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## The serious side of nature, outdoor learning and play: International perspectives Tracey Hayes & Mark Leather

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There is extensive outdoor learning research taking place across the world, which highlights the need to look beyond the dominant Eurocentric and UK-based perspectives. In this special issue we bring together leading authors from England, Ireland, Scotland, Australia, Canada and India to discuss ways of researching the health, wellbeing and educational benefits that may be provided throughout life within a range of outdoor learning contexts. Nature, outdoor learning and play is about more than fun and games – it also enables us to explore some of the most pressing problems facing the world, particularly mental wellbeing, climate change, biodiversity loss and finding positive ways for humans to more sustainably coexist with non-humans. Playful, nature-based activities provide ways of learning about the outside world and understanding our place within it, and enable the development of a more positive relationship with nature, other people and ourselves.

This collection of papers makes a significant contribution to knowledge development and exchange from international perspectives, which is timely as the people of the world adjust to living with Covid-19, alongside ongoing, urgent environmental concerns. It is well documented that spending time outdoors is good for our health and wellbeing. However, access to outdoor spaces is inequitable and this has been exacerbated by public health responses to the pandemic. This is the focus for **Tomás Aylward** and **TA Loeffler** who highlight the inadequacies of accessible outdoor recreation spaces and facilities in our communities for persons with a disability. They outline a plan for a better future, which utilises inclusive outdoor learning to improve everyone's lives.

**Elizabeth Ann Wood** focuses on the impact of the pandemic with a thoughtful exposition on what happens when humans are deprived of play, playmates and play spaces, taking account of how children and families are maintaining play and playfulness under changed circumstances. **Tim Gill's** paper explores how we can take a more balanced approach to public risk, highlighting that actions are rarely risk free, and preventative measures are rarely without side effects. Continuing in a similar vein, **Sruthi Atmakur-Javdekar** challenges us to consider how intensive parenting practices, with concerted efforts to ensure children are 'school-ready', may be negatively impacting children's mental health and wellbeing.

**John Quay** explains that a broader focus on public health is required that extends beyond the human population and recognises that non-humans are also community members. **Katie Parsons** argues that we need to listen to young climate change activists and their demands for more rapid change, recognising them as changemakers of today, rather than tomorrow. She demonstrates this by passing the conversational baton to her daughter **Lucie Parsons**, who provides a young person's perspective on how taking part in social action can help to give us hope. Lucie reminds us that we are part of a community and that each of us can help to make a difference.

**Heidi Smith** brings together the threads from the other papers, proposing that we move to 'outdoor education praxis' as a new overarching term that encompasses the ways in which people feel, think, behave and act, and moves us more towards learning for sustainability.

We look forward to ongoing conversations through the Nature, Outdoor Learning and Play special interest group.

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