

# Teachers want support to embrace nature play in primary education

August 25 2022

---



Credit: Unsplash/CC0 Public Domain

From tree-branch tepees to bush tucker gardens, mud kitchens and even functional fire pits, primary schools are sprouting all sorts of nature play environments in an effort to better connect primary students with the outdoors.

But while nature play infrastructure grows, new research from the University of South Australia shows that [teachers](#) also need a knowledge-boost on how to best link nature play areas to the curriculum and [children's learning](#).

Conducted in partnership with Nature Play SA, the Australian first study found that while all teachers believe that nature-based play and learning can deliver huge benefits for children, seven out of 10 teachers felt that their knowledge and confidence was limiting their ability to fully embrace these opportunities at school.

Surveying teachers in 50 South Australian schools, the study found that the benefits of nature-based play and learning for children included:

- better [mental health](#) (98%)
- improved [cognitive development](#) (96%)
- learning about risk-taking (96%)
- spending time outdoors/in nature (96%).

Barriers to adopting nature-based play and learning for teachers included:

- limited knowledge and confidence about how to incorporate into learning or how to operate the class outside (68%)
- a crowded curriculum restricted their ability to adopt new learning (64%)
- a lack of understanding/support from others in the school (38%).

Australian statistics indicate that less than a quarter of children aged 5–14 achieve the recommended 60 minutes of physical activity every day and spend just over two hours each day sitting or lying down for screen-based activities.

Lead researcher and Ph.D. candidate, Nicole Miller, says the importance of nature-based play and learning for children cannot be underestimated. She strongly advocates for schools to support professional development opportunities to develop nature-based teaching and learning skills.

"There is widespread concern that children are not spending enough time in nature and, as a result, that they may be missing out on the [potential benefits](#) that nature has to offer—both for well-being and learning," Miller says.

"Emerging evidence indicates that nature-based play and learning can improve children's social skills, learning, [physical health](#), and well-being.

"While lots of schools are creating wonderful nature play areas, many teachers feel underprepared and uncertain about how to use these spaces to maximize teaching and learning opportunities aligned with the curriculum.

"For teachers in the know, nature-based play and learning is incredible. For example, cooking dinner on an outdoor fire can encompass a range of curriculum skills—math and measurement of ingredients, essential fire and safety skills, literacy, and sequencing skills from the recipe, as well as resourcefulness in finding the best sticks to use as skewers.

"But simple activities can equally deliver benefits: using sticks to demonstrate how fractions are part of a whole can demonstrate problem solving in a hands-on way and help children better grasp more complex math concepts.

"Nature-based play and learning has so much potential for learning and well-being—both for students and teachers. But we must find ways to support teachers to upskill and feel confident in delivering learning opportunities in nature.

"Training, education, and support at the school level is essential for teachers to take the next step, but so too are system-level approaches to consider how nature-based learning can be formally included into the curriculum.

"Mitigating these barriers must be a focus to ensure children are able to access nature-based play and learning opportunities at school."

The study is published in the *Journal of Adventure Education and Outdoor Learning*.

**More information:** Nicole Miller et al, The perceived benefits of and barriers to nature-based play and learning in South Australian public primary schools: A cross-sectional study, *Journal of Adventure Education and Outdoor Learning* (2022). [DOI: 10.1080/14729679.2022.2100431](https://doi.org/10.1080/14729679.2022.2100431)

Provided by University of South Australia

Citation: Teachers want support to embrace nature play in primary education (2022, August 25) retrieved 19 April 2024 from

<https://phys.org/news/2022-08-teachers-embrace-nature-primary.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.