Why Go Outdoors?

Outdoor education can happen anywhere--on a playground, a walk around the block, or in a cemetery. In forests, beaches, and parks. Any location will do, as long as it encourages first-hand experiences, direct contact with the topic, and interaction among students.

Any subject can be taught outdoors. Students in schools that use outdoor classrooms and other nature-based education show significant gains in **social studies, science, language arts, and math**. Students in outdoor science programs improved their **science** scores by 27% (American Institutes for Research, 2005).

Nature provides fodder for **high-level skills**; children engage in more **creative** play in green areas of their schoolyards than in the paved areas. They also played more **cooperatively** (Bell and Dyment, 2006). Play in nature is especially important for developing **problem-solving skills** (Kellert, 2005). Through environmental education offered in schools, students increase **critical thinking** skills (Ernst and Monroe, 2004).

Teaching outdoors is valuable for educating the whole student. Proximity to, views of, and daily exposure to natural settings increase children's ability to **focus** and enhance **cognitive abilities** (Wells, 2000). Nature is important to children's **development** in every major area—intellectual, emotional, social, spiritual and physical (Kellert, 2005).

A prime goal of outdoor education is to foster **stewardship** and **respect** for the land and its resources through enhanced awareness and appreciation for the interconnection of all facets of life. Time in nature encourages **choices based on data and facts**. Research shows that outdoor education produces the following benefits—

- Contact with the natural world can significantly **reduce symptoms of attention deficit disorder** in children as young as five years old (Kuo and Taylor, 2004).
- School grounds with diverse natural settings encourage children to be **more active physically**, more **civil** to one another and more **creative** (Bell and Dyment, 2006).
- Children who grow their own food are more likely to **eat fruits and vegetables** (Bell & Dyment, 2008) and to show higher levels of knowledge about **nutrition** (Waliczek, & Zajicek, 2006). They are also more likely to continue **healthy eating habits** throughout their lives (Morris & Zidenberg-Cherr, 2002).
- Improves eyesight. More time spent outdoors is related to improved **eyesight** in children and adolescents (American Academy of Ophthalmology, 2011).
- Children will be smarter, better able to **get along with others**, healthier and happier when they have regular opportunities for free and unstructured play in the out-of-doors (Burdette and Whitaker, 2005).
- Access to green spaces, even a view of green settings, enhances peace, **self-control** and **self-discipline** (Taylor, Kuo and Sullivan, 2001).
- Green plants and vistas **reduce stress** (Wells and Evans, 2003).

For more information:

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