

Dr Mark Leather

Professor (Emeritus) of Education

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Profile

Mark is an educator, researcher, and outdoor practitioner with a deep commitment to values-led work. Alongside his role as a professor and educational consultant, he has built a sustained record of impactful research and teaching, always with an eye on how learning can help people flourish in their personal and professional lives. Much of his work focuses on the *lived experiences* of participants, using embodied and creative methods to generate rich, authentic insights. He is particularly passionate about hearing participant voices and exploring how people connect with the sea, the natural environment, and the “more-than-human” world, drawing inspiration from different cultures, countries, and perspectives.

Mark brings many years of hands-on experience across the outdoor sector – including commercial and charitable work, formal and informal education, and roles such as Scout leader, water sports instructor, American summer camp counsellor, outdoor education centre manager, schoolteacher, and university professor. Across all these roles, he is committed to supporting students and colleagues, nurturing confidence, curiosity, and connection with self, others, and the natural world, while continually striving for his own growth and leadership within the outdoor community.

Invited Keynote Lectures

Leather, M. (2024). *Reflections on A Critique of Forest School*. Forest School Association International Research Symposium. University of Liverpool, UK.

Leather, M. (2021). *Leisure studies, útímenntun, and holistic education: Talking, walking, and playing*. University of Iceland. The Annual Conference of the School of Education, Menntakvika: Research, innovation and development.

Leather, M. (2021). *Learning Ecologies. Developing student learning ecologies: Exploring my practice*. University of Winchester Learning & Teaching Conference.

Leather, M. (2019). *Paths, Goals and Perspectives of Forest Pedagogy in Italy*. 1st Convegno di Pedagogia del Bosco, Milan, Italy.

Cree, J. & **Leather, M.** (2018). *What is the place of Forest School in outdoor learning?* At the Forest School Association National Conference, Norfolk, UK.

Leather, M. (2018) *A Critique of Forest Schools: Something Lost in Translation*. National Outdoor Education Conference, Hobart, Australia.

Peer Reviewed Research Publications

Leather, M. (2026). Beyond colonisation: Developing a sense of place through outdoor education in Vietnam. International Conference on Educational Sciences and Foreign Language Teaching, ICEF. *Journal of Science and Technology*, ISSN: 2734-9381 <https://doi.org/10.51316/icef.hust.2025.09>

Leather, M. (2025). Hyperreal Nature: Instagram Providing Greater Affordances with the Outdoors. In Maher, P. & Beames, S. (Eds.). *Routledge Handbook of Mobile Technology, Social Media and the Outdoors*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003367536>

Leather, M. & Loeffler, TA. (2025). Visualising seascapes: Encounters in higher education. In Brown, M. (Ed.). *Blue spaces: Experiencing the sea in outdoor studies*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003272496-17>

Katsogridakis, G., & **Leather, M.** (2025). Teacher-student relationships in higher education: reflections from an adventure sport context. *Sport, Education and Society*, 30(2) pp. 237-248. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13573322.2023.2298794>

Thorsteinsson, J.F., **Leather, M.**, Nicholls, F., & Jóhannesson, G. (2025). Exploring a pedagogy of place in Iceland: Students understanding of a sense of place and emerging meanings. *Journal of Outdoor and Environmental Education* 28(1), pp.19–41 <https://doi.org/10.1007/s42322-023-00150-4>

