

The Rewards Just Outside Your School Door

One thing that can hold you back from getting your students outdoors is thinking that a good experience involves a fancy destination with a program a long distance away. Certainly, going on a long-distance trip enables students to see new things and have first-hand experiences. But the same thing can happen in your own neighbourhood.

Steve Rodwell is a middle school teacher in the Okanagan Shuswap District. He describes how he often takes his students outside:

A little mountain is right across from the school. We leave school for the afternoon and hike in the forest and do some games in there and they love it. It's a different world for them. Even in BC kids don't get to spend as much time as you'd think in a forest. And kids get that chance to maybe share what they know too, in terms of tree identification, or the growth in the forest in terms of rings or mosses, what kind of berry trees are in the ground, or their bird knowledge.

Elaine Jaltema says that when she taught grade two students at Brentwood Elementary in Burnaby, she frequently took her students to a park about five minutes away:

It had a playground in it but that wasn't where our interest lay – it also had quite a wild element and my class went there often. We could walk there in five minutes. Sometimes we went for lunch. We would call it our DPA (daily physical activity) which wasn't prescribed then but is now ... And if you go often to the park, you fall in love with it, which is what I wanted to happen.

Teachers and researchers have discovered that there's real value in getting to know outdoor places well. In one research project, researchers studied two sustainability education programs—one in the US and the other in Australia.

They found that outdoor, place-based education resulted in more lasting knowledge, attitude and behaviour change compared to class-based activities. Students developed a sense of place from repeated visits to an outdoor education site. In turn, cultivating a sense of place led to better learning outcomes for both science learning and education for sustainability (Rafferty and Laird, 2013).

So make getting outdoors easy on yourself by finding any bit of 'wildness' close by. Not only will it be less work and stress, it just might be more beneficial to you and your students.



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