizing interdependence, mutuality, and the flourishing of diverse forms of life (Albrecht, 2016, 2019). Symbiocentrism shifts attention from human interests towards mutually sustaining relationships among humans, other animals, and ecological systems, complementing biocentric, ecocentric, posthumanist, and non-anthropocentric perspectives and providing an interpretive framework for examining representations of farmed animals.

This article examines how farmed animals and human–farmed animal relationships are represented in online materials of educational farms in Greater Poland affiliated with the National Network of Educational Farms (Ogólnopolska Sieć Zagród Edukacyjnych, OSZE). In Poland, these farms offer educational programmes involving agricultural practices and farmed animals providing an important context for such experiences (Marcysiak et al., 2023; Marcysiak, 2024). The study addresses two research questions: (1) how farmed animals are represented and (2) what types of human–animal relationships are represented in these materials. The constructivist perspective informs understanding of learning and meaning-making, while animal studies and symbiocentrism provide the basis for interpreting findings and their pedagogical implications. The study combines outdoor education and animal studies to examine farmed animals and educational farms as spaces where pedagogical, relational, and production-oriented logics intersect.

Methodology

Methods and materials

A qualitative and quantitative content analysis was conducted on publicly available materials concerning 18 educational farms in Greater Poland belonging to the OSZE. One initially identified farm was excluded because no farmed animals were represented in the available materials. The corpus comprised farm descriptions, educational programme descriptions, and lesson plans or scenarios available on the OSZE website <https://www.zagrodyedukacyjne.pl>. The materials were collected in February 2026. The unit of analysis was the complete set of materials concerning each farm, while individual statements, activity descriptions, and other meaningful content segments constituted the coding units. The analysis combined qualitative interpretation with quantitative assessment of category frequencies.

The categorization framework was developed iteratively, combining deductive and inductive approaches. It was initially informed by relevant subject literature and refined through an initial examination of the empirical material. The framework was subsequently adapted to the specific characteristics of educational farm materials.

The analysis comprised two dimensions: (1) representations of farmed animals and (2) human–farmed animal relationships.

The first included animal functions, language, species representation, and references to animal products and production. Animal functions were coded as *educational*, *productive*, *therapeutic*, or *recreational*. Species representation distinguished conventional livestock species in the Polish agricultural context from less conventionally represented species in contemporary educational-farm settings. References to production included explicit or implicit descriptions of obtaining animal-derived products and references to animal use, production, and slaughter. Language was categorized as *objectifying*, *anthropomorphizing*, *emotional*, or *neutral*. Objectifying language framed animals as resources, products, instruments, attractions, or means of achieving human goals; anthropomorphizing language attributed specifically human characteristics, intentions, emotions, or roles; emotional language expressed affection, attachment, sympathy, or tenderness; and neutral language remained descriptive or informational.

The second dimension concerned human–farmed animal relationships, categorized as *educational* (animals as elements of learning), *care-oriented* (emphasis on animals' care and wellbeing), *partnership-based* (mutual engagement and recognition of animals as active participants), or *utilitarian* (animals presented in terms of human use or benefit). Human positioning was categorized as *dominant* (control), *paternalistic* (protection combined with human authority), or *egalitarian* (greater mutuality and recognition of animal agency). Interactions included observing, feeding, petting,

care, walking, playing, riding, production, purchasing or consuming animal products, and animal-assisted activities.

Categories were not necessarily mutually exclusive; multiple codes were assigned where segments contained more than one feature. The framework was operationalized before coding and applied to all materials from the 18 farms by one researcher.

Limitations

The study has three main limitations. First, publicly available OSZE materials capture representations rather than actual practices or experiences. Second, the 18-farm sample was not statistically representative; frequencies should therefore be interpreted descriptively. Finally, single-researcher coding precluded assessment of inter-rater reliability and may involve interpretive bias.

Results

The analysis of 18 educational farms' online communication in Greater Poland reveals recurring patterns in representations of farmed animals and human–farmed animal relationships. Most farms are rural ($n = 17$), targeting primarily preschool and early school-aged children ($n = 18$), with substantial inclusion of adolescents ($n = 14$), adults ($n = 14$), and groups with special needs ($n = 9$). Animals fall into two main groups: traditionally farmed species (cows, pigs, chickens, ducks, geese, horses, etc.) and less conventionally represented in contemporary farm settings (e.g., alpacas and miniature goats; $n = 3$). All analyzed farms had farmed animals, though some species were unspecified or inconsistent across program descriptions.

Functionally, animals serve educational roles universally ($n = 18$), alongside production-related ($n = 14$) and recreational functions ($n = 14$). Therapeutic roles are present in the majority of farms ($n = 10$). Correspondingly, human–farmed animal relationships are mainly educational ($n = 18$) and utilitarian ($n = 16$), with care-oriented ($n = 8$) and partnership-based ($n = 2$) relations being less frequent. Humans are consistently positioned as dominant actors ($n = 18$), while some farms ($n = 10$) incorporate elements of paternalistic care, egalitarian positioning was not identified.

Linguistic analysis shows neutral language is used across all farms, but objectifying ($n = 13$), emotional ($n = 10$), and anthropomorphizing expressions ($n = 6$) also appear. In six cases ($n = 6$), animals are explicitly described as *teaching aids*, underscoring their instrumental role within learning. Human–farm animal interactions identified in the analyzed materials are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. *Types of Activities Regarding Farmed Animals in Educational Farms in Greater Poland*

Type of activity	n
Observing	16
Feeding	9
Petting/hugging	7
Horse/pony-riding	6
Animal-assisted therapy	6
Participation in production of animal products	5
Possibility to purchase animal products produced on the farm	4
Cleaning and basic animal care	3
Walk with animals	3
Tasting animal products	2
Milking	2
Egg collection	1

Source: *Own materials.*

Regarding engagement with production, explicit references to slaughter appeared in only one case (n = 1), while indirect production-related activities and references to animal-derived products were more common.

Educational, emotional, and utilitarian framings frequently coexisted within the analyzed materials.

Discussion

Outdoor Education Through the Lens of Animal Studies as an Answer to Contemporary Challenges

The findings from the analysis of educational farms can be considered in the broader context of contemporary human–nature and human–animal relations. Around 83 billion land animals were slaughtered for meat worldwide in 2022 (Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, 2024). Humans together with farmed animals now constitute 95% of mammalian biomass (Ritchie & Spooner, 2025). Despite their environmental impacts, animal products provide only 18% of global

calories (Poore & Nemecek, 2018), while contributing substantially to greenhouse gas emissions and environmental degradation (Benton & Bailey, 2019; O'Mara, 2011). These trends highlight tensions between current food systems and sustainability goals (UNESCO, 2020).

The present findings indicate that educational, affective, care-oriented, and utilitarian representations coexist in educational farm materials, consistent with research highlighting human-centred perspectives in different educational contexts (Chutorański, 2020; Michalak & Parczewska, 2019). The coexistence of care-oriented and instrumental representations also reflects the *entangled* nature of human–animal relations described by Haraway (2003) and Braidotti (2013). The limited visibility of slaughter and animal death, alongside more frequent references to production-related activities, is noteworthy. While this absence does not demonstrate that death is deliberately concealed, it indicates that the life cycle of farmed animals is referred to selectively, with production and animal-derived products more visible than slaughter or death.

At the same time, frequent direct interactions with animals indicate the educational potential of these settings (Mann et al., 2022). Research suggests that children's developing understanding of farmed animals may provide opportunities for educational engagement with questions of animal use and moral consideration (McGuire et al., 2023), while direct contact with farm animals may support empathy and concern for their welfare (Burich & Williams, 2020). The limited emphasis on animal individuality identified in the present materials may indicate an area for further pedagogical development (Rabinovitch et al., 2024). From an animal-studies perspective, these findings raise the question of whether outdoor education can extend beyond contact with animals towards reflection on the different roles and meanings assigned to them within human societies.

The distinction between conventional and less conventional species, such as alpacas and miniature goats, warrants attention. Their presence may reflect recreational, therapeutic, and commercial uses rather than a shift away from utilitarian relations. Thus, species novelty does not necessarily imply less instrumental representation.

Educational Values and Risks of Contact With Farmed Animals in Outdoor Learning

Direct contact with farmed animals can support hands-on learning, practical knowledge, and engagement with animals and agricultural processes, particularly for children with limited previous experience of farmed animals (Marcysiak, 2024; Veen et al., 2023). Educational farms may also provide alternative learning environments for neurodivergent children, school dropouts, and children experiencing difficulties in conventional educational settings (Hassink et al., 2020; Rich et al., 2023;

Veen et al., 2023), while outdoor activities can support collaborative learning and peer relationships (Andrzejewska, 2020).

At the same time, contact with animals requires careful pedagogical and organisational planning, including consideration of safety, logistics, seasonal and behavioural variability, and access to structured materials (Michalak & Parczewska, 2022). The educational value of contact depends not only on the presence of animals, but also on how encounters are structured and interpreted. Anthropomorphizing may have both potentially beneficial and problematic consequences: while some forms may influence attitudes towards animal consumption (Mishra & Mehta, 2023), they may also obscure animals' specificity, agency, and intrinsic value (Kozłowska & Czapla, 2023). A reflexive approach should therefore combine direct engagement with attention to animals' needs, agency, and the diverse meanings of human–animal relationships.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are theoretically informed propositions rather than direct empirical conclusions from the content analysis, intended as directions for pedagogical reflection and future research. One possible direction is the inclusion of farmed animal sanctuaries, which provide care for animals outside productive systems, potentially creating opportunities to engage with farmed animals as individuals whose agency and relational value can be recognised (Donaldson & Kymlicka, 2015; Blattner et al., 2020), as complementary educational spaces. From a symbiocentric perspective, such spaces may offer opportunities to foreground interdependence and relationality beyond animals' productive functions (Albrecht, 2016; Bała et al., 2024). Although empirical research on sanctuary-based education remains limited, studies in primate sanctuaries suggest potential educational value (Feliu et al., 2023). Further research could compare educational farms and farmed animal sanctuaries in terms of their educational practices, representations of animals, and participants' learning and attitudes.

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Childhood Between Nature and Culture: Discourses, Tensions, and Curriculum Reform

Dzieciństwo między naturą i kulturą. Dyskursy, napięcia
i reforma podstawy programowej

KEYWORDS

education, nature,
posthumanism,
childhood

ABSTRACT

This article examines how the nature-culture dichotomy, present in the social sciences since the Romantic era, influences discourses on childhood and early childhood education, with reference to the new Polish core curriculum valid from September 2026. The construct of the child's relationship with nature is deeply rooted in Romantic philosophy, according to which the child possesses a special bond with nature that adults functioning within Western civilization do not. This philosophy continues to influence how childhood is constructed today, which is a source of tension due to civilizational discourses that assume a child's transition from the stage of an uncivilized savage (connected to nature) to that of an adult who adheres to cultural norms. An additional factor complicating this relationship is the increasingly rare exposure of children to nature, around which narratives full of fears and anxieties have emerged. By highlighting the interrelated discourses underlying contemporary early childhood education, this article focuses on presenting the tensions between them and recognizing the need to consider a posthumanist perspective, grounded in a specific context, which allows for critical review of nature related education.

SŁOWA KLUCZE ABSTRAKT

edukacja, natura,
posthumanizm,
dzieciństwo

Niniejszy artykuł przedstawia, jak dychotomia natura–kultura obecna w naukach społecznych od czasów romantycznych wpływa na dyskursy dotyczące dzieciństwa i edukacji przedszkolnej ze szczególnym uwzględnieniem nowej podstawy programowej obowiązującej od września 2026 r. Konstrukcja relacji dziecka z naturą jest silnie zakorzeniona w filozofii romantycznej, według której posiada ono z nią specjalną więź niewystępującą u dorosłego funkcjonującego w cywilizacji zachodniej. Filozofia ta wpływa do dziś na to, jak konstruowane jest dzieciństwo, co jest źródłem napięć ze względu na dyskursy cywilizacyjne, których założeniem jest przejście dziecka od stadium nieokrzęsanego dzikusa (związanego z naturą) do stadium dorosłego, który realizuje normy kulturowe. Dodatkowym elementem problematyzującym tę relację jest coraz rzadsze przebywanie dzieci w naturze, dookoła którego powstały narracje pełne obaw i lęków. Wskazując na powiązane ze sobą dyskursy leżące u podstaw współczesnej edukacji wczesnoszkolnej, artykuł skupia się na przedstawieniu napięć występujących między nimi oraz zauważeniu potrzeby uwzględnienia posthumanistycznej perspektywy, która pozwala na krytyczne spojrzenie na dyskursy edukacji o naturze.

Introduction

The recent reform of the Polish preschool core curriculum places renewed emphasis on children's engagement with the natural environment. These changes revive a long-standing debate in educational theory concerning the relationship between nature and culture and their role in shaping childhood. While contemporary educational policy increasingly promotes outdoor learning and contact with nature, it simultaneously continues to frame early childhood education as a process of preparing children for participation in society. This creates tension between two influential discourses: one portraying the children as a naturally biophilic being with an inherent bond with the nature, and another emphasizing the need for civilization and formal education to prepare them to enter society and become competent social actors.

The aim of this article is to examine how the classical nature-culture dichotomy is reproduced in the new Polish preschool core curriculum and to identify the tensions between different constructions of relations with nature in childhood through a qualitative analysis of curriculum documents.

The fundamental child–nature connection, rooted in romantic educational philosophies, has long been regarded as both indisputable and essential. Rousseau's (1762/1933) treatise, *Émile, or On Education*, established nature as an ideal educator

capable of preserving children's innate goodness through learning beyond formal schooling. The opening statement of his educational manifesto: "Everything is good as it leaves the hands of the Author of things; everything degenerates in the hands of man" (Rousseau, 1933, p. 5), encapsulates the enduring and radical opposition between nature and culture that still shapes educational discourses. At the same time, this tradition positions education as a process of negotiating the tension between children's presumed natural innocence and the demands of socialization – a tension that remains visible in contemporary curriculum reforms.

The new Polish preschool core curriculum signals a shift from previous iterations. Rather than emphasising narrowly defined skills, the revised framework privileges a graduate profile grounded in values, personal dispositions, and holistic developmental outcomes. Within this framework, children's agency, wellbeing, and selfdevelopment take precedence over the acquisition of specific competencies traditionally tied to readiness for the next formal educational stage, such as literacy. Against this backdrop, the subsequent section examines how this systemic reorientation reshapes the constructed relationship between the child and nature, interacting with the broader discursive formations established above.

Biophilic Childhood

Rousseau (1762/1933) was among the first to articulate a conceptual linkage of an *essentially good child* with *essentially good nature*. In his view, nature functions as the ideal teacher, uncorrupted by the moral decay associated with civilization. This nature-culture opposition simultaneously establishes a moral dichotomy between good and bad, positioning child alongside nature as morally privileged.

Taylor (2013) demonstrates that contemporary research frequently reproduces the assumption of an innate bond between children and nature. This perspective was popularized by Louv's (2016) *Last Child in the Woods*, which stimulated debate on restoring children's contact with nature. Empirical studies have documented numerous developmental benefits of outdoor education (Chawla, 2015; Kiviranta et al., 2024), while Adams and Savahl's (2017) review show that nature is predominantly conceptualized as children's space, reinforcing the taken-for-granted assumption of childhood as inherently biophilic.

Recent posthumanist perspectives on nature shift the attention from essentialised categories to relations between humans and the more-than-human world (Kamińska, 2023; Taylor et al., 2012). The human is no longer positioned at the epistemic centre, instead the pedagogical focus shifts toward the relational networks between human beings and their environment. As the recently implemented Polish preschool

curriculum places renewed emphasis on outdoor education and children's engagement with the natural environment, a posthumanist perspective provides a useful analytical framework for examining these changes.

The dominant construction of nature as the opposite of culture reinforces the image of childhood as an inherently biophilic state, while adulthood becomes associated with culture, rationality, and civilization (Jenkins, 2008). At the same time, educational thought as Taylor (2013) notes, shifted from learning *in* or from nature to learning *about* nature, reflecting a broader epistemological transition from experiential immersion to analytical understanding. Although these approaches differ, both continue to shape contemporary educational discourses and are reflected in current curriculum reforms.

From "Wild Child" to Civilised Pupil in Early Education

Several scholars (Fallace, 2015; Saminaden et al., 2010; Taylor, 2011) have demonstrated that historical discourses on childhood and "savages" share important similarities, particularly in their relationship to nature. Both groups were historically constructed as having an inherently good and privileged relationship with nature, while simultaneously being perceived as "not fully human": simple, primitive, carefree, and undisciplined. Within this framework, both children and "savages" were understood as requiring education and discipline to conform to social expectations. Within developmental discourses, childhood is commonly understood as a state of "becoming" rather than "being" (Corsaro, 2018). The child is therefore positioned as an unfinished subject whose successful transition into adulthood depends upon processes of education, socialization, and civilization. This developmental model closely parallels colonial narratives in which the "savage" was likewise represented as requiring civilization before being recognised as fully human.

Consequently, the metaphor of a "wild child" portrays childhood as a developmental stage requiring education and socialization before entry into adult society, closely paralleling colonial narratives of "civilizing" so-called savage populations (Fallace, 2015; Saminaden et al., 2010). This dual perception – nature as both wild and noble – may lead to considerable tension and anxiety in a world of multiple expert discourses. These discourses highlight, on the one hand, the need to restore children's contact with nature (Louv, 2016), and on the other, they continue to prioritise educational models centred on measurable competencies and school readiness. These historically rooted constructions provide the analytical framework for examining how the new Polish preschool curriculum reproduces, negotiates, or reconfigures these competing understandings of childhood and nature.