- Lee, E. Y., de Lannoy, L., Li, L., de Barros, M. I. A., Bentsen, P., Brussoni, M., ... **Leather, M.**, ... & Tremblay, M. S. (2022). Play, Learn, and Teach Outdoors—Network (PLaTO-Net): terminology, taxonomy, and ontology. *International Journal of Behavioral Nutrition and Physical Activity*, 19(1), 1-20. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12966-022-01294-0>
- Leather, M.** & Thorsteinsson, J. (2021). Developing a Sense of Place. In G. Thomas, J. Dymont, & H. Prince (Eds.). *Outdoor Environmental Education in Higher Education: International Perspectives*, pp. 51-60. Springer. ISBN: 978-3-030-75979
- Leather, M.**, Harper, N., & Obee, P. (2021). A pedagogy of play. Reasons to be playful in post-secondary education. *Journal of Experiential Education*. 44(3) 208–226
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1053825920959684>
- Quay, J., Gray, T., Thomas, G., Allen-Craig, S., Asfeldt, M., Andkjaer, S. Beames, S., Cosgriff, M., Dymont, J., Higgins, P., Ho, S., **Leather, M.**, Mitten, D., Morse, M., Neill, J. North, C., Passy, R., Pederson-Gurholt, K., Polley, S., Stewart, A., Takano, T., Waite, S., & Foley, D. (2020). What future/s for outdoor and environmental education in a world that has contended with COVID-19? *Journal of Outdoor and Environmental Education*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s42322-020-00059-2>
- Leather, M.**, Fewings, G. & Porter, S. (2020). Outdoor education: The Romantic origins at the University of St Mark and St John. *History of Education Review*, 49(1), 85-100. <https://doi.org/10.1108/HER-04-2019-0009>
- Leather, M.** (2020). Finding my professional voice: Autobiography as a research method for outdoor studies in B. Humberstone and H. Prince (Eds.). *Research Methods in Outdoor Studies* (pp. 130-139). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429199004>
- Gibson, K. & **Leather, M.** (2020). Mixed methods research: Paradigmatic considerations for outdoor studies in B. Humberstone and H. Prince (Eds.). *Research Methods in Outdoor Studies* (pp. 269-278). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429199004>
- Leather, M.**, & Gibson, K. (2019). The consumption and hyperreality of nature: Greater affordances for Outdoor Learning. *Curriculum perspectives*, 39(1), 79-83.
<https://doi.org/10.1007/S41297-019-00063-7>
- Leather, M.** (2019). Pasts and Presents Making Connections with the Sea: A Matter of a Personal and Professional Heimat, in K. Peters & M. Brown, (Eds.). *Living with the Sea: Knowledge, Awareness and Action*. Routledge Studies in Human Geography, pp 196-212. Taylor & Francis. ISBN: 9781138062078
- Leather, M.** (2018). Outdoor education in the National Curriculum: the shifting sands in formal education, in P. Becker, B. Humberstone C. Loynes, & J. Schirp, (Eds.). *The Changing World of Outdoor Learning in Europe*, pp 179-193. Routledge. ISBN: 9781138047662
- Leather, M.** (2018). A critique of Forest School: something lost in translation. *Journal of Outdoor and Environmental Education*. 21(1), 5-18. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s42322-017-0006-1>
- Leather, M.** (2018). The water environment and informal education, in T. Jeffs & J. Ord (Eds.). *Rethinking Outdoor, Experiential and Informal Education: Beyond the Confines*, pp. 124-138. Routledge. ISBN: 9780415703109
- Ord, J. & **Leather, M.** (2018). Experiential Education: The Importance of John Dewey, in T. Jeffs & J. Ord (Eds.). *Rethinking Outdoor, Experiential and Informal Education: Beyond the Confines*. Pp. 40-55. Routledge. ISBN 9780415703109
- Leather M** & Nicholls F (2016) More than activities: using a ‘sense of place’ to enrich student experience in adventure sport. *Sport, Education and Society*, 21(3), 443-464.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/13573322.2014.927758>
- Leather M** (2013) ‘It’s good for their self-esteem’: the substance beneath the label. *Journal of Adventure Education and Outdoor Learning*, 13(2), 158-179.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/14729679.2012.737701>
- Parrott L, Pettit E & **Leather M** (2012) *Up the creek without a communication aid: Speech and language therapy and outdoor adventure education*. In A Miller, J Sharp & J Strong (eds.) *What is research-led teaching? Multi-disciplinary perspectives*. London: CREST/GuildHE.

