



THE OUTDOOR CLASSROOM

Benefits to Using the School Grounds for Learning

Using the Schoolyard as a Teaching Space:

1. **Provides concrete experiences to clarify abstract concepts:** Concepts become much more meaningful and authentic when actually encountered in the schoolyard. Students' knowledge moves from head (textbook) knowledge to experiential (hands-on) knowledge.
2. **Provides motivation for the reluctant learner:** Whether it be the change of pace, the change to tactile/ kinesthetic learning or the immersion in nature, many students who do poorly in the indoor classroom thrive in the outdoor classroom. English language learners also blossom with opportunities to touch, smell, see and hear the language they are learning.
3. **Adds variety to teaching and learning:** The most effective teachers present new content multiple times using a variety of instructional strategies. The outdoors can provide rich learning experiences that are a welcome change to the four walls of the classroom for both students and teachers.
4. **Helps increase student achievement:** Researchers that have focused on the environment as a learning context found data that supports the use of the outdoors for instruction. Students learn more within an environmental based context than within a traditional educational framework. (Lieberman and Hoody, 1998)
5. **Is compatible with current practices in education:** Learning in the outdoor classroom is very compatible with inquiry-based learning, research based instructional strategies, multiple intelligences and character education.
6. **Provides easy access to the outdoors:** The proximity of the schoolyard makes repeated trips to observe changes that happen in a day, or over a period of a year, possible and doesn't require permission forms that would be needed for an off-site field trip. The length of excursions can be very short or longer to provide in-depth study. The proximity also provides the opportunity to initiate projects to improve the environment.
7. **Makes field trips more meaningful:** A class that has had a lot of experience with trees and local animals will not be overpowered by a city park, or a botanical garden, but will approach this bigger area with the skills of observation and scientific inquiry that were developed and practiced in the school situation.

Adapted from *Schoolyard Enhanced Learning* by Herbert Broda and *Ten Minute Field Trips* by Helen Russel. Written by Hilary Inwood, Ontario Institute for Studies in Education and Pamela Miller, Toronto District School Board for the TDSB-Evergreen Outdoor Classroom Institute Workshop.