

LEARNING in the OUTDOORS

AN INTRODUCTION

TOOLKIT 1



TEACHER TOOLKIT SCHEDULE

Outdoors Victoria, in partnership with the Australian Council for Health, Physical Education and Recreation (ACHPER Victoria), Environment Education Victoria (EEV), Geography Teachers Association (GTAV) and Parks Victoria (Parks Vic) will produce 15 Teacher Toolkits between 2018 and 2020. These toolkits will be delivered to the following order:

2018

- 1 Introduction to Outdoor Learning
- 2 Outdoor Learning in the Play Ground
- 3 Outdoor Learning in Water-Based Environments

2019

- 4 Outdoor Learning in Physical Education*
- 5 Outdoor Learning in Art*
- 6 Outdoor Learning in Geography*
- 7 Outdoor Learning in Science*
- 8 Outdoor Learning in Mathematics*
- 9 Outdoor Learning in Urban Environments*

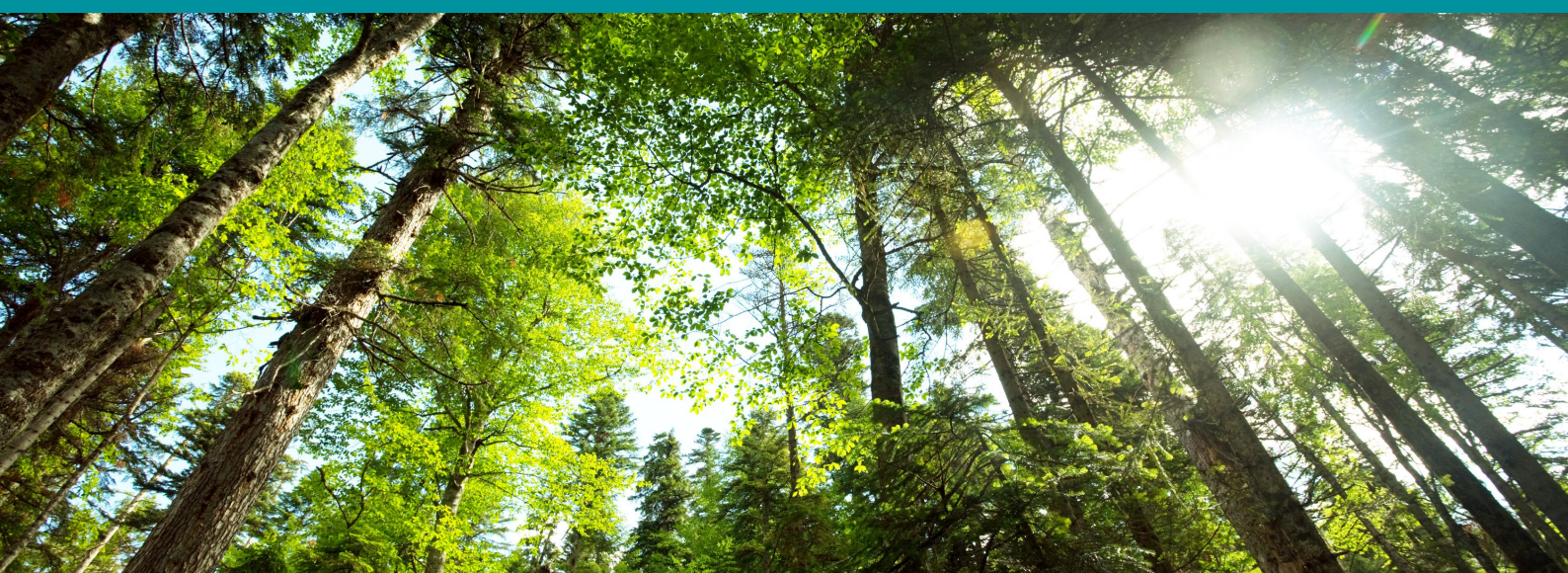
In 2020 a further six teacher toolkits will be created upon further consultation, if you would like to be involved in this process please use the contact details located on the last page of the document.