New Curriculum and Nature

Methodology

To identify how the relation between child and nature is constructed in preschool education, a qualitative discourse-oriented content analysis (Schreier, 2012) of curriculum documents was conducted. The analysis focuses on how institutional discourses shape the child-nature relationship and how this relationship is embedded within policy frameworks.

The corpus of the analysis includes two documents containing the core curriculum for preschool education, namely:

1. The Regulation of the Minister of National Education of February 14, 2015 (Rozporządzenie..., 2017).
2. The Regulation of the Minister of Education of March 11, 2026 (Rozporządzenie..., 2026).

The first document will remain in force until September 2026, while the second is scheduled for implementation from September 2026. This selection enables a comparative content analysis of how the institutional vision of the child-nature relationship evolves over time. The analysis examines selected learning outcomes, thematic domains, and regulatory provisions, focusing on dimensions such as the character of the child–nature relationship, institutional orientations towards the natural environment, and underlying conceptualisations of nature (e.g., anthropocentric and ecocentric framings), as well as forms of children’s direct engagement with the natural world. Rather than treating curriculum content as neutral descriptions of educational aims, the documents are approached as discursive artefacts that reproduce broader social, cultural, and historical narratives concerning nature–culture relations.

Consequences of the Construct of “Nature Deficit Disorder”

The competencies expected of children after finishing the preschool stage of education are organized into three categories: fundamental, cross-sectional, and agency-related. Among the fundamental ones – alongside mathematical, digital, and linguistic skills – a newly distinguished area concerns physical development, which emphasises body awareness, motor abilities, and the cultivation of healthy habits. It resonates with broader discourses connecting children’s physical activity to outdoor environments, where movement is perceived as more natural and less constrained. Narratives concerning children’s absence in nature intertwine with a lack of physical activity in

childhood, the rise in the of number of obesity cases (WHO, n.d.) and restricted independent mobility (Brudzińska, 2021; von Benzon, 2018).

Unlike romantic conceptions of childhood, in which outdoor play was assumed to be a natural part of everyday life, children's physical activity is becoming increasingly formalized through organized programs. Consequently, curriculum guidelines now explicitly promote outdoor movement, reflecting concerns over the declining presence of nature in children's lives (Taylor, 2013).

A key change is the introduction of a dedicated "nature domain" within the expected outcomes of preschool education. Unlike the 2017 curriculum, where nature appeared only marginally within cognitive development, the new framework emphasises direct engagement with and care for the natural environment, aligning more closely with romantic conceptualisations of the child-nature relationship and signalling a shift from an Enlightenment-oriented approach towards a more experiential understanding of nature.

In the document from 2017, nature appeared in a single point (no. 18) within the cognitive development domain. The new framework, therefore, marks a clear shift from a narrowly cognitive, terminologybased approach toward a more holistic and experiential understanding of children's encounters with the natural world.

This change reflects both the discourse that positions nature as an inherently child-centred realm, and the growing concerns about the modern world, where the direct engagement with the natural world is increasingly limited, especially for children. These concerns are linked to the transformation of the urban areas, shrinking green spaces (Louv, 2016), and the diminishing autonomy of children's independent outdoor mobility. The curriculum does not simply expand environmental education; it redefines how the nature-child relationship should be.

Research on children's independent mobility (CIM) indicates a decline in children's ability to move freely in their neighbourhoods and engage in unsupervised play (Malone, 2011). This trend is reinforced by media discourses that emphasize the risks and harms while overlooking the benefits, shaping parents' attitudes toward their children's outdoor activities (Bennetts et al., 2023). Growing concerns about safety have also led to intensified risk-management practices in the design of play areas and other child-oriented spaces. Play environments are constructed to ensure continuous adult supervision and minimize risk through standardized and certified materials (Bobik, 2023). As a result, contact with nature is frequently reduced to highly controlled and "civilized" settings: a dedicated corner in the preschool facility (as outlined in the 2026 curriculum) or artificially reproduced elements (e.g. snow brought into the classroom

in a bowl¹). Parental concerns (Brudzińska & Śmieszek-Formela, 2022), teachers' low acceptance of risky play (LeMasters & Vandermaas-Peeler, 2023; Jerebine et al., 2022) contribute to increasingly controlled outdoor environments, limiting opportunities for spontaneous engagement with nature.

A further element of the curriculum, which may generate challenges and tensions within the preschool ecosystem – among parents, teachers, and children – is the newly articulated requirement specifying the minimum amount of time children must spend outside the preschool building. The document mandates at least one hour of outdoor activity per week, with the provision that this requirement does not apply on days when alerts from the Government Security Centre are in effect or during particularly adverse weather conditions (which have been left to individual interpretation). The imposition of a compulsory amount of time spent outdoors, including in varied weather conditions, may provoke resistance and misunderstanding among parents and teachers. Such responses are likely shaped by adults' desire to protect children from exposure to inclement weather and by concerns that time spent outside could be allocated to activities perceived as more “productive” or academically valuable. As a result, what is intended as a developmental or pedagogical measure may instead become a point of negotiation, conflict, or contestation within the preschool community.

Research conducted in the United Kingdom (Parkin et al., 2026) highlights the challenges of accessing nature within institutional spaces: on the one hand, it fosters development and becomes a space of liberation; on the other hand, contact with nature becomes a marker of social distinction – the lack of appropriate shoes or clothing limits the ability to spend time in nature, to which access is theoretically free. There is also a significant pressure to meet standards and curriculum requirements, as well as to demonstrate measurable progress – which, in the case of outdoor education, is more difficult to assess than with traditional tests.

Taken together, these changes illustrate how the new curriculum attempts to reconcile two competing constructions of childhood: the romantic image of the child as naturally connected to nature, and the developmental discourse that continues to frame education as a process of regulation, assessment, and preparation for formal schooling.

1 Example from social media of kindergartens: <https://www.facebook.com/100065051017513/posts/1273299594848396/?rdid=bSVK2gtxToyrg7wi>, <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=1411520550375593> (access: 23.03.2025)

Nature, Childhood, and the Presence of Civilising Narratives

The “physical development area” further contains elements that explicitly refer to direct contact with nature. For instance, point no. 2 emphasises participation in outdoor games. In another area of the document – terms and conditions for implementing the core curriculum – point no. 5 is also about child relation with nature and the “unbreakable human-nature bond”. Such formulations reproduce long-standing discourses about a pure connection with nature made by “savages” (but also children). These overlapping constructions reveal internal contradictions within the curriculum. As Affrica Taylor (2013) observes, these contradictions juxtapose a rational, positivist orientation – centred on the description and scientific study of nature – with a romanticised, primordial connection to nature imagined as inherently noble. During the colonial era, this “noble underdevelopment” served to legitimise interventions that sought to “civilise” non-Western populations; a structurally similar dynamic can be observed in discourses concerning children.

The child’s presumed special bond with nature is simultaneously celebrated and problematized: it is valued as an aspect of innocence yet also construed as a potential obstacle to meeting normative expectations of healthy development or acquiring skills associated with future success (Bieńko, 2021; Brzozowska-Brywczyńska, 2020). Kindergarten schedules are filled with additional activities and only few of them relate to nature encounters, because they are not leading to measurable results. The effects of outdoor education and nature experiences are harder for parents to notice, which may cause concerns about the reasonableness of this form of education, or even its existence in the daily schedule. Despite this, the popularity of outdoor kindergartens and forest education is on the rise (Śliwerski, 2022). According to Brudzińska (2022), outdoor education is inextricably linked to freedom, which requires adults to trust that children possess the necessary skills to cope in a natural environment. Forest kindergartens focus on fostering children’s agency and self-governance in a natural environment, which aligns with the previously described construct of the biophilic child.

Desirable and essential skills are related to writing and reading, not only because they can give a child a better start in the primary school, because they are a sign of civilization process (Rakoczy, 2023). A child is becoming a part of society by using the same written communication as adults and can take advantage of all the knowledge that is secured in that form. If a child spends more time in nature, they will have less time for learning practical and useful skills. That leads to a constant battle between child agency and wellbeing, which in current discourses are related at some point to nature, free play, self-determination, and the need to provide a child with the best start in the adulthood as possible by “moulding” them in the first years of life. This tension,

when situated within a broader analytical frame, reflects the enduring socialscientific dichotomy of nature versus culture – a bifurcation that continues to structure contemporary debates on childhood, development, and pedagogy.

Conclusion

What may seem surprising, even something as obvious as child engagement in nature can be subjected to critical analysis. This article examines how the enduring nature–culture dichotomy continues to shape contemporary understandings of childhood and early education, and how these discursive legacies become embedded in the new preschool curriculum scheduled for implementation in 2026. The analysis demonstrated that neither the concept of childhood nor the meaning of nature is neutral; instead, both are produced through historically layered, often contradictory narratives.

Furthermore, curricular expectations related to outdoor activity expose frictions within the preschool ecosystem. The policy aims to institutionalize children’s presence outdoors, because of the threat of a child’s absence in nature – as parents’ and teachers’ concern about safety, productivity, and adverse weather reveal – demonstrates the persistence of neoliberal logics in which childhood becomes a project requiring optimization and measurable outcomes. In this context, encounters with nature risk being instrumentalized or reduced to tightly controlled, highly mediated activities that limit the very spontaneity and agency the curriculum claims to support. Nature and childhood are both entangled in developmental and colonial discourses which lead to the many tensions and concerns among all actors in the kindergarten ecosystem.

Taken together, these findings underline that educational reforms cannot be understood solely as administrative adjustments; they are cultural artefacts that both reflect and reproduce broader societal narratives that can reinforce existing discourses about the nature of childhood. In practice, this means that teachers will need to reconcile the curriculum’s outdoor requirements with existing schedules, weather-related discretion, and parental expectations of measurable progress, and at the same time bearing responsibility of interpreting ambiguous provisions – such as what counts as “particularly adverse weather” – and safety of the children.

Ultimately, the tension between nature and culture does not merely organize discourses about childhood; it exposes the limits of current educational imaginaries. Moving beyond this binary may allow educators, policymakers, and researchers to envision pedagogies that acknowledge children as coparticipants in multispecies, more-than-human worlds. Such a shift invites a rethinking of childhood not as a project to be optimised, but as a form of life embedded in complex ecological, social, and material relations – a perspective that holds significant promise for the future of early education.

Future research should follow the first year of implementation empirically – through classroom observation or teacher and parent interviews or surveys – to establish whether the curriculum's stated aims of fostering children's agency and connection to nature translate into altered daily practice, or whether they are absorbed into existing routines with little substantive change.

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Autonomy in Outdoor Education: Educators' Perspectives

Autonomia w edukacji outdoorowej. Perspektywa edukatorów

KEYWORDS

outdoor education,
autonomy, Self-
Determination
Theory, qualitative
research, thematic
analysis, youth
development

ABSTRACT

This article explores how autonomy is understood and supported in outdoor education. The aim of the study was to examine educators' perspectives on autonomy and its role in learning processes in outdoor settings. A qualitative research design was employed, using semi-structured interviews with 13 outdoor educators working with children and youth in the United States. The data were analyzed using reflexive thematic analysis. The findings indicate that autonomy in outdoor education is embodied, relational, and context-dependent. It is expressed through direct engagement with environmental challenges, opportunities for choice, and participation in group processes. Educators reported that autonomy enhances intrinsic motivation, self-efficacy, and social development. Outdoor environments were found to support the integration of autonomy, competence, and relatedness, in line with Self-Determination Theory. The study highlights the importance of autonomy-supportive practices, including flexibility, trust-building, and balancing freedom with structure and safety. The results suggest that outdoor education offers a unique context for fostering autonomy as meaningful participation rather than individual independence.

SŁOWA KLUCZE ABSTRAKT

edukacja
outdoorowa,
autonomia, teoria
autodeterminacji,
badania jakościowe,
analiza tematyczna,
rozwój młodzieży

W niniejszym artykule przeanalizowano, w jaki sposób rozumie się i wspiera autonomię w edukacji outdoorowej. Celem badania była analiza podejścia edukatorów do autonomii oraz jej roli w procesach uczenia się w środowisku outdoorowym. Zastosowano metodologię badań jakościowych, opartą na częściowo ustrukturyzowanych wywiadach z 13 edukatorami outdoorowymi pracującymi z dziećmi i młodzieżą w Stanach Zjednoczonych. Dane poddano refleksyjnej analizie tematycznej. Wyniki wskazują, że autonomia w edukacji plenerowej ma charakter praktyczny i relacyjny i zależy od kontekstu. Wyraża się ona poprzez bezpośrednie zmaganie się z wyzwaniami środowiskowymi, możliwości dokonywania wyborów oraz udział w procesach grupowych. Edukatorzy zauważyli, że autonomia wzmacnia wewnętrzną motywację, poczucie własnej skuteczności i rozwój społeczny. Stwierdzono, że środowisko na łonie natury wspiera integrację autonomii, kompetencji i relacji, zgodnie z teorią autodeterminacji. Badanie podkreśla znaczenie praktyk wspierających autonomię, w tym elastyczności, budowania zaufania oraz równoważenia wolności ze strukturą i bezpieczeństwem. Wyniki sugerują, że edukacja na łonie natury oferuje wyjątkowy kontekst do wspierania autonomii jako świadomego uczestnictwa, a nie jedynie indywidualnej niezależności.

Introduction

Autonomy is a key concept in contemporary educational theory, particularly in relation to motivation and student engagement (Szulawski & Szapiro, 2016). Within Self-Determination Theory, autonomy is defined as acting with a sense of volition and psychological ownership, rather than independence from others. Self-Determination Theory (SDT), developed by Edward Deci and Richard Ryan, is a comprehensive theory of motivation explaining human behavior and well-being (Ryan & Deci, 2000). It conceptualizes motivation along a continuum from amotivation, through extrinsic motivation, to intrinsic motivation. Extrinsic motivation varies in the degree of internalization, ranging from external regulation (driven by rewards or punishment) to integrated regulation, where goals align with personal identity (Deci & Ryan, 2013). Intrinsic motivation is driven by curiosity and inherent satisfaction (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Both intrinsic and internalized extrinsic motivation predict higher well-being, engagement, and better outcomes (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

SDT identifies three basic psychological needs: autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Autonomy – central to SDT – refers to the sense of volition and self-determination (Wehmeyer et al., 2017). Competence involves feeling effective, while relatedness concerns belonging and connection. Frustration of these

needs is associated with mental health difficulties, including depression, anxiety, and maladaptive behaviors (Cordeiro et al., 2016; Schrooyen et al., 2021). Autonomy develops throughout childhood and adolescence, supported by cognitive and neurological growth, including executive and metacognitive functions (Wehmeyer et al., 2017). These processes enable reflection, identity formation, and value-based decision-making, making autonomy a key focus in education. However, in many contexts, including Poland, its implementation remains limited (Szulawski & Szapiro, 2016; Lejzerowicz & Galbarczyk, 2020). The topic of motivation in education became urgent in recent years in Poland, where the latest studies, TIMSS 2023 (Dobosz-Leszczynska, 2024) and PISA 2022 (OECD, 2024), showed that despite high academic achievements, students don't like school and don't see the subjects they're studying as useful in future life.

One of the educational approaches that fulfills students' autonomy is Outdoor Education (OE). OE is a form of experiential education that takes place in outdoor environments giving. Experiential Education (EE), as defined by the Association for Experiential Education, is "a philosophy of education that emphasizes learning through direct experience and guided reflection" (Association for Experiential Education, n.d.). Rather than a single method, EE is a philosophical approach grounded in questions about knowledge, reality, values, and social relations. Its foundations can be linked to classical philosophy, including epistemology, metaphysics, ethics, politics, aesthetics, and logic (Crosby, 1981), all of which gain practical expression in EE (Priest & Gass, 2018). The roots of EE date back to Aristotle, who emphasized learning through experience (Arystoteles, 2009), and were further developed by John Dewey (1985), who argued that education should be practical and socially embedded. In the 20th century, the approach evolved through outdoor education (Bąk et al., 2020) and alternative pedagogies such as Montessori and Waldorf (Uhrmacher, 1995), as well as in Poland through Janusz Korczak (1907). A key conceptual model is Kolb's experiential learning cycle, which includes concrete experience, reflection, conceptualization, and application (Kolb, 2014; Priest & Gass, 2018).

Over the past two decades, a growing body of evidence suggests that OE contributes not only to academic learning but also to students' motivation, wellbeing, social competence, and engagement (Becker et al., 2017; Mann et al., 2022).

OE is now applied in education, therapy, and community work, supporting social-emotional learning and community building (Frank, 2004; Gass et al., 2020). Research confirms its effectiveness in improving learning outcomes, motivation, and engagement (Burch et al., 2019; Uyen et al., 2022; Kong, 2021).

Outdoor education provides a distinctive context for supporting autonomy. Learning takes place through direct engagement with the natural environment, physical activity, and social interaction (Priest & Gass, 2018). These conditions create

opportunities for learners to make meaningful decisions, face real challenges, and participate in shared experiences (Schoel et al., 1988).

