



Outdoor Learning: Let nature be your teaching partner
With Jennifer Hegan and Helene Fleury

5-metre field trip

500-metre field trip

5 km field trip

General best practices for outdoor education

1. Be aware of your expectations
2. Allow for "feelings of firsts" and state of flow
3. Tell inside, do (and be) outside
4. Know your space
5. Routines
6. Helpers
7. Safety first
8. Pre-visits





I. EXPECTATIONS

Managing outdoor learning starts with managing our expectations

- No time for prep?
- No helpers?
- No budget?

You can still make outdoor learning happen!



2. Allow for "feelings of firsts" and state of flow

3.TELL INSIDE

BEFORE

- New vocabulary
- Work groups/buddies/challenges or missions
- Overview of what will be done outside
- Outdoor behaviour rules
- Materials, equipment to bring (magnifying glasses, bum pads, clip boards, pencils, field guides)
- Bathroom break

AFTER

- Integrate findings, record observations and data
- Place artifacts on display table
- Use journal to reflect on the experience

DO OUTSIDE

- Review outdoor behaviour rules
- Address potential hazards
- Identify clear boundaries
- Teach facts, knowledge
- Demonstrate and help practice skills
- Model and help develop positive attitudes
- Explain values (conservation, leave no trace)



4. KNOW YOUR SPACE (Garden)

- Garden beds are needed for produce, flowers, fruit, grazing
- Garden beds are also needed for playing, digging, insect discovery and unstructured gardening
- Area for buckets, tools, supplies
- Re-group area for next instructions
- Shade



4. KNOW YOUR SPACE (Forest)

- Hills - Amphitheatre
- Stumps, fallen trees & rocks – seating, writing and balancing
- Moss - sit spots
- Conifer clumps – natural shelter; Spacing of trees – tarp shelters, hammocks
- Branches, rocks, leaves, spruce/pinecones - loose parts for math, compare/contrast, art, poetry/haikus





5. ROUTINES

To help get us outside regularly

- Welcome Circle: rules, boundaries, plan of the hour/day
- Sit spot: contemplation, observation, tummy, back, art
- Roles: scribe, caboose, tea makers, supplies carriers
- Simpler activities:
 - measuring plant growth, snow depth
 - sensory exploration, plant smelling
 - soil sifting, soil temperature
 - looking for insects, digging for treasures
 - colour swatches
- Games, Read aloud, Art
- Journaling
- Teatime
- Leave no trace checklist
- Closing circle (gratitude, 3 things that surprised you)



6. HELPERS

Parents, Grand-parents, EAs, community groups, DFO, ministry of forests, ministry of environment, meteorology, mining/rock experts, retired teachers and more!

- For optimal small group learning
- For tasks that require concentration (like planting seeds!)
- To help manage distractions
- For stations or activities that necessitate more supervision

But, remember that nature is your helper in unstructured learning. Use natural objects and spaces to your advantage!



7. SAFETY FIRST

- Allergies
- Boundaries
- Sandwich/train formation
- Natural hazards:
 - water, slippery roots, branches, thistle/nettle/devil's club
- Poisonous plants
- Dangerous mammals
- How to use tools
- Regrouping signal





8. PRE-VISITS

Time consuming but essential and worthwhile!

- Parking - bus, parent helpers
- Trail closure
- Snow
- Uprooted or fallen trees
- Sit spots
- Toilet area
- Snack areas
- Shelter
- Regroup areas

SCHOOL GARDEN SUCCESSES

1. Small group gardening can be a calming, satisfying activity, empowering students with new or improved skills.
2. Larger seeds for smaller fingers: chard, beets, peas, beans, radish, calendula & nasturtium flowers, potatoes, garlic
3. Seedlings cost more but are worth it.
4. Most successful plants: potatoes, beets, nasturtiums, kale, herbs, radishes, beans, Asian green mixes, chard, broccoli, kolrabi
5. Plant flower seedlings early – shows that garden is being used for growing
6. Rotate groups from classroom or parallel self-directed activities such as:
 - Gross motor skill activities like buckets & shovels, digging, pulling old plants,
 - Making soil in buckets (and then watering!)
 - Digging for worm and insects – collecting and ‘caring’ for them – making a home
 - Chalk drawing beside garden

GOOD TO GO BACKPACK

- Cell phone
- First aid kit
- Flagging tape
- Whistle
- Bandana (for eye covering, for bugs, to tie things, to hide objects, for sun protection)
- Colour swatches
- Survival items (fire starter, tinder, rope, knife, emergency blanket)
- Toilet paper, trowel, lighter
- Field guide
- Ziplock bags for collecting, for picking up unfortunate garbage
- Measuring tape
- Bum pad

In a different bag/box/wagon:

- Clipboards/pencils
- Magnifying glass
- Small art supplies Watercolour/paintbrushes, charcoal for tree rubbing

SUPPORT FROM SCHOOL ADMINISTRATION AND PACs

- Garden trained EAs
- District-shared garden and outdoor learner support position
- More garden boxes to incorporate 'play' area
- \$ for seedlings, tools, buckets
- \$ for bussing
- Outdoor clothes/footwear bank
- Outdoor kits (WildBC, Groundbreakers)
- Grant applications (help from PAC, admin)

RESOURCES

- Each Other! Our emails: fleuryhma@gmail.com, jheganwork@gmail.com
- Megan Zeni, a BC based outdoor educator specializing in gardens and the value of play and learning:
<https://meganzeni.com/teaching-prep-outside/>
- HCTF Education (WildBC) great support for BC Teachers and outdoor learning
See: <https://www.hctfeducation.ca/lessons/teacher-tips-and-tricks/>
Lesson plans with Curriculum links and Competencies already described and applied:
Such as: https://www.hctfeducation.ca/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/Grade4-Water_Matters.pdf
<https://www.hctfeducation.ca/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/PlaceBasedLearning-Grade1.pdf>
- The well-known *Get Outdoors* manual is now a free download at <https://www.hctfeducation.ca/product/get-outdoors/>
- Books:
Schoolyard-Enhanced Learning: Using the Outdoors as an Instructional Tool, K-8, Herbert W. Broda
Sharing Nature with Children, Joseph Cornell
A Year of Forest School, Jane Worroll & Peter Houghton
A Forest Days Handbook, Eliza Minnucci



THANK YOU!