Please note the teacher toolkits will be constantly updated as emerging trends, activities and projects are created over the coming years. Videos and 360VR experiences are expected to be placed throughout the teacher toolkits above. These updates will occur within the FUSE Website.

Outdoors Victoria, in partnership with ACHPER (Victoria), EEV, GTAV and Parks Victoria, is always interested in finding out what is occurring in the outdoors in your school.

If you are proud of a new program you have implemented or would like to be involved in /contribute to any of the Teacher Toolkits, contact any of the above organisations (Contact details are provided on the final page of this document)

Outdoors Victoria, in partnership with ACHPER (Victoria), GTAV, EEV and Parks Victoria, respectfully acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of the land and their Elders past and present, for the important and enduring role that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples play in Australia regarding the land, water and sky used for learning in the Outdoors.



LEARNING IN THE OUTDOORS

An Introduction

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This Teacher Toolkit is offered as a framework for developing your own curriculum specific ideas and activities for Outdoor Learning. It is quite flexible and should be adapted to suit your needs. Remember to note the benefits of Outdoor Learning in your teaching area, and to provide tips wherever you can for embedding Outdoor Learning into the curriculum. Include relevant research, case studies and examples that might assist teachers. Teacher Toolkit 1 Benefits of Outdoor Learning presents research that will help you argue the case for taking students out of the classroom.

What is Outdoor Learning?



Outdoor learning is defined by many different organisations and governing bodies. Here are two definitions found in the literature in this emerging area.

“*Outdoor Learning is a broad term that includes: outdoor play in the early years, school grounds projects, environmental education, recreational and adventure activities, personal and social development programmes, expeditions, team building, leadership training, management development, education for sustainability, adventure therapy and more. Outdoor Learning does not have a clearly defined boundary, but it does have a common core.*

”

[English Outdoor Council](#)

Or as defined by the Institute of Outdoor Learning in England;

“*Outdoor Learning is a purposeful and planned experience in the outdoors. It's a broad term that includes discovery, experimentation, learning about and connecting to the natural world, and engaging in outdoor sports and adventure activities. Outdoor Learning is used for academic, social, mental health, wellbeing, inter and intra-personal development. Experiences are usually led by an instructor, teacher or leader and can be provided for an individual or group. Outdoor Learning helps people of all ages, backgrounds and abilities reflect and learn about themselves, each other and their environment.*

”

[Institute of Outdoor Learning](#)

For the following 15 Teacher Toolkits to be released throughout 2018, 2019 and 2020 Outdoor Learning is defined in the Australian Curriculum as follows:

“*Outdoor learning engages students in practical and active learning experiences in natural environments and settings, and this typically takes place beyond the school classroom. In these environments, students develop the skills and understandings to move safely and competently while valuing a positive relationship with natural environments and promoting the sustainable use of these environments.*

”

Outdoor learning can be instrumental in:

- the teaching and learning of self-reliance, interdependence and leadership;
- the development of an adventurous spirit;
- managing personal risks;
- experiencing safe journeys in nature;
- learning the value of lifelong outdoor recreation for enjoyment, health and wellbeing;
- understanding nature through direct experience; and the development of deeper human-nature relationships.

[The Australian Curriculum](#)

What is Outdoor Learning? *cont.*

The Australian Curriculum also introduces outdoor learning as one of four curriculum connections;



These curriculum connections allow educators to draw connections across the dimensions of the Australian Curriculum on various conceptual themes from Foundation to Year 10





<https://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/resources/curriculum-connections>



Through a partnership with Outdoor Education Australia, a framework has been developed for students to experience guided, integrated learning across the curriculum in natural environments.

Students, therefore, can gain unique and specific benefits from outdoor learning including skills and understandings while valuing a positive relationship with natural environments and promote sustainable use of these environments.

The Australian curriculum website shows how content from the Australian Curriculum links to;

- Health and Physical Education
-  Humanities and Social Sciences
-  Geography
-  Science
-  General capabilities and cross-curriculum priorities can be organised and delivered through learning in the outdoors (F–6) and outdoor education (7–10).