Although previous studies have documented numerous educational benefits of outdoor learning, considerably less attention has been paid to educators' own understandings of autonomy and the pedagogical practices through which autonomy is intentionally fostered. Most existing studies focus on student outcomes rather than educators' perspectives or the educational processes that underpin autonomy-supportive practice.

Exploring educators' perspectives may provide valuable insight into how autonomy is conceptualised and enacted in outdoor education. Understanding these perspectives may contribute to both theoretical discussions on autonomy-supportive education and the development of educational practice.

This article is based on my Master's research at the University of Warsaw, Faculty of Psychology under the advisement of dr Karolina Małek (Łoskot, 2025). The research explored autonomy in experiential education, and this paper focuses on outdoor education, a branch of experiential education.

Research Questions

Due to the exploratory qualitative design, the study was guided by research questions rather than hypotheses.

My research questions were following: How do educators understand autonomy? What role does student autonomy play? What enables educators to support student autonomy?

Methods and Research Tools

This study employed a qualitative research design grounded in a constructivist paradigm. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with 13 outdoor educators working with children and youth in the United States. Participants were recruited by the author among educators met personally during an internship in the USA. Forty people were identified using snowball sampling, and then those who work with children and youth were selected. Finally, 15 interviews were conducted. The study focused exclusively on educators working with children and adolescents, as the development and expression of autonomy differ across developmental stages. This decision ensured greater coherence of the study sample and allowed for a more focused exploration of autonomy-supportive educational practices. The participants are

listed in Table 1. Interviews were conducted online using Zoom platform in English, recorded, and transcribed. Interview recordings were automatically transcribed using Zoom and subsequently reviewed and manually corrected by the author. Minor discourse markers (e.g., “like”, “you know”) that did not contribute to the meaning of participants’ statements were removed to improve readability while preserving the original meaning of the data. Prior to each interview, participants received information about the purpose of the study and the interview procedure. They provided informed consent for participation, audio recording, anonymized data analysis, and publication of the findings. Participation was voluntary, and all identifying information was removed from the transcripts. Pseudonyms were assigned to all participants to protect their confidentiality. The total duration of the interviews was approximately 11 hours of audio recordings and produced 179 pages of transcript. Thirteen interviews met the inclusion criteria and were included in the final analysis. Data were analyzed using reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2021). The analysis followed six stages: familiarization with the data, coding, theme development, review, definition, and reporting (Braun & Clarke, 2021). Coding was conducted manually using Google Docs. Segments related to educators’ understandings and support of autonomy were initially coded, after which similar codes were iteratively grouped into broader categories. Emerging themes were visually mapped using Miro to facilitate comparison between codes, themes, and supporting quotations. Throughout the analytic process, themes were repeatedly refined to ensure internal coherence and clear distinctions between categories. While the analysis was primarily inductive, it was also informed by Self-Determination Theory as a conceptual framework guiding the interpretation of autonomy.

As reflexive thematic analysis acknowledges the active role of the researcher in knowledge production, the author’s professional experience in experiential education inevitably informed both data collection and interpretation. Throughout the analytic process, continuous reflexive consideration was given to the potential influence of prior assumptions. Emerging interpretations were regularly discussed with the research supervisor to enhance analytic transparency and credibility.

In preparation for the article, the OpenAI model was used for the translations and text editing.

Table 1. *Study Participants*

Pseudonym	Age	Experience in years	Current Role	Context
Alex	50–60	~30	University educator (training EE practitioners)	Large city
Aurora	60–70	~40	SEL specialist in public schools	Large city
Ernie	60–70	~30	School counselor	Large city
Franky	60–70	~45	EE implementation in schools	Large city
Fred	40–50	~30	School psychologist / EE educator	Large city
Freya	30–40	~5	Outdoor education educator	Large city
Helene	20–30	~8	Community environmental educator	Medium-sized city
John	30–40	~10	Outdoor education instructor	Small town
Joseph	60–70	~45	Mental health educator	Large city
Laura	50–60	~23	EE educator in schools	Small town
Leon	30–40	~10	Outdoor education educator	Large city
Rebecca	40–50	~10	Community educator	Medium-sized city
Teodor	60–70	~35	EE implementation in schools	Large city

Results

The analysis identified three main domains: (1) understanding autonomy, (2) outcomes of autonomy, and (3) practices supporting autonomy in outdoor education. These themes emerged through an iterative process of coding, constant comparison across interviews, and repeated refinement of thematic boundaries, consistent with the principles of reflexive thematic analysis.

Table 2 presents the thematic structure generated during the analysis, including the three overarching tareas of the analusis and emerged themes during the research. In this article there's presented the general idea that comes through the themes.

Table 2. *Areas of Analysis and Themes Identified During the Analysis*

<i>Educators’ Understanding of Autonomy</i>	The fact of experiencing The Creation of Meaning Students are like cats Cooperation
Outcomes of Student Autonomy	Commitment “I never knew I could do that” “Climbing a tree is just like the various academic activities you do in class” The “I” in the group
The Implementation of Autonomy by Educators	Being mindful of the student and being flexible “They’ll give me a chance because we have a relationship” A Teacher’s Openness Setting Boundaries “Never forget what it was like to be a child”

Understanding Autonomy in Outdoor Education

Autonomy was primarily understood as embodied and experience-based, emerging through direct engagement with real situations. Educators emphasized that in outdoor education, autonomy cannot be transmitted through instruction but must be personally experienced: “You can’t just tell them what it means – they have to feel it, be in it, especially outside” (Alex). Autonomy was therefore closely linked to action, physical presence, and interaction with the environment. Participants highlighted that meaning is constructed through experience rather than explanation.

A key element of autonomy was freedom of choice, particularly the possibility to decide whether and how to engage in activities. The principle of challenge by choice was described as central: “Idea ‘challenge by choice’ is part of the norm. Participants can decide to observe the experience, be an observer and not engage directly” (Teodor). This approach allowed participants to regulate their level of engagement according to their emotional readiness and individual needs. Importantly, even limited participation was considered valuable: “Sometimes just standing near the group fulfills their daily need for challenge” (John).

Autonomy was also described as situated and bounded, requiring decision-making within specific environmental and social conditions. In physically demanding contexts, participants were encouraged to continuously assess their limits: “They can choose depending on how they feel... when you go up there, you start questioning everything you think about yourself” (Freya).

Another key aspect was the relational nature of autonomy. Decision-making was embedded in group processes: “Out here, it’s never just about you. Your choices affect the group” (Leon). This indicates that autonomy is co-constructed and interdependent rather than purely individual.

Autonomy in outdoor education can therefore be understood as embodied, choice-based, and relational, emerging through direct experience and shaped by both individual readiness and group dynamics.

Outcomes of Autonomy in Outdoor Education

Autonomy was associated with a range of outcomes across motivational, emotional, and social domains. One of the most prominent outcomes was increased intrinsic motivation and engagement: “When they decide how they want to do it, they care more. It’s not something we’re making them do – it’s theirs” (Laura).

Autonomy also contributed to the development of self-efficacy and competence, particularly through overcoming challenges: “They get to the top and suddenly it’s like – ‘I didn’t know I could do that’” (Fred).

Another outcome was initiative and creativity, as participants sometimes reshaped activities: “They completely created their own activity... they took on the challenge of building their own challenge” (Fred).

Autonomy further supported emotional development, including coping with fear and uncertainty, and gradually expanding comfort zones.

A key theme was also transferable learning, where outdoor challenges were interpreted more broadly: “It’s not just climbing – it’s about facing something hard and figuring it out” (Rebecca).

Finally, autonomy contributed to social development, particularly awareness of others: “They learn that their choices matter – not just for them, but for everyone else” (Aurora).

Autonomy in outdoor education thus enhances motivation, competence, and emotional resilience, while also supporting transferable learning and social responsibility within group contexts.

Supporting Autonomy in Outdoor Education Practice

Supporting autonomy required a combination of pedagogical strategies, relational work, and contextual sensitivity. A central aspect was flexibility and responsiveness: “You always have a plan, but outside, you have to be ready to change it” (Helene).

Supporting autonomy also involved stepping back and limiting control: "You have to step back and let it happen" (Alex). At the same time, autonomy was balanced with clear structure and safety boundaries: "They have choices, but within a safe frame" (Franky).

The relationships in giving autonomy are fundamental. First of all, the relationship between educator and student: "If they trust you, they're more willing to try" (Freya). But not only the relationship with students. Also, relationships with other educators. Educators highlighted that supporting autonomy is also a collective process among educators. They emphasized the need for collaboration, shared reflection, and mutual support: "We learn this work from each other... you need other educators to reflect with, to grow" (Rebecca). "I don't think you can do this alone. You need a team that shares the same understanding" (Leon). This indicates that educators require not only individual competence but also access to professional communities to effectively support autonomy in practice.

Supporting autonomy in outdoor education can therefore be understood as a dynamic process that combines flexibility, trust, and structure, while also relying on collaboration between educators and responsiveness to participants' needs.

Discussion

The findings extend previous research on autonomy-supportive teaching by illustrating how educators working in outdoor education conceptualize autonomy not primarily as freedom of choice, but as the opportunity to experience, interpret, and take ownership of meaningful learning processes.

The results are consistent with Self-Determination Theory, which conceptualizes autonomy as experiencing one's actions as self-endorsed rather than externally controlled. Participants' accounts suggest that outdoor education provides conditions in which autonomy is supported through meaningful experiences, reflection, and trusting educator-student relationships rather than through unrestricted freedom.

The aim of this study was to gain a deeper understanding of how educators conceptualized and implemented student autonomy in Outdoor Education practice. The findings show that student autonomy is not a single instructional decision but a complex and dynamic process shaped by relational quality, educational structure, broader social context, and individual learner characteristics.

The present findings complement previous studies demonstrating the motivational benefits of outdoor education by providing qualitative insight into the educational practices through which autonomy is fostered. Rather than focusing solely on learning outcomes, participants described concrete pedagogical strategies that enable students to assume greater ownership of their learning.

In line with Self-Determination Theory (SDT), autonomy cannot be understood in isolation from the basic psychological needs for relatedness and competence. These needs are interdependent and jointly support student development. Children learn to balance independence with social relationships while developing a sense of agency and competence. This interplay was evident in participants' accounts, where autonomy was linked to reflection, which in turn supported relationships. Similarly, competence and relatedness were connected through trust and shared responsibility, enabling learners to take risks and engage in learning.

The study also highlights that OE itself fosters autonomy by enabling learners to construct meaning from their experiences. Participants emphasized that acknowledging learner diversity is essential, and OE offers tools to address this diversity while maintaining group cohesion. The teacher–student relationship in EE is based on cooperation and shared responsibility, requiring educators to reduce control and adopt a more facilitative role. Autonomy was understood as a continuum rather than a binary state, developing gradually within safe boundaries.

Conclusions

The findings have practical implications for teacher education and outdoor education practice. Educators may support students' autonomy by creating opportunities for authentic experience, encouraging reflective dialogue, allowing productive struggle, and adapting learning activities to students' individual needs while maintaining appropriate educational boundaries.

The findings suggest that increasing student autonomy in OE is associated with higher engagement, intrinsic motivation, agency, and self-esteem. Participants also observed reduced stress, deeper learning, and improved transfer of knowledge to real-life contexts.

The study further indicates that EE may be particularly effective for students at risk of social exclusion, as it supports autonomy, relatedness, and competence, fostering both personal and social development. However, these outcomes require strong relational foundations, including trust and cooperation within the group and between educators and learners.

Additionally, professional support, peer collaboration, and the ability to relinquish excessive control emerged as key factors enabling educators to implement autonomy effectively. The results also highlight the need for comprehensive teacher training, as implementing autonomy requires both conceptual understanding and experiential learning.

Overall, the study suggests that OE provides a promising framework for supporting student autonomy and improving educational outcomes, while further quantitative research is needed to confirm its impact.

By exploring educators' perspectives, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of how autonomy is enacted in outdoor education and highlights the pedagogical potential of experiential learning environments for supporting students' motivation, agency, and personal development.

Limitations

The study is limited by a small sample size and its focus on educators from the United States. The findings are based solely on educators' perspectives and do not include the experiences of participants.

Additionally, the researcher's background in outdoor education may have influenced interpretation, despite efforts toward reflexivity.

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Adventure Education as a Way to Strengthen a Child's Mental Resilience

Pedagogika przygody jako forma wzmacniania
odporności psychicznej dziecka

KEYWORDS

adventure education,
outdoor education,
childhood, mental
resilience

ABSTRACT

Various forms of outdoor education proposed by many pedagogists, psychologists and educators are ways to learn through experience in open space, outside the school classes which is. Not only the acquisition of knowledge, but also the development of motor skills, experiencing the capabilities of one's own body, and gaining social experience through shared activities are important aspects of a child's development. Crucial form in this field is also risky play and adventure education with its promoting and therapeutic potential. The aim of the article is to point out the meaning of adventure education for mental health promotion. The basic terms connected with the adventure education will be defined in the article. Moreover the arguments for adventure education role in the building of mental resilience in children will be discussed. The Circle of Courage Model as conceptualization of adventure education meaning in positive growth of children will be presented. Moreover the Sandra Prince-Embury conception of resiliency will be attached to clarify the building of personal resources in children. Education when taking into consideration mental health promotion in children need innovations, getting international and interdisciplinary experiences (ex. history, philosophy) what will be underlined in the article.

SŁOWA KLUCZE ABSTRAKT

pedagogika
przygody, *outdoor*
education,
dzieciństwo,
odporność
psychiczna

Różne formy *outdoor education* są drogą nauki przez doświadczenie poza murami sali szkolnej, w otwartej przestrzeni, proponowaną przez wielu pedagogów, psychologów i nauczycieli. Nie tylko nabywanie wiedzy, ale i rozwijanie sprawności ruchowych, doświadczenie możliwości własnego ciała, jak i zdobywanie doświadczeń społecznych we wspólnych aktywnościach to istotne aspekty rozwoju dziecka. Znaczącym obszarem w zakresie tego nurtu jest również zabawa związana z ryzykiem (*risky play*) oraz edukacja przez przygodę (*adventure education*), która posiada też wymiar profilaktyczny i terapeutyczny. Celem artykułu jest wskazanie znaczenia pedagogiki przygody dla promocji zdrowia psychicznego. W tekście zostaną zdefiniowane podstawowe pojęcia dotyczące wybranych form *outdoor education*. Ponadto omówione będą argumenty wskazujące wagę pedagogiki przygody dla budowania zasobów odporności psychicznej dziecka. Jako model wspierający rozumienie tych relacji zostanie przedstawione koło dzielności – propozycja konceptualizacji znaczenia przygody dla formowania się zasobów osobowych dziecka (*positive growth*). Jako wyjaśnienie procesu budowania odporności psychicznej (*resiliency*) zostanie wskazana propozycja Sandry Prince-Embury. Zarówno edukacja, jak i wspieranie zdrowia psychicznego dzieci wymagają innowacji i czerpania z doświadczeń nie tylko innych dyscyplin (filozofia, historia), ale i z dobrych praktyk międzynarodowych.

Education, Experience and Development in Open Space

Outdoor Education, Experiential Learning, Enviromental Education, Erlebnispädagogik or Adventure Education are terms describing pedagogical suggestions which underly action, learning in exposition to physical, psychological and social challenges (Michl, 2011).¹ Outdoor education as a general term involved the educational classess (biology, history, geography) on the one hand and sport activities (climbing, tramping, camping) on the second hand. Outdoor education is defined as activities for ecology, physical and interpersonal development in children (Koszałka-Silaska, 2019). Contact with nature enables the development and exersices of many functions in more natural circumstances than closed space of the school class. Education in open space brings many profits to young people. Research on effectivity of this educational form show its positive impact on the cognitive development (knowledge), on the social development(cooperation and problem solving in the group) and on the personal development (responsibility, school motivation and self-esteem)

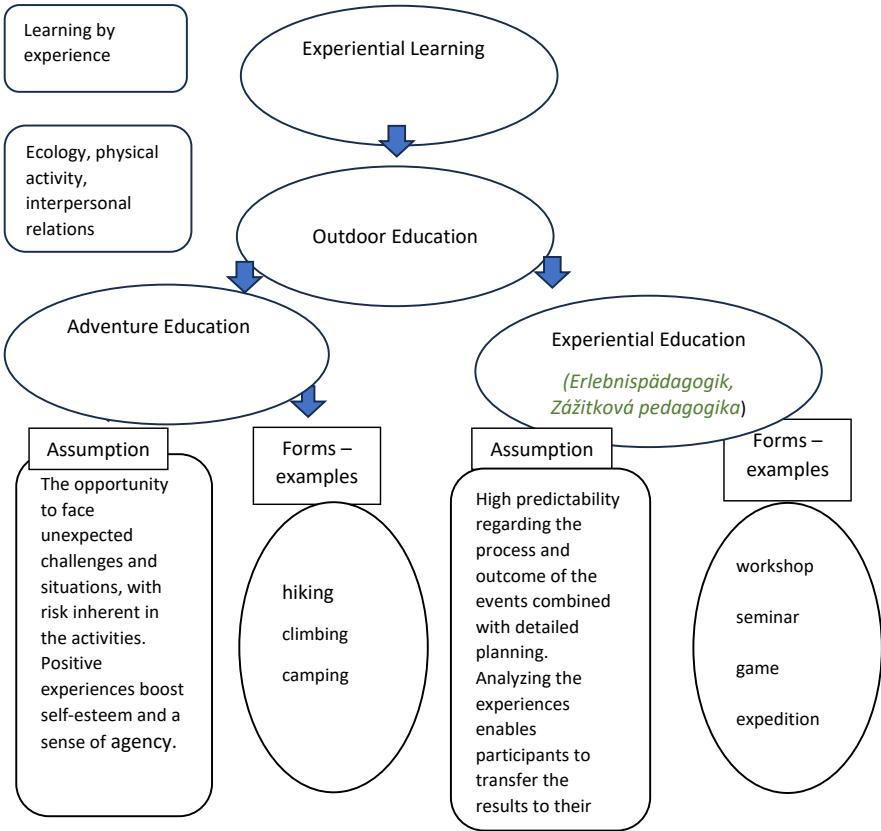
1 Detailed terminological analyses can be found in: Koszałka-Silaska, 2019.

