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Hi, my name is Janne Fengler. I'm a professor of educational sciences, study program director of the Bachelor of „formation pédagogique“, and vice dean at the University of Luxembourg.

My work focuses on outdoor learning, education for sustainable development, the systems approach and what we call transformative competencies: the skills, values and attitudes that help people navigate uncertain futures.

One core question in education today is **“How can we prepare children for an ever-changing world to new challenges and uncertainty?”** Whether it's UNESCO or the OECD, the need to prepare people differently for the future than that was necessary in the past is recognized everywhere.

My research, and that of many colleagues, suggests that one powerful answer lies just beyond the classroom door.

- **When children learn in real environments, whether it's a schoolyard, a forest on the street outside their home, learning becomes concrete, meaningful, and emotionally engaging.** A classic review by Richardson and colleagues already showed this back in 2004.

Imagine students investigating the water quality of a nearby stream. They're not only learning scientific content, they are also practicing teamwork, problem solving, and responsibility. They experience that their actions matter. That combination is the essence of transformative learning.

Transformative learning reshapes how learners see themselves and the world. It grows when students reflect on experiences, engage with uncertainty, and consider multiple perspectives.

- **Outdoor learning** naturally supports this. It **slows things down, sparks curiosity, and strengthens wellbeing.**

Some done research by Wu and others have shown again and again. Across studies, we see three consistent effects.

- 1. First outdoor learning deepens understanding and boosts motivation.**

Authentic contexts make concepts stick.

- 2. Transformative competencies grow through experience plus reflection.**

Emotional engagement is a key driver.

- 3. Connecting learning to students' everyday worlds increases relevance and inclusion.**

When learning is situated in real places, learners take more ownership.

Interestingly, outdoor and place-based learning are fairly well established in early childhood primary and secondary education in some countries, but in higher education this approach is still rare. That's why, together with partners across Europe, we launched the EU funded Erasmus+ project **OLHE (Outdoor Learning in Higher Education.)**

We are developing and testing concrete teaching practices that **bring university learning outdoors.**



My vision is that people of all ages learn in ways that build a real relationship with the world. Hartmut Rosa calls this **resonance**. The feeling of being connected and able to shape one's environment. In German, we call it "Anverwandlung". I'm convinced this is also essential for social cohesion and active citizenship.

For schools, outdoor learning doesn't require a full transformation.

Small steps make a big difference. Teachers can integrate **short outdoor sequences into everyday lessons**:

- observation works
- micro field studies
- or learning stations in the schoolyard

Research shows even brief, well-structured activities can enhance learning and well-being.

Recently, I visited a primary school in Luxembourg with a wonderful project around the school garden and beekeeping. Projects like these invite rich discussions.

- How does our local environment reflect global challenges?
- What responsibilities do we have for the places we use every day?
- How can small actions contribute to larger change?
- What matters is that students **understand** not only how many legs a bee has, but also **how life processes are interconnected and how they themselves are part of these systems**.

That's what Antonovsky describes as a sense of **coherence**.

Learning outdoors is not limited to the natural sciences.

Even subjects such as mathematics and language lessons can take place outside:

- collecting leaves or stones
- counting, sorting, measuring, comparing hands-on activities that foster both mathematical skills and powers of observation
- expand vocabulary,...

When *Bëschklassen*, so forest classes in Luxembourg, take C1-children outside, that is exactly the point.

- Creating a pedagogical setting where they can **discover the world in a nature based and playful way**. I think that's a wonderful approach.

Last November, I had the privilege of speaking at the New Education Forum at the European Parliament in Brussels on that topic. It was a fantastic opportunity to discuss how local educational practices can connect with broader EU-strategies to prepare learners for uncertain and rapidly changing futures.

I left with a really strong sense that EU frameworks clearly support outdoor learning as part of 21st century education, meaning educational approaches that:

- connect curriculum goals with learners lived realities
- foster transformative and sustainability-oriented competencies
- promote participation, responsibility and agency.



Outdoor learning is not an extra burden.

- It's a practical way **to bring policy goals to life in age-appropriate, inclusive ways.**

This goes hand in hand with the PNDD in Luxembourg, the National Plan for Sustainable Development.

Along the same lines, the new primary education curriculum to be implemented in the 2026-2027 school year, explicitly aims to make some **21st century skills**:

- creativity
- Collaboration
- critical thinking
- multilingualism
- digital literacy

a core educational objective.

So to conclude, **future skills grow where learning connects to life.**

- **By designing learning environments that link the curriculum to learners' real worlds, we empower young people to shape their futures competently, responsibly and with confidence.**

And last but not least, all of this not only makes perfect sense, but is also really fun.