State of play in Outdoor Learning

Outdoor Learning has been the focus of much recent research. This section outlines what currently is occurring in Outdoor Learning and notes some of its perceived benefits. It will provide information for you to present to your school board if necessary.

Growing up in Australia, a longitudinal study undertaken by the Australian Government found that;

“One generation ago 73% of Children’s playtime was spent outdoors” whereas “Now 13% of children’s total playtime is spent outdoors”. “In the new millennium, only 1 in 5 children have ever climbed a tree, an experience enjoyed by two-thirds of their parents.”

”

[Growing up in Australia - 2018](#)

In Melbourne;

In 1970, 53.3% of young people walked to school and 7.5% cycled.



In this same time, car travel has increased from 14.3% to 55.3%



In 1994, this dropped to 22.2% and cycling dropped to 3.9%



[Gerrad 2009](#)

“As adults, People believe we aren’t spending enough time in nature (**75%**), and **62%** say they want to spend more time in nature.”

”

[Planetark 2018 - Connect in Nature](#)

“In a survey of preschools in Ohio, half the children in full-day daycare spent **less than 23 minutes** each day outdoors. One in three kids spent **no time** outdoors.”

”

[Copeland, Khoury & Kalkwarf, 2016](#)

In the United Kingdom, in a program created by the **National Trust, a list was created of the top 50 things to do before you are 12**

Of these 50 things, all involved being in the outdoors: climb a tree, build a den, look for bugs and go stargazing. These activities in previous generations would have been commonplace but are no longer.

Australian cities are changing, the great Australian dream of owning a house with a big backyard is no longer the reality. Dr Matthews from Griffith University finds that “The Australian Backyard, in a literal sense, is under threat. It’s become accessible to only those who can afford it”. [News-Mail, 2018](#)

There is little room for a barbeque now, let alone backyard cricket. In the 1990s, 90% of residents surveyed in Melbourne and Sydney wanted a big backyard for their child to play in. In 2016 this figure had dropped to 58%, a 32% change (Brook, 2018)

[News-Mail, 2018](#)

State of play in Outdoor Learning *cont.*

In November 2018 Active Healthy Kids Australia released its **2018 Scorecard** ranking Australia on an A+ to F scale on physical activity, as seen below.

INDICATOR	GRADE	INDICATOR	GRADE
Overall Physical Activity	D-	School	B+
Organised Sport Participation	B-	Family & Peers	C+
Physical Activity at School	B	Community & Environment	A-
Active Play	INC	Government	D
Active Transportation	D+	Physical Fitness	D+
Sedentary Behaviours	D-	Movement Skills	D+

“Despite living in a country advantaged by good schools, programs, facilities and spaces, Australian children and young people do not move enough, lack movement skill mastery, and compare poorly to their international peers when it comes to physical fitness

”