(Michalak & Parczewska, 2022). In the teachers' opinion this form of education presents such advantages as freedom, greater self-efficacy in pupils action, rising their motivation and interest for phenomena in the biological (Parczewska, 2019) and social environment. Nature learning via outdoor education is especially valuable, enables not only knowledge but also acquisition of the health-promoting behavior (Bałachowicz & Tuszyńska, 2015).

Young people education in the natural conditions is promoted by the presumption that children are the part of nature and they find connections with it spontaneously on the natural way (Barratt Hacking et al., 2020). Staying in nature encourages children to ask questions about structure and function of the surrounding world, develops their tendency to explore and to experiment in the environment. International comparisons show, that classes in the open space, outside the school building are very often not included in the school curriculum, but rather undertaken spontaneously by teachers. Summary of research on outdoor education in Australia and Finland show that Finnish teachers are allowed to organize creative outdoor activities near the school more often, whereas Australian experience in this field were connected rather with camps held away from the school (Kokkonen et al., 2026). In turn, the educational philosophy *Come Rain or Shine* in Swedish preschool education illustrates how children acquire knowledge about the world of plants and animals, about nature conservation and about survival skills, by spending time outdoors in all weather conditions (Adamczewski & Nagae, 2022).

For the purposes of this article, I propose a preliminary classification of key concepts relevant to pedagogical activities with children and youth conducted in open space outside the classroom.

Figure 1. *Orientational Concepts – Interdependencies*



Similarity of Goals Between Adventure Education and Experiential Education

- All classes and activities take place in a natural setting, offering opportunities to improve physical fitness (e.g., in a forest environment) and look after one's health, while also allowing one to step away from civilization. Engaging in activities amidst nature fosters reflection.
- Participating in adventures and experiences involves physical activity, improves motor skills and coordination, and fosters familiarity with the surrounding space..
- Participation in the activities impact development of personal competencies (e.g., self-control, a sense of agency, decision-making) and social skills (e.g., cooperation, communication). It benefits participants' mental health by helping them overcome their fears and build greater trust in themselves and the world around them.

(Author's own elaboration based on: Gilbertson et al., 2006; Koszałka-Silska, 2019; Michl, 2011; Palamer-Kabacińska, 2012).

The proposed conceptual systematization is certainly imperfect, yet it represents an attempt undertaken for the purposes of this article. Scholarly debate regarding terminology is ongoing; however, in defense of any potential shortcomings, one might cite the view of Waław Sonelski – a researcher in this field – that the precise definition and differentiation of related concepts (such as outdoor education and adventure education) is, in essence, a pseudo-problem (Leśny, 2014).

In the Polish context, adventure education is considered as a combination of methods drawn from outdoor education, adventure education, and experiential education – all falling within the realm of experiential learning (Palamer-Kabacińska, 2012). So called “Green schools” serve as a Polish example; many of them incorporate elements of adventure education (e.g., tracking games) or experiential education (e.g., integration workshops at the start of the school year). In the Polish context, the juxtaposition of adventure education and Harcerstwo (Polish scouting) holds a significant place. While scout instructors perceive many similarities regarding principles and methods of both pedagogical ideas, a fundamental difference lies in the objectives of the activities: in adventure-based activities, goals may be determined by the group *ad hoc*, whereas in Harcerstwo, they are predefined in accordance with the organization's aims and ideals (Palamer-Kabacińska, 2022).

Because the etymology of “adventure education” is rooted in the word *to venture* – which, among other meanings, signifies “taking a risk” (Kokkonen et al., 2026) – “risky play” could be considered also as a significant form within this field. This activity involving a certain degree of risk is defined as exciting, free play characterized by uncertainty regarding the outcome and the possibility of sustaining physical injury (Sandseter, 2009). Risky play involves climbing, fast movement, the use of dangerous tools, or balancing. It is crucial for children's physical development, self-confidence, mental resilience, and learning to manage risk (Parczewska, 2024). The environment for a child's spontaneous mobility during play, proposed in the model by Marketta Kytä, comprises four patterns.

These are: 1) Cell – a term describing a space where a child finds no opportunities for free, active play due to the prohibitions and restrictions imposed on them. Activity is possible only with the permission of adults. 2) A Wasteland (unused land) is an environment offering few opportunities for active play, providing neither challenges nor encouragement for a child. 3) Bullerby (a noisy village) is a place full of physical challenges that motivate children to engage with them; it is rich in stimuli and exploration opportunities. 4) Glasshouse – a space offering many potentially attractive opportunities for active play, yet inaccessible to the child due to a lack of access (Kytä, 2004). The contrasting concepts of “Bullerby” (the name of the village from Astrid Lindgren's *The Six Bullerby Children*) and “Cell” serve as metaphors for pedagogical approaches illustrating the idea of risky play. The traditional approach favors adult's control and

risk minimization through instructions and prohibitions imposed on children – such as “*I am not allowed to climb trees*”. In contrast, risky play allows the child to make decision and encounter situation involving moderate risk, fostering a sense of agency: “*I can climb branches that aren’t dry and are thicker than my leg*” (Sandseter, 2009, cited in Parczewska, 2024, p. 140). Play involving risk is often considered as potentially dangerous when playground safety standards are discussed. However an element of risk is always present in developmental activities (such as the play of young animals as practice for life skills; Huizinga, 2022). By confrontation with stimulating environmental challenges, a child not only hones their skills but also learns to gauge their own capabilities (Sandseter, 2009).

Adventure education – grounded in the ideas of Plato, Goethe, Rousseau, and the Scouting (regarding youth upbringing) emerged in the 1930s as a concept proposed by the German educator Kurt Hahn (Palamer-Kabacińska, 2012). In this context, adventure is understood as an “unusual, exciting experience with an uncertain outcome, accompanied by a subjective sense of risk” (Brendtro & Strother, 2007, p. 2; author’s translation). The most common forms of activities offered to children include camping, field games, climbing, and hiking. Adventure education is based on the Kolb Model, which describes the principles of experiential learning (Kolb & Kolb, 2022). The cycle comprises four stages:

- Experience (Action): The group participates in an activity, such as an outdoor game or an expedition.
- Reflection (Observation): Participants discuss the events, experiences, emotions, and personal insights with the leader.
- Theory (Conceptualization): Conclusions are drawn based on observations, general principles are formulated, and an understanding of the mechanisms governing group behavior is reached.
- Application (Experiment): Participants test the new knowledge and behavioral strategies in both their daily lives and subsequent adventure activities.

An example of the model’s application is a proposal for outdoor sport activities in youth (Mantorska & Leśny, 2016).

Experiencing challenges and learning to overcome difficulties activate processes that foster healthy personal development (positive growth). The basic premise of adventure education is that facing challenges, engaging in adventures, and overcoming moderate levels of stress have a toughening and strengthening effect (Beightol et al., 2012; Neill & Dias, 2001). Reports on the effects of adventure education demonstrate significant benefits for children and youth in physical, psychological, social, and educational domains (Ewert, 1983; Brendtro & Strother, 2007). The benefits gained by participants could be categorized into those relating to personal development and those concerning social relationships. Firstly, taking on challenges and effectively

managing risks strengthens the sense of agency and self-confidence. Moreover such experience enhances self-awareness, a sense of responsibility, and self-esteem. Secondly, in physical activities, (such as games or camping trips) children improve their motor skills and coordination, overcome personal limitations (such as fatigue or fear), learn problem-solving and when achieving success they foster optimism. Thirdly, through interactions with others, young people acquire skills in cooperation and group leadership, as well as the ability to respect social feedback and the needs of others (Ewert, 1983; Brendtro & Strother, 2007).

Adventure Education and Mental Resilience

Research findings on the developmental outcomes of adventure education highlight its role in building children’s psychological resilience. To illustrate these relationships, the Circle of Courage Model – proposed by the positive psychology to explain the process of developing a child’s individual resources (Brendtro et al., 2005) – will be used. Mental resilience is understood in the model as an individual inner strength that enables one to overcome difficulties and adapt to the challenges. Contemporary preventive interventions based on this model aim to develop the biopsychological mechanisms that serve as a natural resource for coping with stress (Trzebińska, 2008). This American approach integrates insights from three areas regarding child and adolescent development: the child-rearing practices of North American tribal cultures, contemporary findings from developmental psychology, and the expertise of child and adolescent psychotherapists (Brendtro et al., 2005; Neill & Dias, 2001).

Figure 2. *The Circle of Courage*



(Author’s own elaboration based on Brendtro et al., 2005).

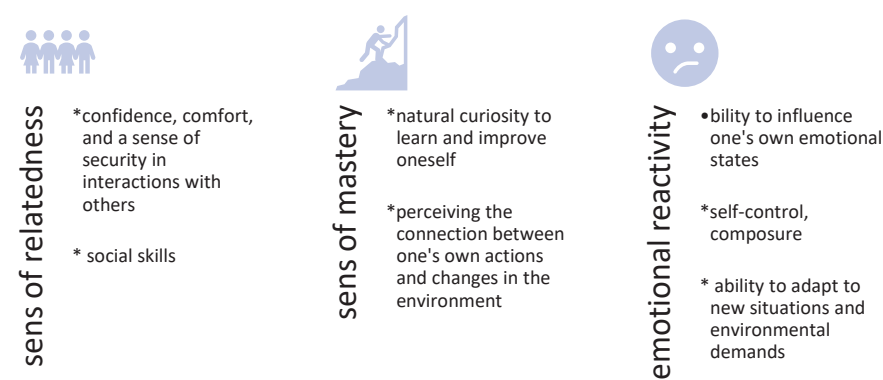
The model presents a circle composed of four quadrants in different colors (red, yellow, black, and white), representing the four human races and the four elements: fire, wind, earth, and water. This figure of The Circle of Courage illustrates the contexts of the biological and social macrosystems in which a child's development unfolds, as well as the more immediate microsystems: family, peer groups, the community, and school (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). A child's inner strength is fostered by meeting universal needs such as belonging, mastery, independence, and generosity (Brendtro et al., 2005; Longhurst et al., 2011). The model's authors posit that when a child's needs are met within their immediate environments it results in personal growth and positive mental health development.

The need for belonging – primary and fundamental to healthy development – involves relationships with others in the family, at preschool, in the neighborhood, or among peers. Being with others, coupled with trust in their support, fosters a sense of security in the world. A connection to one's group serves as a source of inner strength. The next need important for personal growth is **the need for mastery** – striving to be skilled, whether at building with blocks, playing ball, or mastering the multiplication table. The sense of being capable and performing tasks well ultimately builds self-esteem. **The need for independence** becomes clearly evident in a child's development from the age of two. To be autonomous, making one's own decisions and independently carrying out simple actions – is a crucial aspect of a sense of agency and self-reliance. The last element is **generosity** – to share with someone or to help another person. Initial expressions of this might include hugging someone who is crying, bringing one's mother a glass of juice, or helping a classmate with math homework.

All four components of a child's inner strength in The Circle of Courage take on various forms in practice; depending on the stage of development, they become increasingly complex and conscious.

Concepts of mental resilience incorporate aspects described above in the Circle of Courage. A three-component model proposed by Sandy Prince-Embury (2006) can be cited as an example of a model similar in basic ideas to the Circle of Courage. The researcher defines mental resilience as personal resources that facilitate adaptation to challenges and difficulties (Grzegorzewska, 2013). The author analyzes resilience in the face of stress and adversities, highlighting the factors that help a child overcome them: a sense of belonging, competence, and the ability to regulate one's own emotions. Here, resilience is understood in a multifaceted way, comprising three groups of personal (within-child) competencies that are crucial for adaptation in stressful situations.

Figure 3. *Three-Factor Model of Resilience*



(Author’s own elaboration based on: Prince-Embury, 2006).

A **sense of relatedness** encompasses a set of social skills regarding how one experiences social interactions and acts within them. Central to this concept are comfort and a sense of well-being in dealings with others. A sense of relatedness stems from a child’s experiences of receiving support and care from loved ones, as well as the confidence that help is available; over the course of a lifetime, it evolves into the capacity to support others in need (Prince-Embury, 2006). A **sense of mastery** is the drive to increasingly master a skill – the effort to perform a task better and better. It is rooted in a child’s expectation that their actions yield results, as well as a sense of competence and effectiveness. A high level of mastery suggests the child will adapt well to stressful situations during late childhood; it is also associated with good behavioral control and academic achievement (Grzegorzewska, 2013). **Emotional reactivity** is understood as an indicator of the tendency to become overly aroused in stressful situations, low frustration tolerance, and the potential for behavioral problems (Rothbart & Derryberry, 1981, cited in Grzegorzewska, 2013). This factor falls within the scope of self-regulation, which develops with age, in the process of socialization. A key aspect here is respecting environmental demands and the needs of others. Psychological well-being is associated with a low level of reactivity combined with the ability to modulate emotional states (e.g. calming down, relaxation).

The aspects presented in both model (which are crucial for developing a child’s sense of competence and mental resilience) can also be found in the practice of adventure education (Table 1).

Table 1. *Personal Resources Developed in the Child*

Circle of Courage (Main factors)	Mental resiliency (Main factors)	Adventure education (Action examples)
Belonging	Sense of Relatedness	Group activity with outcome dependent on cooperation (e.g., a joint treasure hunt or pitching a tent).
Mastery	Sense of Mastery	Getting accustomed to a new form of movement (e.g., jumping, climbing), refining skills, and practicing through engaging games and activities.
Independence		The opportunity to undertake increasingly challenging activities, becoming accustomed to controlled risk, and the ability to independently assess one's own capabilities.
Generosity	Sense of Relatedness	Cooperation, a friendly group atmosphere, and giving and receiving help (e.g., assistance in crossing a stream).
	Emotional Reactivity	Engaging game and cooperation with others help temper excessive emotional arousal (e.g., „we need to move this branch together, calmly”), while observational learning occurs through the example set by peers (“ I see friends aren't getting agitated. It encourages me to calm down as well”).

(Author's own elaboration based on: Brendtro et al., 2005; Longhurst et al., 2011; Prince-Embury, 2006).

The factors cited in both models bear similar or identical names and define comparable competencies. Educational activities promoting their development can be found in many forms of adventure education.

Development of Mental Resilience – Mechanisms

To explain the principle of “*the personal growth through challenges*,” one can draw a parallel with the immunizing effect of a vaccine. This concept posits that experiencing adventures and challenges, as well as confronting moderate levels of stress, serves to build resilience (Brendtro & Strother, 2007).

In this interpretation, it is important to understand the phenomenon of stress and its types: distress is the experience of unpleasant emotions (such as fear or terror),

whereas eustress is positive arousal (excitement and curiosity). Naturally, taking risk entails an uncertain outcome, so the frustration associated with failure can give rise to negative emotions. However, adventure education also offers exposure to eustress and challenges that do not place an excessive burden on the young person. The educational and developmental function lies not only in experiencing an exciting adventure but, above all, in internalizing the lesson that a problem can be solved and a difficulty overcome. Such situations, associated with success, lay the foundation for how young people will cope with challenges in the future. Embarking on adventures and facing challenges also fosters a sense of closeness with peers and provides group support. Thus, successfully meeting a challenge boosts self-confidence and a sense of personal agency.

The challenge model (Garmezy et al., 1984) is the another argument supporting the idea that confronting adversity fosters mental resilience. According to this perspective, a moderate level of risk experienced by a child enables the development of a coping repertoire for the future. Learning to overcome adversities from childhood makes it easier to cope with future challenges later in life. When confronting a child with difficulties, it is important to strike the right balance. Overprotectiveness in adults can result in a child having no exposure to risky situations, thereby depriving them of the opportunity to practice overcoming obstacles and dealing with frustration. Conversely, a lack of care and attention from adults can lead to the child becoming overwhelmed and disturbed in development.

Pointing out the significance of a child's confrontation to situation of moderate risk, researchers identify areas impacted (with the potential for development) These undoubtedly include social competence, a sense of agency, self-regulation skills, and optimism – attributes regarded as buffers against the development of psychopathology and as important protective factors for mental health (Grotberg, 2000; Prince-Embury, 2006; Sikorska, 2016). The development of these factors is stimulated by environmental conditions and the educational situations created for the child. Open spaces, risky play, and adventure-based education all provide favorable conditions for practicing the skills needed to cope with unusual challenges or unexpected situations. Educational approaches that offer non-standard forms of learning (open space, physical activity, and the child's own direct experience) are increasingly becoming popular alternatives in both upbringing (e.g., forest kindergartens) and schooling (e.g., Waldorf kindergarten and school). According to some contemporary studies, open space and outdoor activities are often perceived as less comfortable (or even threatening) by young people who prefer activities in the virtual world (Michaelson et al., 2020, cited in Michalak & Parczewska, 2022). Thus, for some, outdoor education can serve as a bridge between the enclosed space of the classroom or the safety of a child's room and the social world and natural environment. In the real world alongside potential

dangers, fascinating experiences and pleasant moments await, thereby playing a protective role for the well-being of children who spend their time in the virtual world.

