

Text A: We need more wilderness in education

In the following text the writer discusses a different approach to education.

Instead of obsessing about introducing the latest technology to schools and adopting the most fashionable teaching methods, we should focus on wellbeing and encourage children to connect with the natural world. Children have become cogs in a box-ticking machine.

This matters to me a great deal since becoming a father. I don't want my children to feel the same sense of failure I did if they don't do well in a conventional classroom.

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For some, our minds crumbled under pressure; classroom-based learning left me feeling worthless and destroyed my confidence. The worse I did, the more pressure I felt. Eventually, when I was rejected by my university choices, I spiralled into depression.

The wilderness rescued me. I have been shaped by my experiences in the great outdoors. Feeling comfortable in the wild gave me back my confidence. There is a natural simplicity to nature; it is far more tactile and tangible than the classroom. It's a leveller; it strengthened my character and set me back on track.

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I'm not suggesting the abolition of the current system of education, but we could certainly allow more time for children to explore the world around them. It doesn't need a huge investment either. Even if you don't have easy access, wilderness camps and schools work with inner-city children. Part of the beauty of wilderness schooling is that the overheads are low. You want a classroom? Build a shelter from nature's store. You want to eat? Forage for it. There are plenty of places where children can roam freely or permission from the landowner can be sought.

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There's evidence that shows connecting with nature really works. It's good for social and emotional development, improves self-awareness, and makes young children more co-operative. There is also evidence that the wilderness can reduce hyperactivity and has a soothing effect on children. German visionary Kurt Hahn was one of the early pioneers of outdoor education. His educational vision encompassed craftsmanship, community service, outdoor pursuits and physical skills.

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Scandinavia has led the way in this field, teaching by topics rather than subjects, such as nature's life cycle. Wilderness schooling involves team-work, working together in nature, not sitting in rows while teachers lecture. Lessons are collaborative, geared towards improving communication, character and resilience rather than staring through the window in boredom.

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As my own children step onto the conveyor belt, I am determined to give them a rounded education. We all have a responsibility to ensure every child has access to the same life-enhancing opportunities. It's time to turn everything on its head and to turn classrooms inside out.

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