Active Health Kids, 2018

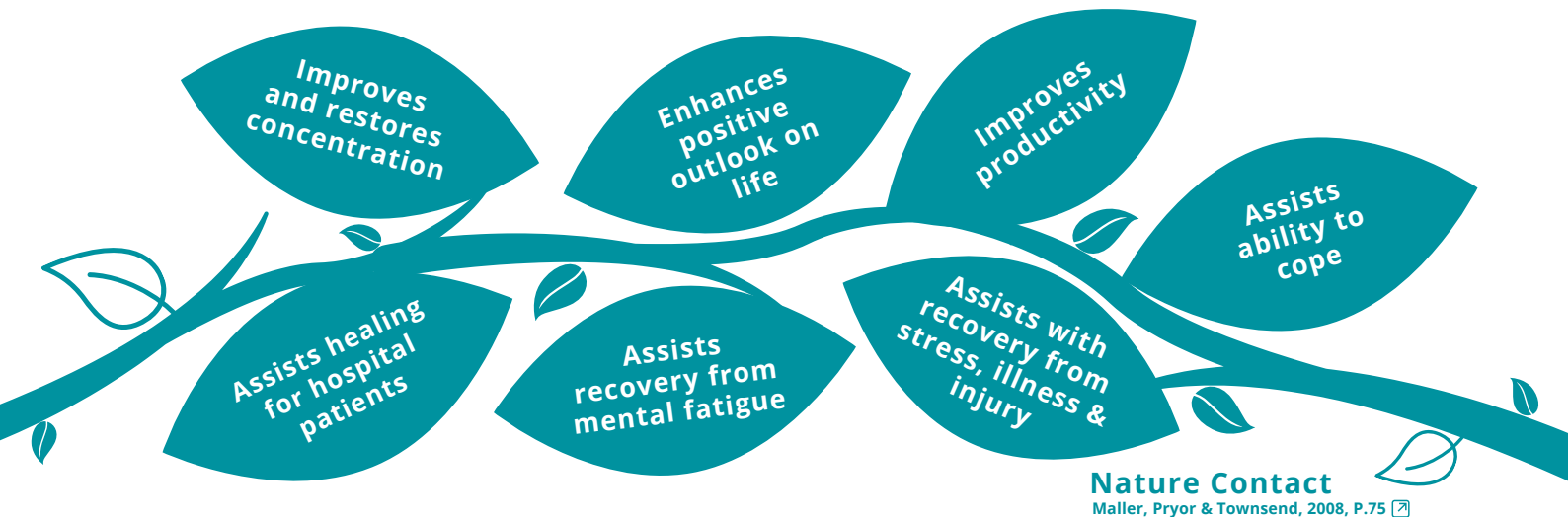
As we can see from this small snapshot, young people are spending less time outdoors. This is due to a range of factors such as the increase of urban sprawl, access to more convenient transport methods and helicopter parenting.

In the following section, we will outline the benefits that can occur by including more Outdoor Learning into our programs.



The Benefits of Outdoor Learning

Outdoor Learning has been shown to have many benefits, in various differing aspects, these include the following;



Better Mental Health

Several studies have found that city living increases the risk of certain mental health problems, such as mood and anxiety disorders, and is thought to be linked to stresses in the urban social environment. Researchers discovered that people living in the country had the lowest levels of activity in their amygdalas, structures responsible for processing and memory of emotional reactions such as environmental threats, people living in towns had higher levels, and people living in the city had the highest levels of activity in their amygdalas.

[Children & Nature Network, 2012 \[2\]](#)

Decreased Stress Levels

Several studies have found that city living increases the risk of certain mental health problems, such as mood and anxiety disorders, and is thought to be linked to stresses in the urban social environment. Researchers discovered that people living in the country had the lowest levels of activity in their amygdalas, structures responsible for processing and memory of emotional reactions such as environmental threats, people living in towns had higher levels, and people living in the city had the highest levels of activity in their amygdalas.

[Dettweiler, Becker, Auestad, Simon, Kirsch, 2007 \[2\]](#)

Improved Grades

A 2006 academic paper (Dillon, et al 2006) pointed to a 2000 study of schoolchildren in California as evidence that outdoor education and learning improves students' grades. After being involved in curriculum-based outdoor learning, students from 11 schools scored higher than those who did not in 72% of assessments, including maths and science. Attendance also was higher. The same year, Dennis Eaton published in his book *Cognitive and Affective Learning in Outdoor Education* his finding that students' cognitive abilities are better developed outside the classroom than in.

[The Value of Outdoor Learning, 2006 \[2\]](#)

The Benefits of Outdoor Learning

cont.

Increased Motivation

A 2008 study of Hollywood kindergarteners found a significant number of children showed enhanced enthusiasm about learning. Researchers cited this as proof children do want to learn, but perhaps not in the way they are usually required to do so. Moreover, they found that the positive effects on the children's' motivation levels carried over to traditional indoor learning after the outdoor learning had concluded.

