

## South Parks' Outdoor-a-thon A whole school celebration of outdoor learning

*By Farheen Haq, WildBC Facilitator*

South Park Family School has been engaged in many place-based learning activities this year as a Wild School. The school is right across Beacon Hill Park, walking distance to the inner harbor and downtown and a 15-minute walk to oceanfront and beaches. In addition to being a Wild School, they are also one of the pilot sites for their School District #61s' nature kindergarten program. The school and the staff have used all these assets to launch a year of outdoor learning. To celebrate their year of learning, the whole school spent a day doing an "outdoor-a-thon" exploring various stations set up at a nearby park.

Staff at South Park Family School created an organizing committee with teachers Louisa Elkin, Carol Eby and Carolyn Howe. Louisa explains that the rationale for the whole day outdoors was to "... engage in deep learning outdoors - not just running around."

They began planning for the Outdoor-a-thon in January with the invitation out to local community partners to lead activities at various stations in the park. The community members responded and 5 stations were finalized:

- **Bird station** included a telescope, skulls, and other objects to look at and touch.
- **Wish Sticks Art station** included a reflection and meditation on the gifts offered by the park and created wish sticks using trimmings from the park's yard waste centre
- **Native Plant Scavenger Hunt station** included a guided native plant search in the park
- **Invasive Native Plants station** included an exploration of local invasive and endangered native plants
- **First Nations station** to learn about the history and culture of the park.

In order to accommodate 9 divisions, Gr. 3/4 teacher Louisa Elkin managed the complex timetabling that saw all classes rotate through 5 stations in the park and even time to walk between each station and use the bathrooms. This was likely the most challenging part but one of the key ingredients to a successful day, especially allotting a half hour



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between each station for each division. This allowed classes to respond to individual needs, using toilets, having movement time, or responding to a point of interest. Here is what the schedule looked like:

TIME	STATION 1	STATION 2	STATION 3	STATION 4	STATION 5
9:00		Div 6			Div 7
9:30	Div 1	Div 2	Div 8	Div 9	Div 3
10:00	Div 6	Div 7		Div 4	Div 5
10:30	Div 3			Div 8	Div 9
11:00		Div 1	Div 6	Div 7	Div 2
11:30	Div 4	Div 5	Div 3		
12:00	Lunch	Lunch	Lunch	Lunch	
12:30	Div 8	Div 9	Div 1		
1:00	Div 5	Div 4	Div 2	Div 3	
1:30	Div 7	Div 8	Div 9	Div 6	
2:00			Div 4	Div 5	

Other elements that made for a great day all round included:

- free play for students time to blow off steam and visit the playgrounds at the park.
- a parent volunteer at each station. "There was a parent volunteer or community volunteer at each station so there extra pairs of hands. We drew on student teachers, parents, friends to do this." Louisa explains.
- a backup plan for behaviour: the principal and a learning support teacher teamed up to be able to respond to a call from a teacher if they needed help (eg: runners, or not able to manage behaviour).
- First aid bags at each station.
- Each station leader had the day's schedule with emergency numbers.

The highlights for the teachers were many, and Louisa Elkin shared "Bringing the wish sticks made during the outdoor-a-thon into the school along with a whole school printmaking project was beautiful. I did not know about the special area about about the endangered wildflowers. I learned something about the park that I didn't know. The children sitting learning about endangered species, outside under the oak trees. I could see the focus and concentration." When asked if she would do the outdoor-a-thon again she says "Yes! With no hesitation."



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