



**Call for papers**

**International conference**

**"Nature-based" education:  
What's at stake for teacher education?**

*Conference organized by the research group IMAGER (EA 3958), Université Paris Est Créteil  
In collaboration with the reserach group LIRDEF, (EA 3749), Université Paul Valéry Montpellier*

**19-22 July 2022**

**Domaine du Ciran, 45240 Ménéstreau-en-Villette, France**

**Deadline for submission of proposals: extended to April 30<sup>th</sup> 2022**

**Keynote Speakers**

**Ziad DABAJA**, chercheur en sciences de l'éducation, Université de Windsor (Canada),  
**Christine PARTOUNE**, chargée de cours honoraire en didactique de la géographie à l'Université de Liège, maître-assistante honoraire en géographie (Haute Ecole Libre Mosane, Belgique),  
**Anne-Caroline PRÉVOT**, directrice de recherche CNRS, (Muséum national d'Histoire naturelle, Paris),  
**Lucie SAUVÉ**, professeure émérite en Didactique (Centre de recherche en éducation et formation relatives à l'environnement et à l'écocitoyenneté –Centr'ERE, Université du Québec à Montréal, Canada).

**Rationale**

In France, we are currently witnessing the rapid development of approaches known as "nature-based education," "education through nature," "outdoor education," "forest schools," or "outdoor classrooms." Largely regarded by the media as a reaction to the lockdown in response to the Covid-19 pandemic, these new educational approaches have become a topic of inquiry

in the scientific community due to the educational, instructional and environmental issues at stake.

Based on research into the beneficial impact that the "nature experience" can have on children's development, the international conference "**Nature-based education**" **will focus on some of the major instructional and environmental issues of this approach as well as on the developmental benefits that underlie these issues.**

**"Nature-based education": a paradigm that incentivizes the transformation of educational practice.**

In the anglophone literature, the umbrella term *outdoor education* has been defined as "an educational practice that takes place in near or distant outdoor and/or extracurricular environments, whether natural or artificial, where students have the opportunity to engage in a multitude of learning activities" (Dabaja, 2022, p.3). Within the perimeter of *outdoor education*, various approaches such as *nature-based education* and/or *nature-based learning* or the notion of the *forest school* – all of which we group together as "educating through nature"<sup>1</sup> – refer to what the environmental education (EE) movement defined in the 1990s as "an educational perspective in which the environment constitutes one of three spheres of interaction that are the foundation of personal and social development: the psychosphere (self), the sociosphere (others), and the ecosphere (environment), [these three spheres being] closely related to each other" (Sauvé, 1997, p. 20). In this perspective, the individual child's psychological development (autonomy, self-esteem, self-reflection, responsibility, etc.) is accompanied by an awareness of others and otherness (social belonging, relatedness, cooperation, citizenship, etc.), as well as the development of the child's relationship to the living environment (ecological awareness, naturalistic knowledge, feeling part of the global ecosystem, etc.). Educating through nature thus differs from a strictly "environmental" educational approach in which "nature" as subject matter would be considered both the means and the end of learning.

The international scientific community seems to agree (cf. Dabaja, 2021 for a comprehensive literature review on the topic) that children's participation and engagement in activities taking place in so-called "natural" environments, i.e., where humans are surrounded by plants, minerals, and animals, could contribute to improving their knowledge of (a) different curricular subjects, including social studies, language arts, mathematics and/or science (Avci & Gümüş, 2020; Becker et al, 2017) and (b) the natural environment (ibid.; Marchant et al., 2019; Purc-Stephenson et al., 2019). In addition, there is evidence for children's improved physical skills and mental health (Finn et al., 2018; Heras et al., 2020; Marchant et al., 2019) as well as benefits for their social and collaborative skills (Waite & al., 2016).