Summary

Supporting children in their development offers the opportunity to invite them to engage in activities that foster their all-round growth. Exposure to controlled risk – such as risky play or adventure education – can be effective, when some principles are taken into consideration: 1) tasks for children and young people should relate to real-life situations so that the solutions can be replicated independently later, 2) learning must be tailored to the child's physical, social, and cultural needs, 3) within the group, efforts should be made to foster empathy, which alleviates the stress experienced by children; 4) a positive atmosphere in the group develops children's communication and social skills (Hopkins, 1985). In addition to play-based activities, discussing them is also important. Reflection on one's own actions and emotions is what links adventure education (Hopkins, 1985) with experiential education (Koszalka-Silska, 2019).

Discussing past experience and how difficulties were overcome with children should serve as a comparison or metaphor for the changes and challenges they may face in the future. (e.g., 1. *If I was afraid to jump across the stream but succeeded on the fourth try, maybe I'll try to make up with Tomek again. It might just work.* 2. *I didn't have the strength to carry my backpack anymore. Marek helped me. There is always someone to help.*)

A comparison of basic principles and goals of various culturally and historically diverse pedagogical approaches reveals certain shared aspirations among adults regarding a child's development. The desire to foster independence, self-confidence, and the hope of successfully overcoming everyday challenges is evident both in the child-rearing practices of North American Indians and in the approaches of educators and therapists working with young people in the twenty-first century. The similarity between the premises of the Circle of Courage, the 3-Factor Model of mental resilience, and the goals of adventure education may serve as evidence of this.

Due to its significant preventive and therapeutic potential, adventure education is also used as a way of supporting the mental health of children and adolescents. Adventure therapy is an eclectic approach that incorporates elements of cognitive-behavioral, systemic, existential, and psychodynamic therapies. This therapy offers adventure-based activities to young people and adults – including those with behavioral and emotional disorders, addicted and those at risk of maladjustment – enabling them to experience situations that lead to positive changes in their lives (Bowen & Neill, 2013). Examples of adventure therapy include a Canadian wilderness summer camp

for youth with cancer, supervised by therapists (Epstein, 2004); a series of full-day excursions featuring a climbing course as part of an American anti-bullying program (Beightol et al., 2012); and Wilderness Adventure Therapy (WAT) (Crisp & Hinch, 2004) for children with emotional and behavioral disorders, eating disorders, and anxiety disorders, as well as those dealing with bereavement and post-traumatic stress disorder (Bettmann et al., 2016). Scout camps were used for therapeutic purposes by the Institute of Pediatrics at the Medical Academy in Kraków to treat children with psychosomatic disorders coming from alcohol affected families. A reduction in psychosomatic symptoms (such as bedwetting, stuttering, and tics), improved well-being, and increased resilience and stress tolerance were observed among the young participants (Dropowa et al., 1988). The “Soar Higher” project, addressed to residents of the St. Brother Albert Youth Socioterapy Center in Szczecin, encompassed integration and therapeutic activities as well as outdoor pursuits such as water sports and climbing. The project resulted in enhanced social competencies among participants (including cooperation, team leadership, the conscious building and maintenance of relationships, and helping others) as well as individual growth (the ability to discuss one's own emotions and difficulties, resolve conflicts, and develop creative thinking) (Łubkowska et al., 2014). The effectiveness of adventure therapy has been examined internationally in several meta-analyses. These studies confirmed a reduction in the severity of clinical symptoms, an increase in social skills, and improved well-being among participants.²

Conclusions:

1. Exposing a child to a situation involving a low, controlled level of risk can serve to strengthen important personal resources (such as social competence, a sense of agency, and self-regulation skills) that are vital for overcoming difficulties. It fosters the development of psychological resilience including a sense of belonging, competence, and emotional control (Prince-Embury, 2006).
2. The engaging and challenging situations of adventure education can encourage children to exert effort and overcome their weaknesses, while also fostering courage and strengthening their mental resilience. Incorporating elements of risky play and adventure education into preschool and school curricula will certainly help build children's inner strength.
3. Successfully handling a less demanding situation builds resilience and prepares one to face higher levels of risk. In the face of modern-day challenges, attempting to resolve difficult situations – rather than giving up – is crucial for the mental health of children and young people.

2 Chosen metaanalyses in Sikorska, 2017.

4. Successfully meeting a challenge brings joy, boosts self-esteem, and instills hope that future stressors can also be overcome. The positive emotions of pride or relief following success alleviate the discomfort experienced earlier (such as anxiety about the outcome). The benefits gained through nature-based activities and sports can transfer to family or school situations for children and young people.

Adventure education is certainly an attractive and effective approach, not only for stimulating the development of mental resilience in children and young people, but also for strengthening or rebuilding that resilience when needed.

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Outdoor Education and Emotions in Second Language Learning

Edukacja outdoorowa a emocje w nauce drugiego języka

KEYWORDS

foreign language anxiety, foreign language enjoyment, flow, outdoor education, positive psychology in SLA

ABSTRACT

This paper examines outdoor language learning as an emotionally complex and pedagogically conditional environment for second and foreign language education. It argues that learning beyond the classroom should not be understood merely as a spatial relocation of instruction, but as a didactic situation shaped by the interaction between task design, learner readiness, spatial context, social exposure, and communicative safety. Drawing on experiential pedagogy, place-based education, environmental psychology, research on emotions in second language acquisition, flow theory, and task-based language teaching, the paper discusses the potential of field-based communicative tasks to support lexical, pragmatic, interactional, cultural, social, and mediation competences. At the same time, it emphasizes that outdoor learning environments are not inherently positive or motivating for all learners. Natural and social spaces may foster curiosity, agency, enjoyment, and willingness to communicate, but they may also generate anxiety, discomfort, uncertainty, or avoidance.

SŁOWA KLUCZE ABSTRAKT

lęk językowy,
przyjemność z nauki
języka obcego, *flow*,
outdoor education,
psychologia
pozytywna

Niniejszy artykuł analizuje outdoorowe uczenie się języka, emocjonalnie złożone i pedagogicznie warunkowe środowisko edukacji w zakresie języka drugiego i obcego. Główna teza zakłada, że uczenia się poza klasą nie należy rozumieć wyłącznie jako przestrzennego przeniesienia procesu nauczania, lecz jako sytuację dydaktyczną kształtowaną przez wzajemne oddziaływanie projektu zadania, gotowości uczącego się, kontekstu przestrzennego, ekspozycji społecznej oraz bezpieczeństwa komunikacyjnego. Odwołując się do pedagogiki doświadczenia oraz miejsca, psychologii środowiskowej, badań nad emocjami w przyswajaniu języka drugiego, teorii przepływu oraz zadaniowego nauczania języka, artykuł omawia potencjał terenowych zadań komunikacyjnych w zakresie wspierania kompetencji leksykalnych, pragmatycznych, interakcyjnych, kulturowych, społecznych i mediacyjnych. Jednocześnie podkreśla, że środowiska outdoorowego uczenia się nie są z natury pozytywne ani motywujące dla wszystkich uczących się. Przestrzenie naturalne i społeczne mogą sprzyjać ciekawości, sprawczości, przyjemności oraz gotowości do komunikowania się, ale mogą również generować lęk, dyskomfort, niepewność lub zachowania unikowe.

Introduction

Language learning beyond the classroom should not be conceptualized as a merely incidental enrichment of traditional instruction, but rather as a complex didactic phenomenon situated at the intersection of experiential pedagogy, outdoor education, place-based education, environmental psychology, research on emotions in second language acquisition, and contemporary language pedagogy. Extra-classroom spaces, whether natural, urban, institutional, school-based, or local, may constitute learning environments in which language functions not only as an object of metalinguistic reflection, but above all as an instrument of social action.

This paper argues that outdoor language learning should be understood not merely as a change of location, but as an emotionally and socially complex pedagogical environment whose effectiveness depends on the relationship between the learner, the task, the place, the group, and the teacher. In this sense, outdoor language learning refers to the planned use of extra-classroom environments for communicative, task-based, and reflective language learning activities. Such activities may take place in natural settings, urban spaces, cultural institutions, local communities, school grounds, museums, libraries, shops, or other public spaces in which language can be used for meaningful social purposes.

Outdoor Education, Experience, and Place-Based Learning

The theoretical foundations of outdoor education may be traced to John Dewey's *pedagogy of experience*, according to which learning occurs most fully when individuals actively participate in meaningful situations, confront problems, act upon them, experience the consequences of their own activity, and subsequently subject that experience to reflection (Dewey, 1938). A similar logic is developed in David Kolb's theory of experiential learning, in which learning is understood as a cyclical process involving concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation (Kolb, 1984).

A second important theoretical context is provided by *place-based education*. Within this approach, the local environment is treated as a point of departure for interdisciplinary, social, cultural, and civic learning. Smith (2002) argues that place-based education may involve the study of local culture, nature, history, social issues, and community practices, thereby enabling students to learn through the anchoring of educational content in the concrete environment of everyday life. Sobel (2004), in turn, emphasizes that connecting the school with the local community fosters responsibility, agency, and a sense of belonging.

Research on outdoor education indicates that its effects should be examined multidimensionally: cognitively, emotionally, motivationally, socially, health-relatedly, and axiologically. Rickinson et al. (2004), in an extensive review of research on outdoor learning, showed that well-designed activities beyond the classroom may support subject knowledge, conceptual understanding, attitudes toward the environment, personal development, and students' social competences. Dillon et al. (2006) emphasize, however, that the effectiveness of such activities does not automatically result from leaving the classroom. Rather, it depends on the quality of the designed experience, students' preparation, the appropriateness of tasks, the manner in which the activity is conducted, and reflective closure after returning to the classroom. Similar conclusions emerge from the systematic review by Becker et al. (2017), which concerns regular classes conducted in outdoor education settings. The authors indicate that education beyond the classroom may support learning, social relationships, physical activity, and students' health, while also noting the heterogeneous methodological quality of the available studies. More recent reviews further strengthen the argument concerning the potential of outdoor education for the holistic development of children and adolescents. Mann et al. (2022), analyzing nature-specific outdoor learning, identify socio-emotional, academic, and well-being-related benefits, including increased engagement, cooperation, agency, elements of improved academic achievement, and the strengthening of self-concept. Ly & Vella-Brodrick (2024), in a review of school-led

greenspace interventions, state that contact with nature in school contexts may support the psychological, physical, and social well-being of children and adolescents, particularly in relation to positive affect, physical activity, and social relationships.

Natural and Social Spaces as Emotionally Ambivalent Learning Environments

The significance of the natural environment for learning is frequently explained through theories of *environmental psychology*. *Attention Restoration Theory* assumes that natural environments may support the restoration of cognitive resources, especially directed attention, which is often heavily taxed in school settings (Kaplan, 1995). Stress Reduction Theory, in turn, suggests that contact with elements of nature may reduce psychophysiological tension and create more favorable conditions for emotional regulation and cognitive functioning (Ulrich et al., 1991). In the meta-review by Lomax et al. (2024), contact with nature is presented as potentially beneficial for the mental health and well-being of children and adolescents, although the authors emphasize the limitations of the current evidence base and the need for further research.

Such a position is particularly relevant for designing research on outdoor language learning: the positive impact of natural space should be treated as a possible outcome rather than as an initial assumption. This is especially important when referring to the theory of biophilia. Wilson (1984) understood biophilia as a human tendency to direct attention toward life and life processes and to seek contact with other forms of life. Later developments of this perspective emphasize that the human bond with nature may have cognitive, emotional, aesthetic, developmental, and axiological significance (Kellert & Wilson, 1993). The concept of biophilia provides an important justification for environmental and outdoor education because it enables contact with nature to be interpreted as potentially supporting curiosity, attention, well-being, and engagement. This does not mean, however, that contact with nature has an unequivocally positive emotional valence for all students. Ulrich (1993), writing about biophilia, biophobia, and natural landscapes, pointed out that human responses to nature include not only fascination, preference, and attraction, but also fear, avoidance, and negative reactions to stimuli perceived as threatening.

For this reason, analyses of outdoor education should also take into account the phenomenon of biophobia, understood as fear, reluctance, disgust, or aversion toward elements of nature such as insects, spiders, snakes, wild animals, plants, mud, darkness, humidity, forests, or the unpredictability of the natural environment. Bixler et al. (1994) showed that during field trips students may display numerous fear reactions and forms of discomfort associated with contact with wild nature.

Bixler & Floyd (1997), in turn, demonstrated that anticipated fear, disgust sensitivity, and attachment to modern comforts may be associated with a lower preference for wild environments and outdoor activities. More recent approaches to biophobia likewise emphasize that aversive reactions toward nature may concern various organisms and environments and may influence the avoidance of contact with nature (Soga & Evans, 2024).

Responses to the natural environment are shaped by previous experiences, place of residence, degree of urbanization, family patterns, cultural practices, media exposure, individual emotional sensitivity, and prior exposure to nature. Zhang et al. (2014) indicate that more frequent contact between children and nature may be associated with higher levels of biophilia and lower levels of biophobia, which suggests that a lack of prior nature-related experience may intensify distance, uncertainty, or fear. In the school context, this means that students do not enter outdoor situations with the same level of emotional readiness. Analogous caution is necessary with regard to activities carried out not in nature, but in social spaces such as shops, libraries, museums, offices, cultural institutions, service points, city streets, or public transport. Such places may increase the authenticity of language tasks because they enable language use in real communicative situations. Nevertheless, they do not automatically foster positive emotions. For some students, contact with an unfamiliar adult, the need to ask a question, the risk of not understanding an answer, time pressure, noise, crowds, unfamiliar institutional norms, or fear of making a mistake may intensify communicative anxiety. This is particularly relevant for students learning a second or foreign language, who may simultaneously experience linguistic, cultural, and social uncertainty.

Emotions in Second Language Acquisition

One of the earliest and most influential theoretical frameworks to incorporate the emotional factor was Stephen Krashen's *affective filter hypothesis*. According to this hypothesis, factors such as anxiety, motivation, and self-esteem influence the extent to which learners are able to make effective use of available linguistic input (Krashen, 1982). Comprehensible input does not automatically lead to acquisition if the learner functions under conditions of high tension, low self-esteem, or reduced motivation. A high affective filter may restrict the access of linguistic stimuli to acquisition mechanisms, whereas a low affective filter fosters greater openness to language contact. The subsequent development of research on the affective dimension of language education has led to a more complex understanding of emotions. Particularly significant in this respect has been research on language anxiety. Horwitz et al. (1986) described foreign

language classroom anxiety as a specific type of situational anxiety associated with using a foreign language in classroom conditions. This anxiety includes communicative tension, fear of negative evaluation, fear of making mistakes, and uncertainty regarding one's own competence. Unlike general shyness or social anxiety, language anxiety is strongly connected with situations in which students must express themselves in a code over which they do not have full control. It is therefore both linguistic and social in nature.

More recent research has brought about a significant shift in perspective. Under the influence of positive psychology, emotions have begun to be perceived not only as factors that inhibit learning, but also as resources supporting language development. Positive psychology in second language research draws attention to phenomena such as hope, well-being, curiosity, interest, resilience, satisfaction, a sense of meaning, social relationships, and enjoyment of language use (MacIntyre et al., 2016). From this perspective, positive emotions are not merely an addition to the didactic process, but may influence attention, readiness to take communicative risks, perseverance in tasks, and the ability to interpret difficulties as challenges rather than solely as threats. This line of research is also consistent with Barbara Fredrickson's *broaden-and-build theory*, according to which positive emotions broaden the repertoire of thought and action and foster the development of long-term cognitive, social, and psychological resources (Fredrickson, 2001). A particularly important development in research on language-related emotions has been the distinction between *foreign language classroom anxiety* and *foreign language enjoyment*, understood as pleasure or satisfaction derived from learning and using a language. Dewaele and MacIntyre (2014) showed that language anxiety and language learning enjoyment are not simple opposites on a single affective axis, but partially independent constructs. This means that a learner may simultaneously experience tension and satisfaction, fear of error and interest in the task, uncertainty and pleasure resulting from participation in interaction.

Flow, Willingness to Communicate, and Field-Based Language Use

One of the most useful perspectives for interpreting positive emotional engagement is the theory of *flow*, developed by Csíkszentmihályi (1990). Flow refers to a state of deep involvement in an activity, intense concentration, a sense of control, coherence of action, and intrinsic motivation, in which the activity itself becomes a source of satisfaction. The condition for the emergence of this state is a relative balance between the level of task difficulty and the individual's perceived competences. When a task is too easy, it may lead to boredom; when it is too difficult, it may

evoke anxiety, frustration, or withdrawal. In language education, the concept of flow is particularly significant because it enables the description of situations in which students engage in communication not because of external compulsion, but because the task is meaningful, interesting, and feasible. Egbert (2003) indicated that flow in the language classroom may occur especially when tasks are authentic, have a clear goal, allow learners a certain degree of autonomy, provide feedback, and are not dominated by immediate error correction. From a pedagogical point of view, well-designed language tasks may therefore support not only the development of communicative competence, but also optimal emotional experiences.