[11 Proven benefits of Outdoor Education](#)

Positive attitudes to the environment

In 1999, researchers put 31 boys and 15 girls through a five-day “biodiversity” program. They found that even already positive attitudes about nature were improved as a result of the activities. The study bolstered existing findings from as far back as 1977 that have shown an increase in knowledge causes changes in attitude, which in turn cause changes in behaviour. Thus, a bonus benefit of the improved attitudes students have toward the outdoors after learning outside is an increase in their environmental awareness and more responsible behaviour.

[ERIC Digest, 1997](#)

Better Overall Behaviour

Not only are children’s environmental behaviours improved by learning outside the classroom, but their ability to behave in an educational setting is improved as well. The Hollywood elementary study found as much, as the number of on-task students increased when the education moved outside. Other studies have found social adjustment, self-concept, and group cohesion improved through education outdoors. Even handling misbehaviour becomes easier for teachers when education is out of the traditional classroom. Louv says: “I can’t tell you how many times teachers have told me that the troublemaker in their classroom becomes the leader in an outdoor setting.”

[American Journal of Play, 2011](#)

Increases in Outdoor Learning Skills

(Martin, Cashel, Wagstaff, 2006) study found that students gain more understanding of what they are doing when being outdoors, be that gardening, using a compass, navigating by the sun or building a fire, all these skills students soak up in open-air classrooms. These experiences were at a significant level compared when they were attempted to be taught in a classroom.

[Outdoor Leadership: Theory & Practice, 2006](#)

Improved Memory

During a study on memory retention in a primary school setting (*Dillon, Morris, O'Donnell, Reid, Rickinson, Scott, 2005*), it was found the memory of the context and experience in Outdoor Learning might be more significant than any specific learning that was meant to (or did) take place. For some students, the factual details learned on location were as strong a memory as the visit itself. These memories were sometimes associated with sounds and sights and on other occasions, they were associated with concrete objects such as pebbles.

[Engaging & Learning with the Outdoors, 2005](#)



The Benefits of Outdoor Learning *cont.*

Improved Physical Capability

Many studies, including one from the National Wildlife Federation (2016), have shown strong correlations between students working outside and an increase in physical capability and fitness. Fitness is not a core component of an Outdoor Learning program, but it is beneficial by-product whose effects cannot be ignored.

[Back to School: Back Outside, 2010](#) 

Children benefit from appropriate risk-taking during outdoor learning

Children benefit from appropriate risk-taking during outdoor learning (*Little, Wvver, 2008*) cite Little and Wyver discuss the inability of many early childhood educators to provide challenging and stimulating outdoor experiences to children due to restrictive regulations and cultural emphasis on eliminating or minimising physical risk.

The study links the importance of children's experience of risk to healthy development. As children improve their ability to develop and refine motor skills and enjoy and gain confidence in being physically active, they develop decision-making skills related to making sound risk judgements.

[Outdoor Play, 2008](#) 



Launching an Outdoor Learning Program

If you are considering embedding outdoor learning into your program there are many things you need to consider, but mainly that you are only limited by your imagination with the program you create. In this section, we will propose some things to consider, along with case-studies from a select number of Victorian Schools highlighting their fantastic programs.

Firstly, your program should reflect the goals of your school and the local community. Is it a part of your school's Annual Implementation Plan (AIP) or strategic goals? Once you are familiar with these goals you can start to consider elements of your outdoor learning program including activities, staff, location, time, cost and approval to name a few.

One of the important concepts is to start approaching teachers, parents and community members and anyone else that might be interested or willing to assist in launching your school's outdoor learning program. You will find that many adults who have had positive experiences in the outdoors are enthusiastic about assisting in getting an outdoor learning program started.



OUTDOOR LEARNING PROGRAM CONSIDERATIONS

- Cost
- Student numbers
- Transportation
- Extra insurances
- Space
- Time
- Framework
- Skills or programs you want to run (Goals)
- Facilities
- Extra equipment
- Parent and school board approval
- Assessment



Essential 1: Find Out What Your School needs

It is paramount that your Outdoor Learning program reflects the academic goals of your school or learning facility. Without this, you will be creating a program that does not enhance students learning to its maximum potential.