In situations "outside the 'walls' (of school) and in nature", the practices adopted by adults in their accompaniment of children (their roles, postures, professional gestures), whether in an instructional or recreational context, and the beliefs that underlie these practices seem to respond to the same characteristics as "classic" educational practices (socio-constructivist postures, scaffolding, mediation, securitization, "pedagogization" of the environment and of the

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<sup>1</sup> Henceforth we will use this term - which will, in fact, be discussed during the colloquium - to designate all school or non-school practices that take place in "a vegetated, mineralized and animated environment" and that aim to put children, cognitively and sensorially, in direct relationship with that environment. We believe that this term encompasses both the world of school (captured more or less effectively by the term "outdoor school") and the associative world, more akin to the Anglo-Saxon term "forest school" or its translation "*école forêt*" or even to the term "nature-based education."

learning processes, attention to direct and bodily experience, etc.), while concomitantly they seem to emancipate themselves from these very same frameworks, due to the fact that the "natural" environment can call for a quasi-ontological repositioning of the individual (Cottureau, 2017; Morizot, 2020), not only in terms of their awareness of self and "others," and of responsibility (perception of risk, in particular - cf. Sandseter, 2020), but also in pedagogical terms (*embodiment* and enactive approach to teaching & learning - Aden & Preller, 2020 -, pedagogy "anchored in the environment" - Acheroy & al., 2020; Partoune, 2020, etc.).

The analysis of these accompanying practices of children 'in nature' necessarily raises the issue of adult education, particularly teacher education and training. If "doing school, doing class" (translated from the French « *faire école, faire la classe* ») has always been an institutional and pedagogical concern for the teacher and teacher trainer (Meirieu, 2004, 2009), "doing school" in nature supposes a conceptual and methodological, even logistical, revamping that, over the course of the next decade, will call for new approaches to instructional design that are adapted to the challenges at hand. If enactive (Aden & Aden, 2017), reflective, biographical (Bachelart & Pineau, 2009) or self-learning (Galvani, 2020) approaches may find their full meaning within these training programs, they could also be effectively supplemented by other approaches, inspired, in particular, by the sciences of environmental education, while involving ongoing dialogue with the actors from both the educational (Ferjou & Fauchier-Delavigne, 2020) and associative fields (Acheroy & al., 2020).

### **Proposed lines of questioning**

Based on these elements, three areas of reflection *shall be proposed for discussion* during the symposium:

**Axis 1 – Terminology, Epistemology and Methodology:** if the main objective of the symposium targets professional practices (axis 2) and training (ax 3), it will be important to first question definitions of the object "education by 'nature'" and the historical filiations and disciplines fostered within previous movements, described in the history of educational sciences (Martel & Wagnon, 2022; Roy, 2021) and in the sciences of environmental education (Sauvé, 1997; Pineau & al. , 2005), among others. What link does "education by 'nature'" have with other successful paradigms or concepts that have preceded it and today, question it, such as "education relating to the environment" (Sauvé & al. , 2017), "eco-training" (Pineau & al., 2005), "education rooted in the environment" (Lloyd & Gray (2014), "nature experience" (Fleury & Prévôt, 2017) – to cite just a few. However, before questioning the link between education and "nature", there must obviously be the question of the very definition of the term "nature", in its plural ramifications. For example, ecology (cf. Prévot, 2021) must dialogue with other fields, such as that of anthropology (cf. Descola, 2005).

For this same axis, we would also like to discuss the question of disciplinary boundaries and associated knowledge with regard to the very definition of education by "nature". In view of the disciplinary footholds of the research cited above, education through nature appears, on the one hand, as an intrinsically transdisciplinary object, halfway between educational sciences and environmental sciences. On the other hand, by this very fact it questions intra- and inter-species links, as an object of sociology, philosophy, anthropology, ecology and ethology, among others (cf. Trocmé-Fabre, 2022). Consequently, what precautions – epistemological and methodological – should we, as scientists, have when approaching research objects that necessarily go beyond our disciplinary fields?