The perspective of flow is particularly useful in analyzing outdoor activities. Tasks carried out beyond the classroom often contain elements conducive to engagement: movement, space, cooperation, a real goal, a problem to solve, a tangible outcome, and immediate feedback from the environment. Students may use language in order to ask for directions, find information, describe an object, interpret a message, cooperate with a group, conduct an interview, or complete a task in urban or natural space. In such situations, language ceases to be an abstract object of school practice and becomes a tool for action. This does not mean, however, that every outdoor task will automatically produce flow. The conditions include appropriate task difficulty, clarity of instructions, linguistic preparation, a sense of safety, and the possibility of acting at a level consistent with the learner's competences. From the perspective of willingness to communicate, field-based activities may also play an important role because they create situations in which speaking results from the need to complete a task. MacIntyre et al. (1998) conceptualize willingness to communicate as a phenomenon dependent on both individual and situational factors. A learner may be more willing to use the language when the task is understandable, the addressee is real, the risk of error is acceptable, and the communicative goal is clear. More recent dynamic and ecological perspectives on willingness to communicate further emphasize the role of context, social relationships, learner agency, and perceived communicative ability (Peng, 2022).

When interpreting the possible emotional and motivational effects of outdoor activities, it is also useful to refer to Dörnyei's L2 *Motivational Self System*. In this perspective, motivation to learn a second language is connected, among other things, with an imagined image of oneself as a future language user, social expectations, and the current learning experience (Dörnyei, 2005, 2009). Positive experiences associated with using language in real and meaningful situations may strengthen students' perception of themselves as individuals capable of communicating in a second language. Conversely, experiences that are highly stressful, humiliating, or exceed the learner's current resources may reinforce avoidance of communication and a negative self-image as a language user. From this perspective, outdoor activities require a design that combines authenticity with psychological safety.

Communicative Tasks Beyond the Classroom

Outdoor education connects directly with language pedagogy when learning beyond the classroom is situated within task-based, action-oriented, and environmental approaches. In this understanding, language is not treated solely as a system of lexical and grammatical structures, but as a tool for achieving social goals. This perspective is consistent with the action-oriented approach developed in the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages, in which the language user is understood as a social actor performing tasks in a specific social and cultural context (Council of Europe, 2020). Field-based activities may therefore constitute an important extension of classroom teaching. They enable students to move from controlled practice of language forms to language use in situations of action, interaction, mediation, and social participation. Communicative tasks carried out beyond the classroom should have a clearly defined goal, a recognizable social context, specified participant roles, and an outcome that can be observed or presented. In this sense, they are consistent with the assumptions of task-based language teaching, according to which the basic unit of organizing the didactic process is a task requiring the use of language to achieve an extralinguistic goal, rather than merely reproducing a particular grammatical structure (Ellis, 2003; Nunan, 2004; Willis & Willis, 2007).

In outdoor and public spaces, such activities may include orientation, transactional, informational, project-based, and mediation tasks: asking for directions, reading information boards, interpreting regulations, buying a ticket, ordering food, collecting information in a library or museum, conducting a short interview, preparing a linguistic map of the neighborhood, developing a guide for new students, or creating an urban game in the target language. A particularly important group of activities consists of tasks based on observing the linguistic landscape. The analysis of signs, announcements, regulations, boards, pictograms, names of institutions, and public messages allows students to notice that language functions in social space as a carrier of information, norms, values, relationships, and cultural practices. Cenoz & Gorter (2008) indicate that the linguistic landscape may constitute an additional source of input in the process of second language acquisition because messages present in public space are authentic, contextually embedded, and pragmatically marked.

At the same time, communicative tasks beyond the classroom should not be idealized. Students may evaluate language use in outdoor space as more authentic, functional, and engaging than classroom exercises because language becomes connected with action, movement, place, and a real addressee. They may experience greater agency because communication serves to solve a problem, obtain information, follow instructions, or cooperate with others. However, the same situation may evoke tension, embarrassment, uncertainty, or a sense of social exposure in other students.

A task involving conducting an interview, asking for directions, or speaking with an institutional employee may be a source of satisfaction for one learner and an overly burdensome situation for another. Therefore, the emotional reception of field-based activities should be the object of research, not an assumption derived from the mere form of the activity. Empirical confirmation of this cautious position can be found in the study by Myhre et al. (2023), which examined anxiety and enjoyment among young adolescents learning English as a foreign language in outdoor conditions. The authors analyzed whether using English outdoors could reduce *foreign language anxiety*, strengthen *foreign language enjoyment*, and increase willingness to communicate. The results indicated that students evaluated the outdoor experience positively, but the quantitative differences between the experimental and control groups were not unequivocally strong. This study shows that outdoor language learning has significant qualitative potential, but its influence on emotions, motivation, and willingness to communicate requires empirical investigation rather than a priori assumptions.

Conclusion and Pedagogical Implications

Field-based communicative activities appear particularly valuable for the development of lexical, pragmatic, interactional, cultural, social, and mediation competences. Lexical competence develops through contact with vocabulary embedded in place and action, such as names of institutions, services, objects, directions, messages, rules, and procedures. Pragmatic competence is supported through the observation and use of politeness formulas, requests, questions, expressions of thanks, apologies, instructions, warnings, and prohibitions. Interactional competence develops through the need to respond to other people's utterances, ask follow-up questions, paraphrase, request repetition, and negotiate meaning. Cultural competence involves understanding behavioral norms, communicative conventions, symbols, institutions, and social practices present in a given environment. Mediation competence becomes visible when learners explain messages to others, summarize information, simplify utterances, help peers understand instructions, or mediate between different levels of language competence.

At the same time, outdoor language learning requires pedagogical caution. Learners differ in their previous experiences, level of linguistic competence, emotional readiness, attitude toward nature, comfort in public spaces, and sensitivity to social exposure. A task that one learner experiences as authentic and motivating may be perceived by another as stressful, unpredictable, or emotionally demanding. For this reason, field-based communicative tasks should be designed in ways that combine authenticity with psychological safety. Outdoor tasks should be introduced progressively: from observation and pair work, through semi-controlled exercises, to more open forms

of social interaction. Linguistic preparation, discussion of communication strategies, clear instructions, peer support, flexible participation, and reflective processing after the activity are essential for ensuring that outdoor learning remains developmentally supportive rather than emotionally burdensome.

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Between Systemic Integration and Fragmentation: Outdoor Education in Polish Early Childhood Teacher Education in the European Context

Między podejściem systemowym a rozproszeniem.
Edukacja outdoorowa w kształceniu nauczycieli
edukacji przedszkolnej i wczesnoszkolnej w Europie

KEYWORDS

outdoor education,
teacher education,
early childhood
education,
experiential learning,
models of outdoor
education

ABSTRACT

Outdoor education is increasingly recognised as an important component of contemporary education, yet little is known about how it is institutionalised within teacher education, particularly in Central and Eastern Europe. This study examines the presence of outdoor education in Polish early childhood teacher education programmes and interprets the findings within the context of selected European models. A qualitative document analysis was conducted using curricula and course syllabi from selected public and private universities. The analysis included both explicit references to outdoor education and related content concerning experiential learning, environmental education, and field-based activities. The findings indicate that outdoor education is not established as a distinct component of teacher education but is represented primarily through dispersed curriculum content and teaching approaches. Three levels of curriculum integration were identified – formal, content, and methodological – with the latter two clearly predominating. Compared with Scandinavian

models, the Polish approach remains fragmented and only weakly institutionalised. The study proposes an analytical framework for assessing the integration of outdoor education within teacher education programmes and contributes to the broader discussion on its institutionalisation.

SŁOWA KLUCZE

edukacja
outdoorowa,
kształcenie
nauczycieli,
edukacja
przedszkolna
i wczesnoszkolna,
uczenie się przez
doświadczenie,
modele edukacji
outdoorowej

ABSTRAKT

Edukacja outdoorowa jest coraz częściej uznawana za istotny element współczesnej edukacji, jednak niewiele wiadomo o sposobach jej instytucjonalizacji w kształceniu nauczycieli, szczególnie w krajach Europy Środkowo-Wschodniej. Celem artykułu jest analiza obecności edukacji outdoorowej w programach kształcenia nauczycieli edukacji przedszkolnej i wczesnoszkolnej w Polsce oraz interpretacja wyników w kontekście wybranych modeli europejskich. Zastosowano jakościową analizę dokumentów obejmującą programy studiów i sylabusy wybranych uczelni publicznych i niepublicznych. Analizie poddano zarówno bezpośrednie odniesienia do edukacji outdoorowej, jak i treści związane z uczeniem się przez doświadczenie, edukacją środowiskową oraz aktywnościami terenowymi. Wyniki wskazują, że edukacja outdoorowa nie stanowi odrębnego komponentu kształcenia nauczycieli, lecz występuje głównie w rozproszonych treściach programowych i rozwiązaniach metodycznych. Wyodrębniono trzy poziomy jej obecności: formalny, treściowy i metodyczny, z wyraźną dominacją dwóch ostatnich. Na tle modeli skandynawskich polski model kształcenia nauczycieli pozostaje fragmentaryczny i słabo zinstytucjonalizowany. Badanie wnosi propozycję ram analitycznych do oceny stopnia integracji edukacji outdoorowej w programach kształcenia nauczycieli.

Introduction

Educational systems increasingly recognise that meaningful learning extends beyond the classroom, placing greater emphasis on experience, participation, and authentic learning environments. This shift has redefined the teacher's role – from a transmitter of knowledge to a designer of learning environments that foster experiential learning (European Commission, 2019). Within this context, contact with nature is increasingly recognised as an important factor supporting children's cognitive, emotional, and social development. Research consistently demonstrates that learning in natural environments enhances understanding, increases student engagement, and promotes autonomy and psychological well-being (Rickinson et al., 2004; Chawla,

2015; Kuo et al., 2022). Across many European education systems, growing interest in outdoor education has been accompanied by efforts to embed it more systematically within curricula and teacher education (OECD, 2019). While the educational benefits of outdoor education are well established, considerably less is known about how future teachers are prepared to implement this approach, particularly in Central and Eastern Europe. In Poland, research addressing the place of outdoor education within teacher education remains limited. In particular, the extent and forms of its integration into early childhood teacher education programmes – whether systemic or fragmented – have received little scholarly attention (Michalak & Parczewska, 2019; Michalak, 2023). Addressing this gap, the present study examines the presence of outdoor education in Polish early childhood teacher education programmes and interprets the findings within the context of selected European models. By distinguishing between formal, content, and methodological levels of curriculum integration, the study contributes to the broader discussion on the institutionalisation of outdoor education in teacher education.

Outdoor Education – Theoretical Framework

Outdoor education represents a pedagogical approach aligned with the broader shift in learning paradigms that emphasise experience, student activity, and the environmental context of learning. There is no single, universally accepted definition of the concept due to its interdisciplinary nature and the diversity of educational practices (Michalak, 2023). The terms *outdoor education* and *outdoor learning* are often used interchangeably, although distinctions are sometimes made: the former typically refers to organised forms of education conducted outside the classroom, while the latter emphasises the learning process itself through direct interaction with the natural and social environment (Waite, 2017). In both cases, the environment is understood as an active component of learning rather than merely its physical setting.

One specific form of outdoor education is the *forest school* approach, developed primarily in Scandinavian and Anglo-Saxon contexts. It is based on regular engagement with natural environments and emphasises exploration, experiential learning, and the development of relationships with nature (Knight, 2013). Unlike occasional outdoor activities, forest school is continuous and integrated into everyday educational practice. Consequently, outdoor education should not be understood simply as learning conducted outside the classroom but as a distinct pedagogical approach grounded in direct experience, learner agency, and meaningful interaction with the environment (Michalak, 2023).

The theoretical foundations of outdoor education draw on several complementary pedagogical perspectives. Experiential learning theory conceptualises learning as a cyclical process in which knowledge is constructed through concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualisation, and active experimentation (Kolb, 1984). From this perspective, authentic engagement with the environment becomes a prerequisite for meaningful learning rather than merely an additional teaching strategy. Similarly, place-based education emphasises learning rooted in local environments and communities, connecting educational content with learners' everyday experiences while fostering environmental awareness and responsibility (Sobel, 2004). Ecological theories of development further highlight that children's learning is shaped through dynamic interactions between individuals and multiple environmental contexts (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Together, these perspectives position outdoor education not only as a teaching method but as a pedagogical approach that integrates experience, place, and social interaction into the learning process.

A substantial body of research demonstrates that outdoor education supports children's cognitive, social, emotional, and physical development. Learning in natural environments enhances understanding of phenomena, promotes causal reasoning, and facilitates the integration of knowledge across domains (Rickinson et al., 2004). It also contributes to the development of competences associated with STEM/STEAM education, including observation, inquiry, and problem-solving (Barfod & Daugbjerg, 2018; Kuo, 2019). At the same time, outdoor learning promotes cooperation, autonomy, self-efficacy, and psychological well-being, while regular contact with nature has been associated with improved concentration, reduced stress, and increased motivation to learn (Chawla, 2015; Dettweiler et al., 2017; Kuo et al., 2022; Riley et al., 2024; Vasilaki et al., 2025).

From the perspective of teacher education, the critical issue concerns the competencies required to design and facilitate learning in diverse educational environments. Implementing outdoor education demands not only subject knowledge but also the ability to organise authentic learning experiences, respond flexibly to changing conditions, and integrate environmental contexts into educational practice (Michalak & Parczewska, 2019). Although teacher education programmes increasingly emphasise active learning methods and learner-centred pedagogies, these assumptions do not necessarily translate into systematic preparation for organising learning beyond the classroom. Consequently, outdoor education remains particularly sensitive to the gap between declarative curriculum assumptions and actual teacher preparation. Examining how outdoor education is represented within teacher education programmes therefore provides insight into the extent to which these contemporary pedagogical assumptions have become institutionally embedded in teacher education.

Outdoor Education Models in Europe

Outdoor education is implemented across European education systems in diverse ways, reflecting differences in educational traditions, curriculum design, and teacher education. Rather than representing a single model, European approaches vary primarily in the extent to which outdoor education is institutionally embedded within teacher preparation. For the purposes of this study, two ideal types can be distinguished: a systemic model, in which outdoor education constitutes an integral component of educational policy, curriculum, and teacher education, and a fragmented model, in which outdoor learning is implemented inconsistently and depends largely on institutional or individual initiatives.

The systemic model is characterised by the full integration of outdoor education into both school curricula and teacher education. The natural environment is treated as an equivalent learning space, and outdoor activities are planned regularly rather than occasionally. This approach is most fully developed in the Scandinavian countries, where outdoor education is deeply rooted in educational philosophy as well as institutional practice. In Denmark, the concept of *udeskole* involves regular teaching outside the classroom and interdisciplinary learning in authentic environments (Barfod & Daugbjerg, 2018).

In Norway, *friluftsliv* emphasises everyday contact with nature as an essential element of children's development. Similarly, in Sweden, outdoor learning is regarded as a natural component of everyday educational practice regardless of weather conditions, supporting children's autonomy, resilience, and holistic development (Adamczewski & Nagae, 2022). Across these systems, outdoor education is understood not as an additional teaching method but as a fundamental way of organising children's learning experiences.

In contrast, the fragmented model does not treat outdoor education as a distinct component of teacher education. Instead, it appears indirectly within broader areas such as environmental education, physical education, or active learning methodologies. Opportunities for learning outside the classroom therefore depend largely on individual teachers, institutional priorities, or local conditions rather than on systemic programme requirements (Waite, 2017). This approach is visible, for example, in the United Kingdom, where *learning outside the classroom* is promoted primarily as a pedagogical method rather than a compulsory element of teacher education.

Teacher education in many Central and Eastern European countries, including Poland, is generally closer to this fragmented model. Outdoor education is present mainly in declarative form, embedded within broader educational objectives but only rarely operationalised through dedicated courses, structured practical experiences, or explicit competence requirements (Michalak & Parczewska, 2019; Michalak, 2023).

Consequently, its implementation depends primarily on institutional interpretation and individual academic staff rather than on coherent national policy.

This distinction between systemic and fragmented approaches provides the interpretative framework for the study, locating Poland early childhood teacher education on a continuum between systemic and fragmented approaches and assessing the extent to which outdoor education is institutionally embedded.

Early Childhood Teacher Education in Poland – Systematic Context

The analysis of outdoor education in early childhood teacher education programmes in Poland requires situating it within the broader institutional context that shapes both the organisation and the priorities of teacher preparation. Study programmes are not solely the result of institutional autonomy but are strongly influenced by national regulations, teacher education standards, and the dominant model of teacher preparation. The primary framework is provided by the national regulation defining teacher education standards (Rozporządzenie..., 2024), which specifies learning outcomes, the scope of subject-specific, psychological-pedagogical, and didactic preparation, as well as the minimum number of teaching practice hours. Although the standards promote an integrated model of teacher preparation that combines theoretical knowledge with practical competences, they remain formulated at a relatively general level. Consequently, preparation for organising learning in diverse educational environments, including outdoor settings, is not explicitly addressed, leaving its implementation largely to institutional interpretation.