To discover how Outdoor Learning can enhance the educational program at your school, start by discussing with staff members who will be working on these programs how they can see Outdoor Learning enhancing their existing program. One of the most important steps is to discuss the project with students. Find out what would they like and how they can see it working. Consult with other schools and staff who have implemented outdoor learning programs. In the following pages, you will find case studies of how schools in Victoria have implemented Outdoor Learning programs.

Launching an Outdoor Learning Program *cont.*

Essential 2: Environment

Once you have established what your school needs from an Outdoor Learning program, it is important to look at the environment in which it will be conducted. The location of your school or learning facility can be an important component of a learning program's success. Many successful programs have been run in inner urban schools.

Outdoor Learning programs differ from Outdoor Education or Outdoor Recreation programs although many components are interlinked. Outdoor Learning programs can exist in the schoolyard or the park or even on the playground. Each location represents a different opportunity for you to educate your students, using the outdoors as a medium. Within the following series of teacher toolkits, these differing environments will offer sample activities that can be taught in these locations

Essential 3: Development of evaluation criteria/goal setting

Each school may have different methods for the creation of goals and evaluation criteria. One method that is effective when creating or implementing new programs is that of backwards design, a method described by [Covey, \(2008\)](#). The idea is to start with the end in mind, with a clear understanding of your destination. If you know where you're going, you understand better where you are now, so the steps you take are always in the right direction.

Outdoor Learning and Outdoor Education have often been at odds with educational goals. Outdoor Learning, though shown to meet many educational objectives, can be hard to assess. [Davies, Hamilton \(2016\)](#) found that assessing children in the outdoors is not used to its potential this is often due to lack of appropriate resources, level of staff expertise, child-staff ratio, adverse weather and changes to curriculum policy which influence the formal assessment of children. [Davies and Hamilton](#) also found that "With creative planning, there is no reason why summative assessments of all areas of learning within the early years' curriculum cannot be done as effectively outdoors as they may be being done indoors".

Planning your evaluation criteria first will allow you to ensure you choose experiences, locations and activities that reflect your school needs. Currently, "practitioners rarely carry out assessments of children's learning in the outdoors" this supports the findings of Estyn (2011).

Once you have established your evaluation criteria, you can set your goals to help ensure your program is successful. Outdoor Learning does not need to be just about goals and evaluation criteria. There is a natural goodness in letting students go outside and explore and learn hands-on. But with the nature of education, it is also important that we assess students on this learning to validate the effectiveness of these programs.



Goals for children may include:

- Develop awareness of and respect for the natural environment;
- Recognise elements such as fresh air and the influence it has on the emotional and physical well-being and responses.

Launching an Outdoor Learning Program *cont.*

Essential 4: Curriculum Development

As Outdoor Learning is an emerging area, there is not the depth of research into teaching styles that there is in the closely related Outdoor Education. It was found that “it is reasonable to draw inferences regarding teaching styles from recently enunciated statements regarding the nature of Outdoor Education (Higgins and Loynes, 1996)

Using an Outdoor Learning program does not mean you have to change your teaching style. Outdoor Learning is a continuation of a traditional curriculum but in the outdoors. The main teaching styles used in outdoor learning are:

- Experiential education
- Inquiry-based education (encouraging students to ask questions)
- Informal education (outside a traditional school setting not as closely linked to curriculum)
- Placed based education.

There are many components of all teaching styles that can be enhanced with Outdoor Learning.



TIPS FOR CREATING EFFECTIVE CURRICULA

1. Provide clear learning goals and objectives.
2. Develop a theme for the session and limit the number of key supporting ideas to 5.
3. Use teaching methods that promote active learning such as hands-on activities and roleplaying games.
4. Support behaviour change by demonstrating realistic ways for students to make an impact.
5. Create a program integration strategy that includes preliminary and follow up activities in the classroom.
6. Prepare classroom teachers and students for the experiences by sharing expectations, learning goals, objectives and program theme.
7. Develop and implement regular program evaluations!