Ord J & **Leather M** (2011) The Substance Beneath the Labels of Experiential Learning: The Importance of John Dewey for Outdoor Educators. *Australian Journal of Outdoor Education*, 15(1), 13-23. <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF03400924>

Academic and professional qualifications

University of Exeter	EdD Professional Doctorate in Education	2010
	Thesis: <i>An Exploratory Case Study of a 'Successful' Pupil Referral Unit</i>	
University of Edinburgh	MSc Outdoor Education	2001
University of Exeter	BSc (Hons) Science Education (QTS)	1994
Royal Geographical Society	FRGS - Fellow	2024
AdvanceHE	SFHEA - Senior Fellow	2022
Institute for Outdoor Learning	POL - Professional in Outdoor Learning	2020

Research and professional practice interests

Boards, Committees, and Groups

Academic Board member of **European Institute for Outdoor Adventure Education and Experiential Learning**, 2023 – present

Academic Committee member for the **International Outdoor Education Conference**, 2013 ->2026

Academic Committee member for the **Forest School Association**, International Research Symposium 2024

Active Outdoor Play in Europe Network. Steering Group – Representing England. Center for Clinical Research and Prevention, Copenhagen University Hospitals. 2024 - present

Co-convenor of **British Educational Research Association** (BERA) Nature, Outdoor Learning and Play (NOLAP) special interest group (SIG) – 2019-2025. Details [here](#)

Co-convenor of **Peninsula Research in Outdoor Learning** (PRinOL) a regional research hub for the Institute for Outdoor Learning (IOL). Details [here](#)

PLaTO-NET (**Play and Teaching Outside Network**): Terminology, Taxonomy, Ontology Global Harmonization Project. **Steering Committee** – 2019 - present
<https://www.outdoorplaycanada.ca/plato-net/>

Journal Reviewing

- *Journal of Experiential Education*. **Editorial Board** member
- *Journal of Outdoor and Environmental Education*. **Editorial Board** member

PhD Supervision

Mathew Mitcheson The impact of pupil premium funding on Duke of Edinburgh Award (DofE) participants.
Feb 2023 - present

Nik Elvy Micro-adventures. The impact of Outdoor Learning experiences of children in poverty. *Withdrawn*
February 2020 - 2022

Ian Blackwell How do activity-based dads' groups impact on the fathers and children who participate?
completed 2021

Examining – PG Research Students

2025 – Liverpool John Moores University, **PhD Thesis, viva voce, Ange Garden**. *Exploring the Theoretical Foundations of Forest School Pedagogy: Autonomy, Risk and Social Constructivism in an English Context*.

2025 – University of Cumbria, **PhD Thesis, viva voce, Rebecca Horden**. *Investigating teacher-student relationships from classrooms to outdoor learning: exploring engagement with learning by listening to 'the voices' of young people*.

2025 – Monash University, Australia, **PhD Thesis, via examination, Alexandra Wendel Treloar**. *A self-study of teacher practice in outdoor learning*.

2025 – Plymouth Marjon University (Internal), **PhD Thesis, viva voce, Jacob Law**. *Exploring the Experiences of High-Performance Athletes Undertaking a Dual Career with English Universities*.

- 2024 - Plymouth Marjon University (Internal), **Major Review**, *viva voce*, **Michelle Batstone**. *Can the gestures, actions and utterances of children aged four and five engaged with virtual manipulatives be used as evidence that development in mathematical understanding of early number concepts has taken place?*
- 2023 – University of Bologna, **PhD Thesis** *via examination*, **Chiara Borelli**. *Walking interview and other qualitative methods to monitor the effectiveness of Adventure Education programs with at-risk adolescents.*
- 2023 – University of Worcester, **Edd Thesis** *viva voce*, **Colin Wood**. *An exploration of how primary school children’s social values are influenced by their experiences during residential outdoor learning.*
- 2023 – Nottingham Trent University, **Edd Thesis** *viva voce*, **Alison Murphy**. *Growing Little Learners: identifying ways to support children’s learning in primary science using the outdoors.*
- 2022 – University of Plymouth, **Edd Thesis** *viva voce*, **Katy Joy**. *The Influence of Higher Education Study on Practitioners in The Field of Outdoor and Adventure Education*
- 2022 – University of Limerick, **PhD Thesis** *viva voce*, **Marie Claire Murphy**. *“Sowing the Seed”. A Bio-ecological Exploratory Case Study of the Forest School Approach to Learning and Teaching in the Irish Primary School Curriculum.*
- 2020 – University of Dundee, **PhD Thesis** *viva voce*, **Alexia Barrable**. *A new focus for education? Nature connection as a goal for all education: Theoretical research and practical perspectives.*
- 2018 - University of Central Lancashire, **PhD Thesis** *viva voce*, **Carmen Byrne**, *HERO, HEROINE OR OUTCAST? Examining gender identity of the British Adventuring hero.*
- 2016 - University of Edinburgh, **PhD Thesis** *viva voce*, **Sharifah Intan Sharina Syed Abdullah**, *An Investigation into the Influence of Outdoor Environmental Education Courses on the Environmental Attitude and Behaviours of Malaysian Participants: A Life History Approach.*
- 2016 - University of Western Sydney, **PhD Thesis** *via examination*, **Amanda Lloyd**, *Place-Based Outdoor Learning Enriching Curriculum: A Case Study in an Australian Primary School.*