The organisation of teacher education programmes reflects a continuing tension between the declared integration of theory and practice and the realities of curriculum design. Study programmes are typically modular, with a predominance of theoretical instruction complemented by methodological training and school placements. Although teaching practice constitutes an essential element of teacher education, it is conducted primarily in conventional classroom settings, which tends to reinforce established teaching routines. As a result, opportunities to develop competencies related to outdoor education depend largely on individual academic staff, partner institutions, and local educational contexts rather than on coherent programme requirements.

These characteristics contrast with broader international trends in teacher education, which increasingly emphasise experiential learning, flexible learning environments, and the integration of education with local communities and natural settings (European Commission, 2019; OECD, 2019; Waite, 2017; Kuo et al., 2022). Against this background, the Polish model remains relatively formalised and

curriculum-driven, which may limit systematic preparation for teaching beyond the classroom. Consequently, the extent to which outdoor education is incorporated into teacher preparation depends primarily on institutional interpretation rather than explicit systemic requirements. This makes Polish teacher education a particularly relevant case for examining whether outdoor education has become institutionally embedded or continues to function as a fragmented element of teacher preparation.

Research Design and Methodology

The study employed a qualitative document analysis (desk research) to examine how outdoor education is represented within early childhood teacher education programmes in Poland. Document analysis is widely used in educational research to investigate institutional frameworks, curriculum design, and the declared assumptions underlying teacher preparation. It is particularly appropriate for analysing outdoor education, which is often embedded implicitly within curricula rather than presented as a distinct field of study.

A purposive sampling strategy was adopted to ensure institutional diversity. The sample included both public and private higher education institutions offering programmes preparing teachers for early childhood education. Four major public universities (University of Warsaw, Jagiellonian University, Adam Mickiewicz University, and Maria Grzegorzewska University) and three private institutions representing both academic and practice-oriented profiles (WSB Merito University, the University of Dąbrowa Górnicza, and Ignatianum University in Kraków) were selected. This combination enabled comparison across different organisational models of teacher education while maintaining a focus on institutions with established teacher preparation programmes. The research material comprised publicly available programme documentation, including curricula, module descriptions, and, where available, detailed course syllabi. University syllabus databases were consulted when additional information regarding course content, learning outcomes, or teaching methods was accessible.

The analysis was conducted in two stages. First, programme documents were examined to identify explicit references to outdoor education, such as outdoor learning, learning outside the classroom, or nature-based education. Second, broader curriculum content associated with outdoor education – including environmental education, experiential learning, field-based activities, and place-related learning – was analysed to identify implicit forms of its integration. Particular attention was paid to the organisational form of these elements (stand-alone courses, curriculum modules, or embedded content), their theoretical or practical orientation, and their relationship to teaching practice. The analysis was qualitative and interpretative, aiming to identify

recurring patterns and differences in the conceptualisation of outdoor education rather than to quantify its occurrence.

Several limitations should be acknowledged. The study included a limited number of higher education institutions and relied on documents that differed in scope and level of detail. In some cases, access to complete syllabi was restricted, and the analysed materials referred to different academic years (2022–2026). Furthermore, document analysis captures the formal and declarative dimension of teacher education rather than its actual implementation in teaching practice. Differences between institutional profiles may also influence how outdoor education is represented within curricula. Finally, the European models discussed in the theoretical part of the article were not examined empirically but serve as an interpretative framework for understanding the Polish case. The analytical focus was therefore not solely on the presence of outdoor education but also on the extent to which it was systematically integrated into teacher education programmes.

Findings: The Fragmented Presence of Outdoor Education in Teacher Education Programmes

The analysis of study programmes and available course syllabi indicates that outdoor education is not established as a distinct and autonomous component of early childhood teacher education in Poland. In most of the analysed institutions – both public and private – it is neither offered as a separate compulsory course nor organised as a coherent curriculum module. The only exception is Adam Mickiewicz University, where outdoor education is available as an elective course, making it an optional rather than a mandatory element of teacher preparation. Nevertheless, the absence of a formally defined component does not imply the absence of related content. Instead, the analysis reveals that outdoor education is represented in fragmented and inconsistent ways across programmes.

Three levels of its representation were identified. The formal level refers to stand-alone courses or curriculum modules explicitly devoted to outdoor education; these were found only rarely and primarily as elective offerings. The content level includes environmental education, nature-related topics, and references to learning in local or natural environments embedded within broader courses. The methodological level encompasses teaching approaches based on experiential learning, student activity, and the use of diverse learning environments, even where outdoor education is not explicitly named. Across the analysed programmes, the second and third levels predominated, whereas explicit curricular integration at the formal level remained exceptional.

This pattern is reflected in institutional differences. At Jagiellonian University, programme documentation includes explicit references to field trips, nature observation, school garden activities, learning outdoors, and elements associated with the forest school approach. These examples indicate a partial operationalisation of outdoor education through both course content and teaching methods. At Adam Mickiewicz University, the elective course is complemented by related content embedded in other modules, representing a combination of formal and dispersed integration. In the remaining institutions – including the University of Warsaw, Maria Grzegorzewska University, Ignatianum University, WSB Merito University, and the University of Dąbrowa Górnicza – references appear mainly at the content and methodological levels. They are typically expressed through environmental education, the organisation of learning environments, or experiential teaching methods, without explicit preparation for outdoor teaching or clearly defined competence development.

Across all analysed programmes, theoretical and declarative content clearly predominates over practical preparation. Although curricula frequently emphasise the importance of diverse learning environments, these declarations are only rarely translated into structured educational experiences such as regular outdoor activities, place-based learning, or field-based projects. Likewise, teaching practice – despite constituting a compulsory element of teacher education – remains focused primarily on conventional classroom settings. Opportunities to implement outdoor learning therefore depend largely on individual initiative, institutional culture, and the specific characteristics of placement schools rather than on programme requirements.

Towards a More Systemic Approach to Outdoor Education: Conclusions and Recommendations

The findings of this study indicate that outdoor education occupies a fragmented and only weakly institutionalised position within early childhood teacher education in Poland. Rather than functioning as a coherent component of teacher preparation, it is represented mainly through dispersed curriculum content and teaching approaches, while explicit curricular structures remain exceptional. Although national teacher education standards create opportunities for learning beyond the classroom, they do not provide sufficient guidance for its systematic implementation. Consequently, the integration of outdoor education depends largely on institutional interpretation and the interests, experience, and expertise of academic staff.

Situated within the broader European context, the Polish case is positioned closer to the fragmented than the systemic model of outdoor education identified in this study. Unlike Scandinavian approaches, where natural environments constitute an

integral part of educational philosophy, curriculum design, and teacher preparation, outdoor education in Poland remains peripheral rather than institutionally embedded. This comparison does not imply that Scandinavian models should be directly transferred to the Polish context. Instead, it illustrates how different levels of institutional integration shape opportunities for preparing future teachers to use outdoor learning environments.

Beyond documenting the current state of teacher education, the study offers an analytical framework for examining how outdoor education is represented within teacher education programmes. The distinction between the formal, content, and methodological levels of curriculum integration provides a conceptual lens that may also prove useful in comparative research on teacher education across different national contexts. The findings further suggest that the principal challenge lies not in the absence of outdoor education itself but in the lack of coherent mechanisms supporting its systematic integration into teacher preparation. As a consequence, outdoor education continues to function largely as part of the hidden curriculum, relying on institutional interpretation rather than explicit programme design.

The findings also indicate several directions for strengthening teacher education. Rather than introducing stand-alone courses, greater emphasis could be placed on explicitly incorporating competencies related to planning, implementing, and evaluating learning in outdoor environments within existing teacher education standards. Practical experiences beyond the classroom could be more systematically embedded in methodology courses and teaching placements, while partnerships with schools, environmental education centres, and local organisations could create more opportunities for authentic learning experiences. Equally important is supporting the professional development of academic staff, whose expertise often determines whether outdoor education becomes a meaningful component of teacher preparation.

In conclusion, strengthening outdoor education requires adaptation rather than direct transfer of European models. Clearer curriculum expectations, more practice-based learning, and support for academic staff could foster more coherent teacher education and better prepare future teachers to use diverse learning environments.

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Reception of Froebelian Pedagogy Yesterday and Today in Poland and Abroad

Recepcja pedagogiki froebrowskiej wczoraj i dziś w Polsce i na świecie

KEYWORDS: ABSTRACT

kindergarten,
Frederik Froebel,
freblism

Friedrich Froebel is recognized as the founder of the modern preschool. Despite his indisputable contributions to raising awareness among education policymakers and the general public about the need to establish preschool institutions, the reception of his ideas has had a turbulent history. The aim of this article is to provide an overview of the current state of research on Friedrich Froebel's work in Poland and abroad. The study employs a historical-pedagogical analysis and a critical review of the relevant literature, including scholarly studies and examples of contemporary educational initiatives in Poland and abroad.

The article begins by presenting the history of the early reception of Froebelian pedagogy in Poland during the period of the Partitions and the interwar period, followed by a review of the latest research and initiatives promoting Froebelian pedagogy in Poland and abroad. The analysis showed that the reception of Froebel's pedagogy was dynamic in nature and subject to social, political, and cultural influences. Following a period of marginalization in Poland during the People's Republic of Poland, there was a marked increase in interest in his work, as evidenced by academic research, educational programs, the activities of associations, and pedagogical practice. The conclusions indicate that Froebelian pedagogy remains a relevant source of inspiration for preschool education, particularly in the areas of play, children's independent activity, creativity, and a child-centered approach to the educational process.

SŁOWA KLUCZE ABSTRAKT

przedszkole,
Fryderyk Froebel,
freblizm

Fryderyk Froebel jest uznawany za twórcę współczesnego przedszkola. Mimo jego bezsprzecznych zasług w upowszechnieniu wśród decydentów oświatowych i społeczeństwa przekonania o potrzebie zakładania placówek wychowania przedszkolnego recepcja jego poglądów ma burzliwą historię. Celem niniejszego artykułu jest przybliżenie stanu badań nad dorobkiem Fryderyka Froebela w kraju i za granicą. Zastosowano metodę analizy historyczno-pedagogicznej oraz krytyczny przegląd literatury przedmiotu, obejmujący opracowania naukowe i przykłady współczesnych inicjatyw edukacyjnych w Polsce i za granicą.

Na wstępie przedstawiono historię wczesnej recepcji freblizmu na ziemiach polskich w czasach zaborów oraz w okresie międzywojennym, następnie dokonano przeglądu najnowszych badań i inicjatyw propagujących freblizm w Polsce i za granicą. Analiza wykazała, że recepcja pedagogiki Froebela miała charakter dynamiczny i podlegała wpływom uwarunkowań społecznych, politycznych i kulturowych. Po okresie marginalizacji w Polsce w czasach PRL nastąpił wyraźny wzrost zainteresowania jego dorobkiem, czego przejawem są badania naukowe, programy edukacyjne, działalność stowarzyszeń oraz praktyka pedagogiczna. Wnioski wskazują, że pedagogika froebelska pozostaje aktualnym źródłem inspiracji dla edukacji przedszkolnej, szczególnie w zakresie zabawy, aktywności własnej dziecka, kreatywności i podmiotowego podejścia do procesu wychowania.

Pre-school pedagogy as an independent discipline in the area of the broader educational sciences has been experiencing significant development in the last two decades in Poland. Its manifestation is the appearance of new monographs, articles, journals and associations promoting the ideas of preschool education, as well as an increase in the number of students studying this field. Many theoreticians and practitioners are looking for new solutions and inspiration, diversifying the offer of alternative kindergartens and the methodology of traditional kindergartens. This situation is conducive to returns to the roots and new readings of the work of representatives of preschool pedagogy, now considered classics. Among them is Frederick Froebel.

The German pedagogue is considered the founder of the modern kindergarten. Although almost 200 years have passed since the founding of the first children's garden, his pedagogy still arouses keen interest among scientists, teachers and parents. In Poland, it has even experienced a kind of renaissance in the last decade. The purpose of this article is to introduce the history of the early reception of freblism on Polish soil during the Partitions of Poland and in the interwar period, when the structures

of preschool education in Poland crystallized (the 1932 Jędrzejewicz reform incorporated kindergarten into the school system).

Works Enriching the State of Research on the Early Reception of Freblism in Poland and Around the World

Freblism was promoted on Polish soil initially in the Russian and Austrian partitions. So far, no study has been written on the development of kindergartens in the Prussian partition. The reception of Froebel's pedagogy on Polish soil in historical terms was the first to be addressed by Bella Sandler. In her 1959 article, she presented the fate of kindergartens in Galicia (Sandler, 1959). They were introduced there with the teachers' seminaries established by the National School Board in Galicia, at which freblian courses were launched. The first gardens were established in 1874. According to the latest research findings, the first garden in the Galician capital was the result of a private initiative, that is, in 1871 this type of institution was opened by Paulina Pietraszewska (Łapot, 2016, p. 65). Probably the first text on frebling establishments on Polish soil was published in the Galician "School" in 1868 (Bęczalski, 1868). The author considered gardens to be more progressive than orphanages; he emphasized that there was less rigor in them (Bęczalski, 1868, p. 267).

Froebel's system was initially approached with distrust or unconcealed reluctance. Over time, elements of his play methodology began to permeate into day care centers (Sandler, 1959, p. 217 et seq.). More recently, Barbara Kalinowska-Witek, taking a closer look at the views of Polish pedagogues of the second half of the 19th century and the turn of the 20th century in the Russian partition, drew attention to Jan Władysław Dawid's interest in Froebel's pedagogy – he appreciated the place of play in the theory and educational practice of the young child (Kalinowska-Witek, 2019, p. 19). Dawid's journalistic activities had a great impact on the popularization of preschool education and Froebel's ideas. Similarly, Wiesława Leżańska, in her text on the beginnings of preschool pedagogy in Poland before World War II, noted the interest of the most prominent Polish pedagogue of the Positivist era in the achievements of the creator of kindergartens (Leżańska, 2020, pp. 49–50). It is also known that in the Russian partition Froebel's methodology was first used in 1867 in the Father Baudouin orphanage in Warsaw, while the first kindergarten was established by Teresa Pruszk-Mleczkowska in 1870 (Loyola Opiela, 2014, p. 109).

In the Kingdom of Poland, Froebel's ideas were difficult to adapt at the beginning of the 20th century, even during the adaptation of the concept of new education in the educational practice of the time. Aneta Bołdyrew and Monika Nawrot-Borowska, who researched this issue, stated:

In the best-funded nurseries, children were introduced to Froebel's games and activities. However, the artistic activities recommended by educators (e.g., working with paper, cardboard, boxes, clay, modeling, sculpting, pottery, building bricks, weaving, puzzles, mosaics, arranging shapes and pictures from peas, broad beans, beans, corn, coffee) was only fully implemented in kindergartens for children from wealthier backgrounds; such institutions were very few and far between in Congress Poland until the First World War (Bołdyrew & Nawrot-Borowska, 2022, pp. 32–33).

Knowledge of the reception of freblism in the Russian partition was enriched by articles by Grzegorz Michalski (2016) and Stefania Walasek (2015). It is known that the first mentions of the theory and practice of kindergartens appeared in the press, including in *Przegląd Pedagogiczny*, *Przegląd Tygodniowy*, *Kłosa*, *Opiekun Domowy* or *Tygodnik Ilustrowany* in the Kingdom of Poland and in *Szkola* in Galicia. F. Froebel's theory of play was analyzed by Polish theorists and researchers of children's games and toys and presented in the press in the Kingdom of Poland, including *Bluszcz* (Miaskowski, 1868; D.K., 1913; see also: Bednarz-Grzybek, 2011). Aneta Bołdyrew, Marta M. Kacprzak, and Monika Nawrot-Borowska, in their selection of press articles in the Kingdom of Poland, noted 20 items referring to Froebel's preschool pedagogy (Bołdyrew et al., 2024).

In Warsaw, the idea of kindergartens gained popularity through Maria Weryho. She was an educator and publicist, as well as an educational activist. In 1884, M. Weryho worked as a teacher at Henryka Czarnocka's private school, and three years later she opened her own freblock (in 1896 there were 16 such institutions in Poland), where future teachers were also trained (Moraczewska, 2015, p. 219). Her first important publication was *Methodology of work with preschool children*, a manual for educators, which she wrote together with J. Strzemeska. The authors critically analyzed Froebel's system, took over his methods and adapted them to Polish conditions, rejecting excessive rigor and formalism in play, focusing on the role of free play, observation of the environment and the child's initiative in organizing activities (Strzemeska & Weryho, 1895). M. Weryho also published other articles and books on preschool education. She also collaborated with magazines, including *Przegląd Pedagogiczny*, where she ran a column entitled "Kindergarten", popularizing Froebel's pedagogy, as well as Kindergarten Education and Kindergarten (collaboration with Zofia Żukiewiczowa).

In reborn Poland, M. Weryho-Radziwiłłowiczowa became head of the Department of Kindergartens in the Ministry of Religious Denominations and Public Education (Ministerstwo Wyznań Religijnych i Oświecenia Publicznego). The main task of this state authority was to reorganize the activities of pre-school childcare institutions and standardize the forms of their activities. They were called kindergartens, as opposed to kindergartens and child care centers. Another area of M. Weryho's involvement in the popularization of freblism was related to the preparation of preschool education

personnel. Weryho led to the equalization of the status of preschool teachers with school teachers, which was a breakthrough in the history of Polish preschool education. Her understanding of the role of the teacher corresponded directly with the views of the German pedagogue, according to which the teacher and the kindergartens should not compete with the family in the field of child rearing, but should create a friendly atmosphere similar to the home environment, introduce the child to the world of values and social life. In such a space, the student independently discovers the world in the course of independent exploration (Moraczewska, 2015, p. 227).

