

Outdoor Learning is the Real Thing

As WildBC has been collecting stories from teachers around the province, one detail that has really stood out is the number of teachers who remark on the richness of learning experiences outside the classroom.

Sacred Heart School in Prince George has used WildBC grants to pay for transportation for a number of field trips throughout their region. The kindergarten teacher at Sacred Heart, Nuala Powers, exudes on the power of getting students outdoors: "Fieldtrips are a fantastic learning experience for children. There's only so much you can show them in the classroom or read about in the classroom. But when they go out in the environment and really experience it, it's fantastic for them."

Nuala says that even years later, her past students will talk about the field trips they went on. They don't talk about specific days in the classroom, she says, but what they learned on those trips stays with them.

Barb McClusky, a kindergarten teacher at 100 Mile Elementary School in 100 Mile House has started taking her class out weekly:

"[We've] had some wonderful experiences where the kids have been interacting with nature. After one of our walks in the snow, we made a story map like the one we did for the book, "The Snowy Day" by Ezra Jack Keats. We found a trail of perfect rabbit tracks on another one of our trips.

One day we found an enormous puddle where the snow and ice was partially melted. The kids played and got drenched but thoroughly had fun. After the snow melted, we saw the trails the voles made in the subnivean spaces. A little critter even ran past us as we were inspecting them. We think it was a vole, but it was scurrying so fast, we weren't sure. We came upon a deer one day. We followed a pair of Canada geese to the creek. We observed and drew pussy willows near the creek, then we wrote about them back in class and did another art project drawing pussy willows with pastels and paint. This week we focused on the four senses of sight, smell, touch and hearing and recorded our discoveries while visiting a forested area at the park.

Steve Rodwell, a grade 6/7 teacher in the North Okanagan Shuswap District, echoes these sentiments. "Kids are pretty self-motivated in nature. They seem to eat it up. They have a little bit of freedom or more freedom than a classroom. Being in the air works on the brain and makes them more excited and enthusiastic about what they're doing."



“ One lesson outdoors is worth seven inside. ”



What our BC teachers have discovered is supported by research. For example, studies are suggesting that outdoor education may contribute to cognitive learning. The country of Scotland now recognizes outdoor education as an essential part of education because of the value it provides to students:

- The multi-sensory experience outdoors helps children and young people retain knowledge more effectively. Pupils learn with their whole bodies on a large scale
- Outdoor environments and surroundings provide a rich stimulus for creative thinking and learning. This affords opportunities for challenge, inquiry, critical thinking and reflection
- Connections are made experientially with the real world outside the classroom, giving student meaningful context for the skills, knowledge and understanding they're developing
- Students discover that not everything outside matches the models and textbooks (or the Internet). This doesn't mean that what they have found is 'wrong'. Instead, students develop awareness of the complexities of the real world – improving their critical thinking skills

http://www.educationscotland.gov.uk/Images/OutdoorLearningSupport1_tcm4-740873.pdf

We're discovering the places in which people learn help them make connections between their experiences and the world around them in a meaningful way. And outdoor places provide a diversity of resources and spaces that is hard to reproduce indoors!



Learning outside the classroom provides rich experiences.