Source: Nathan J. Meyer et al., *Best Practices for Field Days: A Program Planning Guidebook and CD for Organizers, Presenters, Teachers and Volunteers.* University of Minnesota, 2010

Essential 5: Training

The way your school or education facility decides to run an Outdoor Learning program will decide the type of training staff require.

In general, staff should hold a first-aid certificate (Emergency First Aid Level 2). Outdoor Learning has a way of building relationships, as people get to know each other through hands-on activities that break down barriers. As the Oregon Community Foundation notes, this can also create its conflicts, so staff in the Outdoor Learning program must be aware of potential problems and discuss conflict resolution strategies if required.

Throughout the year, professional development opportunities in Outdoor Learning are available in Victoria, including from the following organisations:

- [Outdoors Victoria \(OV\)](#)
- [Australian Council for Health, Physical Education and Recreation \(ACHPER\) VIC](#)
- [Geography Teachers Association \(GTAV\)](#)
- [Parks Victoria](#)
- [Environment Education Victoria \(EEV\)](#)

Launching an Outdoor Learning Program *cont.*

Essential 6: Create a safe, secure & inclusive environment


The following advice is general, and it is important you consult your own school's safety policies before implementing an Outdoor Learning program.

- Complete thorough checks of the Outdoor Learning environments and equipment before each visit. Be aware of and aim to minimise hazards such as water-based environments, wildlife like bees and snakes.
- Send out safety memos for parents to review and sign so that they are aware of basic Outdoor Learning rules. Include notice of clothing and equipment needs.
- Provide contact and visiting information to parents

It is important to have an Outdoor Learning program that is inclusive of all students and staff. Financial cost and engagement of families from diverse backgrounds to participate in Outdoor Learning programs can present problems.

You could;

- hold open days or afternoons for parents to come to look at the Outdoor Learning program,
- embed additional expense into the school cost and not as a separate fee,
- educate students and parents about the benefits of being outdoors.

If you have students that have learning and physical disabilities that does not mean you cannot have an Outdoor Learning program. It is important that Outdoor Learning like all types of learning is inclusive to everyone. A study in the United Kingdom found that 86% of families with disabled children go without outdoor leisure activities along with **65%** of families caring for disabled children **reported feeling isolated frequently or all of the time and the need for truly inclusive outdoor provision is clear.** [Bendrigg Trust](#) 

All activities can be modified and adapted to suit the needs of all learners. Blackwood Outdoor Specialist School, a Victorian Government Outdoor School located in the Wombat Forest, 20 minutes from Ballan and 30 minutes from Daylesford does not focus on a students' disability but their abilities.

Parks Victoria promotes extended bushwalking for students who may not have developed sufficient stamina or physical ability to participate. Trailriders, all-terrain wheelchairs built to handle rugged terrain not suited to standard wheelchairs can be rented from a wide variety of locations, including the following Parks Victoria locations: Buchan Caves Reserve, Grampians National Park, Dandenong Ranges National Park, Wilsons Promontory National Park and shire councils including Colac Otway Shire, Hepburn Shire, Loddon Shire, Moorabool Shire, Mount Beauty Visitor Information Centre, Surfcoast shire and the Warburton Visitor information centre. Through Parks Victoria, your school can become involved in the Sherpa Volunteer Program which can assist in the operation of the Trailrider.

Launching an Outdoor Learning Program *cont.*

One of the great things about being in the outdoors is that all your senses are picking up new impressions through sight, hearing, smell and touch. Embrace this and structure activities around it when taking students into the outdoors. Encourage students to feel mud between their fingers, sit amongst trees and listen to the bird's chirp, watch the current take a stick down the stream. Use every child's sensory skill in your Outdoor Learning programs.

Essential 7: Equipment

Outdoor Learning does not require a significant amount of funds - the equipment you need is only limited to your imagination. There may be small costs in starting up a program to gather appropriate safety and protective equipment such as rain jackets, waterproof pants and first aid equipment. If you would like to know more information, please use the contact section at the bottom of this document.