In the context of the merits of M. Weryho-Radziwiłłowiczowa in popularizing the thought and practice of the kindergarten creator, it is worth noting the article by Aleksandra Feliniak, who addressed the issue of the reception of Freblow kindergarten in Poland, focusing on the interwar period and the first professional magazine on kindergarten education published at that time, *Wychowanie 'Przedszkolne'*, established by Maria Weryho-Radziwiłłowiczowa (Feliniak, 2010). Froebel's pedagogy was also popularized in Poland in the interwar period by for example: Stefania Marciszewska-Posadzowa, Natalia Cicimirska, Zofia Bogdanowiczowa, Janina Krasucka-Bużycka, and Zofia Żukiewiczowa (Bilewicz-Kuźnia, 2017b).

Krzysztof Jakubiak (2015) distinguished two trends in the development of Polish preschool education at the beginning of the 20th century – the first was related to Froebel's methodology, the second to the systems of Maria Montessori and Ovide Decroly. The modified Froebel system was popularized by textbooks such as *Podręcznik dla ochraniarek* (Polskie Towarzystwo Pedagogiczne, 1920). Many of Froebel's ideas were included in the textbook by M. Weryho *Wskazówki dla osób zakładających i prowadzących ochrony* (1921). The author recommended familiarizing children with their surroundings through discussions and observing objects and phenomena, developing their concentration. The rules of work for nursery nurses were important, among which the following should be emphasized: that activities and games should be organized on the basis of contrast, for example, after intellectual activities, they should lead to work in the garden or manual work; treating work with children not as a means to achieve a certain effect, but as a factor in their development, and not imposing activities on children, but guiding them.

Western researchers are also interested in how Froebel's ideas were received in their countries. For example, Ann Taylor Allen (2006) subjected to comparative analysis the reception of Froebelian pedagogy in the United States and Germany between 1840 and 1914. It turns out that initially the American kindergarten became the first class of the elementary school, open to five-year-olds on a voluntary basis. Kindergarten teachers insisted that this class was not part of the school, but maintained its integrity. Kindergarten classes were often separated from other classes and placed under separate, usually female, leadership. They emphasized preparing children for

school, especially for poor or immigrant children who were considered backward. In the xenophobic atmosphere created by World War I, the pure pedagogical idea was subordinated to a program to Americanize children. Particularly in poor or immigrant neighborhoods of large American cities, Froebel's pedagogy was quickly abandoned in favor of practical exercises aimed at teaching English and job skills. In crowded and underfunded urban schools, preschool teachers often had to teach overtime, leaving little time for interaction with parents. The price of kindergarten's acceptance was the erosion of its special character and assimilation into the school. Taylor Allen is inclined to conclude that the potential inherent in the German educator's (2006) idea of preschool education has not been realized in America.

A manifestation of interest in the early reception of Froebelism is the article by Jane Read (2013), in which the author analyzed the implementation of new methods of educating young children in day-care centers in London between 1890 and 1930. She focused on the work of Elizabeth Shaw and Frances Roe, as their experimental method, based on Froebel's pedagogy, changed the approach to the education of working-class children in England. The day care centers were initially designed for children between the ages of five and seven. In 1900, 178,244 children between the ages of 3 and 5 were enrolled in London's daycare centers, and another 169,244 children between the ages of 5 and 7 were subject to compulsory schooling. English kindergarten departments at the time were not a convenient ground for transplanting Froebel's ideas. Nevertheless, there was a thriving Froebel Society in London.

The promoters of freblism in England sought to influence key figures in the Department of Education and were successful in doing so. Under the leadership of George Kekewich, permanent secretary of the Department of Education (1890–1900) and the Board of Education (1900–1902), the Department of Education issued a circular in 1893 encouraging teachers to adopt freer methods of educating the youngest, based on Froebel's pedagogy. Froebel's lobbying thus proved effective, and Kekewich's liberal political stance made him a natural ally of Froebelian methodology. By introducing reforms, London school principals Elizabeth Shaw and Frances Roe proved themselves effective implementers of educational reform (Read, 2013).

The approach of F. Roe's approach to Froebel's methodology was experimental, involving a revision of his principles to adapt them to the conditions of London's pre-school institutions, which were struggling with excessive numbers of students in the 1930s.

In addition to the similarities, however, there were differences in the two pedagogues' approaches to froebliism. Although E. Shaw's methods were designed to arouse children's interest (they were aimed at learning about basic objects, tools and phenomena), her curriculum was designed to provide a central role for the teacher. Unlike E. Shaw, Roe's methodology expressed the ideas of the "new education," which

was dominated by pädagogocentrism. The influence of Montessori was evident in her individualization of methods for working with children. Roe's experimentation with individual and group methods, however, does not change the fact that in her teaching practice, Froebelian methodology was at the forefront. Jane Read found that Froebelian pedagogy remained dominant in early childhood education in England despite the influence of Montessori, especially in the period up to 1939 (2013, p. 93). Nevertheless, the child-centered approach was constantly confronted with an attitude that gave the teacher a leading role in the educational process. The articles discussed argue that the process of reception of Froebel's achievements in Western Europe and the United States was stretched over time, with its acceptance and creative use occurring relatively late, only in the interwar period.

The Latest Research on Froeblianism and its Implementation in Contemporary Preschool Practice

After World War II, Friedrich Froebel's pedagogical concept was criticized by Polish educational circles for the routinization of gift exercises and the misuse of stories to impart knowledge about the real world. The communist regime in Poland suppressed the idea of play, replacing it with the concept of education through work, and shaped the vision of an autocratic teacher who guides the student, corrects his mistakes and has a monopoly on knowledge. The differences between childcare centers and kindergartens disappeared, the work of kindergarten educators began to be schematic and focused on didactics. This position was polar opposite to Froebel's views on children's self-education through free cognitive activity. Froebel, like his gifts, disappeared from preschool curricula, his presence was marked only in publications of a historical nature. B. Bilewicz-Kuźnia (2017b), a researcher of Froebel's pedagogy, notes that echoes of Froebel's pedagogy were felt in the idea of developing preschool gardens in the People's Republic of Poland. However, there were financial difficulties in implementing the idea, and there was a lack of properly trained staff, which resulted in the idea being adopted in a simplified and literal version, leading to the mechanization of children's work in the gardens. Polish pedagogy of the communist era practically deleted Froebel from all areas of action, ideas and philosophy (Roszak, 2018, p. 157).

Only after the fall of communism were conditions favorable to the revival of the German pedagogue's preschool thought and practice.

At the beginning of the 21st, there is a visible increase in interest in Froebel's pedagogy in Poland, both in terms of theory and practice. Particularly much attention has been paid to his theory of children's play. According to the German pedagogue, play is a form of education. With a view to educating the youngest, he designed special

toys – called gifts. He was convinced that toys with geometric shapes found in nature (sphere, cube, cylinder) provide optimal opportunities to learn and understand the surrounding world, so in the created preschool methodology he used a ball and wooden blocks of various shapes. They had symbolic as well as real meaning. They provided an opportunity to learn arithmetic, trained imagination and construction sense, exercised senses, muscles, physical strength, memory and imagination. Through them, Froebel believed, children gain self-awareness, develop their willpower, a sense of independence and, at the same time, social contacts. Although early in the development of his own methodology Froebel subjected the child to the teacher's invention, before his death he stressed the importance of freedom in play. He expected children to create their own toys, for example, from sand, clay, paper, water and other materials available in the immediate environment (Bilewicz-Kuźnia, 2018, p. 49).

Perhaps the best-known current promoter of Froebel's work is Sylwia Kustos, who has developed methodological proposals using Froebel's theory of gift play (2014). She emphasizes that playing with gifts develops psychophysically, as well as exercises concentration and promotes calmness in the child. Sylwia Kustos points out the potential of Froebel's gifts in developing a child's creativity. The German pedagogue's teaching material opposes toys that impose on the child a way, a scenario of play. "In the age of tablets, digitization, when the child does not have the opportunity to create or give meanings and interpretations, most of the objects in his rolling are ready-made, defined and closed" (Kustos, 2019, p. 13). He also appeals to the preschool education teacher to arrange the preschool activity space in accordance with the spirit of constructivism, which is conducive to the development of the child's creative thinking. Indeed, creativity and creation were an important factor in the concept of kindergartens. According to S. Kustos,

[...] gifts are materials shared by children and the teacher for play, education, and – very importantly – self-education. This means that the creator thought out their construction in such a way that by freely manipulating them, experiencing and observing, the child performs operations of inference, analysis, and also perceives physical laws, similarities, differences and properties of solids in the course of self-directed activity of play (2019, p. 134).

Katarzyna Małek, author of the *Theaters. Great book of inspiration. Proposals for theatrical animations and games based on Froebel pedagogy* (2016). Her study is an original proposal for table theater and shadow theater using gifts to model the content of fairy tales, legends and poems. Thus, we are dealing with teaching through play, shaping the child's creativity, and at the same time directing children's activity by the teacher.

In addition, the so-called "heuristic play", based on the Froebelian idea of free play, gifts of nature, circle games and children's creation of their own toys, was implemented

into the Polish methodology of preschool education. This concept was born in England, in Poland it is promoted by Barbara Bilewicz-Kuźnia (2014, 2017a, 2017b, 2018) and Kamila Pernal (2017).

An important position on the publishing market, testifying to the interest in Froebel in our country is a collective monograph edited by Marian Z. Stepulak and Małgorzata Sitarczyk endorsed *Pedagogy of Froebel – a challenge for teachers, an opportunity for children. Theory and practice* (2017). It collects texts by Polish and Ukrainian pedagogues, sharing their experiences of using Froebel methodology. They are interdisciplinary in nature. The main message of the publication is Froebel's idea that teachers in their pedagogical practice should emphasize the development of thinking, action and work with the child himself, rather than its form (Stepulak & Sitarczyk, 2017).

Research and practical examples of the possibility of using the elements of Froeblian pedagogy in a modern kindergarten are also carried out by Barbara Bilewicz-Kuźnia. In 2013–2015, she implemented a project in several kindergartens, which led to the development of the *Dar zabawy* preschool education program using Froebel's theory of play. This author also prepared a methodological guide with ready-made suggestions for games and activities. They used the concepts of free play and heuristic play, play using Froebel's gift of play, storytelling in a circle, small group work, handwork, movement games and outdoor activities (Bilewicz-Kuźnia, 2014).

In an article reviewing the latest ideas of using Froebel pedagogy, Maria M. Mazur and Agata Jacewicz stated that

[...] modern preschool education shows that the use of gifts in daily work brings many benefits: it allows to exercise all senses, develop manual dexterity, concentration, eye-hand coordination, stimulates imagination and creative thinking. Froebel's material allows children to form a variety of mathematical concepts, sometimes beyond the framework of the core curriculum, such as fractions, geometric concepts. A very important aspect is children's concentration while working with gifts and calming down. Playing with gifts teaches children responsibility and respect for the objects entrusted to them (Mazur & Jacewicz, 2021, p. 47).

Meanwhile, Przemysław Ziółkowski, in an article on alternative concepts of education present in the modern school, mentioned Montessori, Froebel, Freinet and Awakening Schools (*Budzące się Szkoły*) methodologies. In turn, discussing the merits of each concept, he began with Froebel's proposal. Because of his subjective and respectful approach to the child's activity-play, he considered Froebel a forerunner of the New Education (Ziółkowski, 2022, p. 39).

An expression of the new openness to Froebel methodology is also the associations that are emerging in our country. Froebel.pl is a group of educators, teachers,

academics (including Edyta Gruszczyk-Kolczyńska and the aforementioned Barbara Bilewicz-Kuźnia), directors of kindergartens and schools who implement the pre-school education program *Dar zabawy*, prepared on the basis of Froebel's philosophy. Its activities are related to publishing (at the time of writing, 8 items have been published in the fields of general preschool education, as well as mathematics, music and movement, English language and education in the form of poems and drama based on Froebel's work), selling teaching aids (Froebel's gifts are the basis) and organizing training for teaching staff (popularizing Froebel's ideas and the *Dar zabawy* program). The culmination of Froebel.pl's activities is the annual National Froeblian Conference (its fourth edition was held on October 5–6, 2018 in Lublin), bringing together principals and teachers, academics, students and enthusiasts of Froebel's pedagogy. During the event, kindergartens and preschool groups receive a Froeblian certificate, confirming the institution's work using Froebel's ideas (Roszak, 2018, p. 159).

Similar societies are active abroad. Froebel methodology is promoted in the West by, among others, The Froebel Trust (formerly The Incorporated Froebel Educational Institute, International Froebel Society, Froebel Archive Childhood Studies or Froebel USA).

In the context of the foreign reception of froblism, it is worth noting the reprint of selected works by Froebel (2003). It is a collection of fifteen essays, originally published in German in 1861, on the value of the various stages of child's play.

An important position in the contemporary reception of Froebel's works is Joachim Liebschner's monograph (2006), in which he spoke out in the still ongoing debate on methods of educating the young child. Approaching Froebel's ideas, he advocated a pajo-centrally oriented education, questioning traditional approaches to the education and upbringing of the young child. In turn, Tina Bruce (2011, 2012) developed proposals for preschool activities inspired by Froebel's methodology. These included activities in the preschool garden, outdoor activities, songs, rhymes, use of gifts and forest preschools.

In light of the growing importance of Froeblian methodology, the findings of Ann Taylor Allen (2006) seem surprising. Well, in both Germany and America at the turn of the 20th century, there was a shift away from Froebel's methods, which emphasized theoretical learning, toward a pedagogy that turned its attention to practical skills. As part of a broader movement, this pedagogy permeated American school curricula at all levels from that time to the present. It was a disastrous trend that undermined the idea of democracy. The anti-intellectual curriculum was, in practice, offered mainly to the children of the poor and immigrants, while the children of the elite continued to receive a theoretical education. The resulting inequality became particularly apparent in the late 20th century, when the agricultural and industrial occupations for

which most students had been prepared ceased to exist, and good employment began to depend mainly on verbal and mathematical skills.

Today it is important to revisit both the message and methods of Frobel's original kindergarten. He did not differentiate his curriculum according to the ability, race, gender or social status of his students. He insisted that all children maintain their individualism; according to him, all need theoretical knowledge of the natural world and real society to develop their potential (Taylor Allen, 2006, pp. 187–188).

On the other hand, David J. Hargreaves, Sue Robson Sue Greenfield, Hiroko Fumoto, in an article on the issues of a child's sense of ownership and autonomy in the early stages of education using the assumptions of Froebelian pedagogy, noted that Froebel emphasized the development of natural forces and predispositions dormant within the child, rather than shaping him according to the assumptions and requirements of the environment. He believed that the child's personality was not a formless mass subject to arbitrary molding by the teacher, but had its own form and "life". He opposed education based on the transmission of knowledge from outside. The object of the Froebel Research Fellowship (FRF) teaching project, funded by the Froebel Trust (formerly the Incorporated Froebel Educational Institute) since 2002, was to investigate the extent to which the aforementioned Froebel assumptions can be used in contemporary education and care for the young child. The authors pointed out that in the UK, this is a very active and important part of current government education policy. Froebel's ideas underlie the main concerns of the research, which aimed to look at how practitioners carve out space for children's own creativity and thus promote their personal development. The project resulted in several publications (books and articles), about 80 presentations, as well as lectures/workshops for professional groups and practitioners. The results highlighted a number of areas of current interest in early childhood education and care, including the place of creativity in nurseries and preschools, the relationship between parents and professionals, children's participation, and pedagogical issues such as teacher-child relationships and their impact on children's creativity (Hargreaves et al., 2014, p. 310).

The purpose of the characterized research was to determine the extent to which Froebel's ideals, such as the belief that a child's knowledge should develop from within rather than from without, can be met within the requirements of contemporary early childhood education and care. Using an interview and questionnaire, as well as observations, teachers' attitudes and practices were examined in relation to the development of children's personal, social and cognitive skills. Also of interest to the researchers were children's creative thinking and the impact of social relationships on it, as well as the differences between children's, parents' and teachers' views on approaches to play and learning at home and at school.

The cited texts and initiatives are exemplary in nature. However, they convince us that Frebelsian pedagogy is still a living source of inspiration for contemporary educators and educators.

Conclusion

The reception of Friedrich Froebel's achievements went through various stages. After the initial reluctance towards his solutions, related to the fact that he represented a nation hostile to the Polish nation and pursuing a policy of Germanization, his methodology began to reach Polish lands. In turn, the heyday of freblism came during the interwar period. The process was similar in other countries, such as England and the US. During the communist era, gift-giving and the concept of play in Freblian terms were almost completely excluded, and it was only after 1989 that these ideas were revived. The result of increased interest in the thought and practice of the 19th-century pedagogue were publications, curricula and Freblian societies.

Freblovia pedagogy continues to shape the landscape of contemporary thought and practice in preschool and early childhood education. Froebel's gifts and his concept of play are an inalienable feature of modern preschool. The flourishing of preschool pedagogy in Poland is conducive to the intensification of research into the legacy of the German pedagogue and the implementation of his ideas and methods. It seems that thanks to these works, the status of the methodology of the 19th-century pedagogue has clearly strengthened. This process corresponds to the trends in preschool education found in the West, where Froebel is still a vibrant current of research and practical activity.

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