Finally, there are methodological issues. What tools and approaches do we use to collect and analyze educational practices pertaining to the so-called “natural” environment? Interactionist paradigms, and their focus on analysis of action via the language dynamics in interaction (Nicolas, 2019), for example, can they be a gateway to analyze practices? Does verbal data collected through interviews (biographical, semi-directive, self-confrontation, explanation, etc.) contribute both to the understanding of practices and to the training of actors in the field?

**Axis 2 – Pedagogy and Environment:** the regular outings of children in so-called "natural" environments implies questioning at the same time the pedagogical dimensions of the support and their impact on the environment. Since education is always contextualized, anchored in an environment, it is important to question pedagogical behavior in the proximity that it maintains with plant, animal and mineral elements. To what extent does this educational dynamic, relatively recent in France, imply professional posture adaptation to support children in an outdoor context? What are the relevant pedagogical actions in the face of these unprecedented educational situations for many professionals? How do the practices of professionals and their beliefs influence both the activities carried out by children in contact with other living things and on the living things themselves? What are the educational rituals that accentuate the sessions outside? What educational innovations could emerge in and through this so-called “natural” context? What supportive behaviors do adults manifest during outdoor sessions: how do they manage groups of children in outdoor environments, whether it involves free play practices or more directed activities?

**Axis 3 – Didactics and Training:** The formative dimensions of accompanying educational practices by "nature" are necessary to question as soon as these practices are being observed. How does the training system – university and/or professional – for child caregivers (early childhood educators, specialized educators, teachers, nature animators, etc.) meet the needs of adults practicing or intending to practice the process of education by “nature”? What integration can be envisaged within training programs for adults, an integration that is both capable of creating a link between the existing content within the models and of offering content specifically adapted to accompanying children outdoors? Should we, moreover, think of “integration” or “construction” of new and parallel training programs? How can research and participatory action research carried out in France and in other countries help analyze the needs of professionals and ensure effective integration into the training system?

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### **How to submit a paper:**

The expected communication proposals will be in the field of education or environmental sciences. They will be organized according to the 3 axes described above:

- Terminology, Epistemology and Methodology
- Pedagogy & Environnement
- Didactics & Training

Any researcher who wishes to give a talk is invited to submit an **anonymous abstract** of no more than **3,000 characters including spaces** (excluding figures and references) in French or English, **no later than April 15<sup>th</sup>**, 7pm (UTC+1). Papers will be **20 minutes long** and will be **followed by a 10-minute discussion**. The working languages of the conference are **French and English**.

**Abstracts will include:**

- A title,
- Autor's first name, family name and institutional affiliation
- 3 to 5 keywords and the axis
- Main bibliographic references (5 maximum)

**Abstracts must be submitted through this page:** <https://educationnature.sciencesconf.org/>

**Please note: communications cannot be done remotely (no video conferencing system available)**

**Calendar:**

Date of publication of the call for papers: February 15<sup>th</sup> 2022

Deadline for submission of proposals: ~~April 15<sup>th</sup> 2022~~ => **extended to April 30<sup>th</sup> 2022**

Notification of acceptance or refusal: May 30<sup>th</sup> 2022

Registration to the symposium: June 1<sup>st</sup> – June 15<sup>th</sup> 2022

Dates of the conference: July 18<sup>th</sup> -22<sup>th</sup> 2022

**Logistic information:**

Contact : [educationnature@sciencesconf.org](mailto:educationnature@sciencesconf.org)

Registration and payment online (opening of registrations: June 1<sup>st</sup> 2022) :

<https://educationnature.sciencesconf.org/>

**Admission fee to the conference:**

- Doctoral students: 15€
- Other audiences: 50€

**Accommodation:**

- Possibility of lodging on site, in tents or dormitories
- Possibility of accommodation in the vicinity

**Conference venue:** domaine du Ciran, 45 Ménestreau en Villette (Loiret, Centre-Val de Loire, France). More information : <https://www.domaineduciran.com/>

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