Conference presentations

- Leather, M.** (2026). Beyond colonisation: Developing a sense of place through outdoor education in Vietnam. *International Conference on Educational Sciences and Foreign Language Teaching, ICEF.*
- Leather, M.** (2025). The UK Story - Critical reflections on international collaboration and friendship. *Gelyda International Conference, The Science and Practice of Extended Learning, Youth Development and Wellbeing*, University of Iceland.
- Leather, M.** (2025). Hyperreal Nature: Instagram Providing Greater Affordances with the Outdoors. In P. Maher & S. Beames Symposium at *European Institute for Outdoor Adventure Education and Experiential Learning. Conference*, University of Bologna, Italy.
- Hayes, T., **Leather, M.**, Milner, A., Major-Smith, K., Smith, M. & Fewings, G. (2024). Far away from the Ivory Tower: The impact of university education on disadvantaged people and their communities. *British Education Research Association Conference*, University of Manchester, UK.
- Leather, M.** & Loeffler, TA. (2024). Exploring the Pedagogical Benefits of Visualising Seascapes in Higher Education. *International Outdoor Education Research Conference (IOERC)*. Tokyo, Japan at the National Olympics Memorial Youth Center.
- Leather, M.** & Katsogridakis, G. (2024). Teacher-student relationships in Higher Education: Reflections from an Outdoor Adventure Education degree. *International Outdoor Education Research Conference (IOERC)*. Tokyo, Japan at the National Olympics Memorial Youth Center.
- Leather, M.** & Thorsteinsson, J. (2023). The Place Continuum. Taking Action on the Climate Crisis by Nurturing Our Connection to the Planet. *European Institute for Outdoor Adventure Education and Experiential Learning. Conference: Metsäkartano Youth Centre, Finland.*
- Katsogridakis, G. & **Leather, M.** (2023). Teacher-student relationships for an equitable learning environment: Insights from the field of outdoor adventure education. *British Education Research Association Conference*, Aston University, UK.
- Leather, M.** & Hayes, T. (2023). Curating a Cabinet of Curiosities: A playful outdoor walkshop. *British Education Research Association Conference*, Aston University, UK.

- Leather, M.** & Loeffler, TA. (2022). Blue Spaces and the Visualising of Seascapes: Duoethnographic Encounters in Higher Education. *British Education Research Association Conference*, University of Liverpool
- Kelly, O. & **Leather, M.** (2022). Walking with nature: reflections on alternative pedagogies. *International Outdoor Education Research Conference (IOERC)*. University of Cumbria
- Thorsteinsson, J. F., & **Leather, M.**, & Nicholls, F. (2022). Exploring a pedagogy of place in Iceland. Students understanding of a sense of place and emerging meanings. *International Outdoor Education Research Conference (IOERC)*. University of Cumbria,
- Þorsteinsson, J. F., & **Leather, M.**, & Jóhannesson, G. Þ. (2022). Exploring a pedagogy of place in Iceland. Students understanding of a sense of place and emerging meanings. *Nordic Educational Research Association (NERA)*. Conference in Reykjavik, Iceland.