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BERA has a new [Nature, Outdoor Learning and Play \(NOLAP\) special interest group \(SIG\)](#)! It has the strategic aim of encouraging educational research into nature, outdoor learning and play across the lifespan by engaging in critical dialogue about the health, wellbeing and educational benefits available through a broad range of activities, contexts and locations. The establishment of this SIG is timely in light of recent initiatives and government funding, including the Children and Nature Programme (DfE et al., 2019) and the National Trust and National Lottery Heritage Fund's Future Parks Accelerator initiative (MHCLG, 2019). This new policy-driven funding highlights the need for more awareness of nature and outdoor learning within the world of educational research.

Outdoor learning is a broad term that includes discovering, experimenting with, learning about and connecting to the natural world. Traditional forms of engagement with the outdoors, such as the Scout Association, Outward Bound and the Duke of Edinburgh's Award, remain part of the educational landscape. Similarly, nature study and natural history provide ways of learning about the outside world and understanding our place within it, as is clear from the educational work of organisations such as Plantlife, the National Trust, the Wildlife Trusts, the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds and the Woodland Trust. Notable contemporary initiatives include the Open Air Laboratories network, which aims to support learners to discover more about nature on their doorstep, and the phenomenally successful book *The Lost Words* by author Robert Macfarlane and artist Jackie Morris which, with accompanying educational resources developed by the John Muir Trust, is, the Trust says, 'set to bring literacy

and nature to the fore in education settings across the UK' (John Muir Trust, 2017).

The NOLAP SIG will be officially launched at a [one-day event](#) at the University of Cumbria's London campus on Tuesday 2 July. SIG convenors Tracy Hayes and Mark Leather, together with speakers Tim Gill and Elizabeth Wood, will draw on their work to help attendees consider how to expand the horizons of children, young people and adults through NOLAP, focussing particularly on the natural world on our doorstep.

'The official launch of the NOLAP SIG on Tuesday 2 July will help attendees consider how to expand the horizons of children, young people and adults through nature, outdoor learning and play, focussing on the natural world on our doorstep.'

Tim will set out why practitioners need to take a balanced, thoughtful approach to risk in children's outdoor learning and play, and what this looks like. Taking in Scandinavian research in early childhood development, a ground-breaking Canadian court case, influential statements from key UK regulators, and innovative industry standards in Australia, Europe and beyond, he will argue that far from being anxious, the time is right for advocates of outdoor play to stop worrying and learn to love sensible risk management (see for example Gill, 2007).

Elizabeth will focus on how play seems to be at a critical juncture, with policy frameworks highlighting desired outcomes for health, wellbeing and achievement in education. Alternative views foreground free play as requiring more attention, while at the same time being under threat from a range of sociocultural influences. Taking a critical perspective on policy frameworks, Elizabeth will provide an overview of play in policy, and juxtapose this with current research on play in practice and children's play lives. She will draw on the concepts of funds of knowledge and convergence to understand contemporary play, and to contrast the

complexity of play research with narrow policy drivers (see for example Wood & Hedges, 2016).

Tracy and Mark's goal for the SIG is to create a forum in which academics, policymakers, practitioners and students can come together to engage critically in debates around nature, and to make a significant contribution to knowledge development and exchange. Extensive outdoor learning research is taking place in the UK that is of value to researchers and educational professionals alike (see for example Bragg & Atkins' 2016 report for Natural England). Through the activities of this SIG we aim to bring such research together in a cohesive way.

For more information and to join the NOLAP SIG visit bera.ac.uk/group/nature-outdoor-learning-and-play.

For more about the launch event on Thursday 2 July, and to book your place, [click here](#).

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