



**Figure 1: Outdoor education provides opportunities for pupils to learn in wild spaces. Photo © Yenka Honig.**

## A geography of the present: looking inwards

Perhaps outdoor educators need to be informed by human as well as physical geography. Human geography helps us to see that forms of knowledge about nature and space are to some degree, social constructions (Park, 1995); that our cultural identities and mindsets help to determine how we experience and know the world. This becomes important when we work with pupils in nature, so that we can help them to explore their own internal geographies; the world and themselves through using their senses, emotions, imaginations and cognitive facilities.

Natural environments are a wonderful setting for pupils to explore their identities of self, relationships to the world and to connect with the greater than human ecological community (Louv, 2005). This requires us to provide them with opportunities to be receptive and sensitive; to engage and refine their attention skills; and to discover elemental nature and ecological space through play and creativity.

We can mentor pupils to connect with the stillness, space and potential of the present moment. Nature provides a background for pupils to engage with their own greater selves and with ecological networks (Figure 2). Many pupils are becoming more and more disconnected from the natural world. They feel separate



**Figure 2: Encouraging in-depth understanding of the natural world can reconnect pupils with nature. Photo © Yenka Honig.**

and alone, which makes them feel disconnected and alienated such that they exhibit symptoms of what Richard Louv (2005) has coined 'nature deficit disorder'.

Through exploring natural spaces, pupils can begin to discover their internal spaces. In this way, outdoor education can begin to forge a relationship with a new kind of geography of interior terrains. Pupils can explore the personal and the

universal, the local and the global. They can begin to discover their interconnection to a greater reality, to realise that 'our minds and bodies are as intertwined with the moon and the stars as they are with the air we breathe and the water we drink' (Coleman, 2006). As John Muir (2001) put it, when he wrote that by going for a walk in nature he 'was going out', but he actually found that he 'was really going in'.