

Learning in Nature

Creating an Outdoor Classroom for Early Education Students



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My story...



Outdoor learning?!

How would I run an outdoor classroom with preschoolers?

What would our schedule look like?

What if they were simply “too little”?

What about parents?

Would they be on board?

Where and how could we do this?



My research questions:

- ❖ What are the positive and negative impacts of outdoor education?
- ❖ What are the advantages and disadvantages of an outdoor classroom?
- ❖ What training would there be for teachers to be as effective as possible?
 - How do you adjust lessons for outdoor learning without

Why is outdoor learning important?

- ❖ Supports all domains of learning
- ❖ Authentic
- ❖ Meaningful connections
- ❖ Improves health

Teaches students...



calculated risks
compromise
negotiation
independence
appreciation of nature
responsibility
sensory experiences
teamwork
creativity



Connection to:



Field:

- ❖ Waldorf Theory
- ❖ Howard Gardner's Multiple Intelligences
- ❖ Urie Bronfenbrenner
- ❖ Maria Montessori

Educational practices:

- ❖ Active learning
- ❖ Learning styles
- ❖ Cooperation
- ❖ Community engagement
- ❖ Learning from experience

Why is my project important right now?

Inspire

Students to think, act, and be whole healthy

Save a teacher from burnout

Start a ripple effect of learning...



Design

Several areas:

- Gathering seated area
 - Logs on ground - free
- Tables and seats
 - Spools from electrical wire - free
- Play areas
 - Branches and sticks
 - Climbing rocks
 - Sunny and shady areas
 - All free
- Covered area for rainy days
 - Tarps and rope - \$30
- Supply space
 - Plastic bins
 - back packs



**HOPE TO
BUILD IN THE
SPACE**

Challenges

- ❖ Schedule - services and specials
- ❖ Correct placement of classroom
- ❖ Enough extra clothes
- ❖ Toileting
- ❖ Slow process



Successes

- ❖ Smart and supportive staff/administration
- ❖ Discovery and observation
- ❖ Endurance
- ❖ Tarp as a rug
- ❖ Handling of nature
- ❖ Connection and joy
- ❖ Engagement in the community



Training and skills for teachers



- ❖ Natural Start Alliance
 - www.naturalstart.org
- ❖ Inside-Outside Nature Based Educators
 - www.insideoutside.org
- ❖ Outdoor Classrooms Training and Development Programs
 - <https://www.outdoor-classrooms.com/trainings-outdoor-courses/>
- ❖ Hitchcock Center
 - School programs
 - www.hitchcockcenter.org
- ❖ Hopkins Memorial Forest
 - School programs

- ❖ First Aid
- ❖ Fire Building
- ❖ Knot tying
- ❖ Whittling
- ❖ Orienteering
- ❖ Handling of animals
- ❖ Weaving baskets
- ❖ Animal tracking



What did it look like this year?



Who?



Lesson: Always keep open communication with parents. Remind about those colder days coming up.

What was the purpose?



Lesson: Always be prepared! Whether it is clothing, lessons gone sideways, or wet materials, always be prepared.

Where?



Lesson: Check your area for potential relocation risks. Moving tables and tarps is a pain.

When?



Lesson: Try to schedule services and specials early or at the tail end of the day. It absolutely blows when we realize “Whoops, we have to be back for Johnny’s services” or “Oh no we can’t do the lesson outside we are going to Gym in twenty minutes”.

How?

- ❖ Be prepared
- ❖ Don't go hungry
- ❖ Bring your bag
- ❖ Boundaries and safety
- ❖ Flexibility
- ❖ Allow time for discovery and observation
- ❖ Have fun!



“Awakening a child’s spiritual development with playful activities in outdoor environments can help to identify the child’s passions, strengths, motivation, and creativity” (Harris, 2016).