Essential 8: Have Fun

But above all, have fun. There will be difficulties at times but overall the enjoyment students and staff have in undertaking an Outdoor Learning program will far outweigh any problems in setting it up.

How to promote Outdoor Learning to staff

One of the most important aspects of an Outdoor Learning program is ensuring school staff understand and embrace it. Teaching in the outdoors is often out of the comfort zone for many staff so it's important you address potential concerns before establishing the program. Here are four benefits of Outdoor Learning to promote to staff.

Outdoor Learning:

- extends teaching capacity (meaning?)
- offers a new setting, thus way, to educate students;
- promotes lifelong enjoyment in the outdoor environment;
- uses school grounds and facilities differently.

How to promote Outdoor Learning to students

It is important to go outside and leave reliance on technology and technology-based learning when possible. Think about the opportunity it gives to see something new and gain new practical knowledge.

This could include:

- explore the school ground and the surrounding environment.
- take the opportunity to have fun and enjoy yourselves.
- enjoy being physically active.
- socialise with classmates in a different environment.

School Case Study - Balnarring Preschool (Outdoor Learning)

Introduction

Balnarring Preschool, located on the Mornington Peninsula, caters for students between three and five years of age with about 20 children in each group, including children with additional needs. Balnarring has developed a Learning and Living with Nature philosophy which guides day to day learning. This started with the planning and construction of the preschool yard, to include many natural elements such as rocks, trees, indigenous plants, chickens, a fire pit, mud patch, vegetable garden, dry creek bed and water tanks. Outdoor Learning is also conducted offsite at a beach and a park reserve.

Together with facilities for outdoor learning, Balnarring commits to include First People's culture and language in everyday practice. Educational Leader Karen Anderson had the opportunity to go to Denmark in 2010 where she visited many Bush Kindergartens. While immersed in this environment, Karen questioned why the outdoors did not have a stronger focus in her preschool curriculum. She realized that the Balnarring Preschool children were being rushed to achieve academic success in specific areas and missing being educated more broadly, with the added positives of extra physical activity and mental well-being gains that being active in nature brings for children.

Context

Balnarring Preschool developed a Learning and Living with Nature philosophy after a staff member's research into Nature Kindergartens worldwide. The local community, passionate about their environment, has assisted Balnarring Preschool to develop a natural outdoor space, providing sustainable areas such as water tanks, vegetable gardens and chicken coops. By having the key facilities available to them, teachers now have the confidence to take children into this environment on a regular timetabled basis.

The Process

Balnarring Preschool focuses on integrating Outdoor Learning across the curriculum areas and learning about First People's culture and language. Students at Balnarring have developed a strong sense of belonging to the outdoor spaces they frequently visit and have gained an appreciation of what nature has to offer and of their role in caring for it.

- A beach site which includes closely located park reserves were selected;
- Staff, management and local rangers responsible for this area were consulted to ensure the appropriateness of this environment;
- The rationale for Outdoor Learning was developed to ensure the aims of the sessions were clear;
- Risk assessments were completed;
- A four-week trial was held with all students, staff and external community members involved (e.g. Local Rangers);
- Wet weather gear was purchased for children and adults to go with the hats and sunscreen to ensure teachers and students were equipped for year-round Outdoor Learning.

School Case Study - Balnarring Preschool (Outdoor Learning) *cont.*

At the Beach *(Time to settle into the space)*

- Rock wall climbing scrambling and rambling
- Imaginative play (e.g. - Wave game – learning about the movement of waves)
- Storytelling using things from the sea
- Drawing in the sand
- Singing, usually in Boon Wurrung Language
- Observing dolphins when they visit the area
- Conservation program with the ranger, children collected the seeds at one part of the beach and then planted in another part to reduce erosion in the area.
- Connect with community members who visit the beach e.g. fisherman and paddleboarders
- Provide time for children to sit, walk, and wonder in their own time and at their own pace

In the Bush *(at the Reserve)*

- Tree climbing
- Bird watching
- Storytelling with natural items
- Imaginative and structured play (e.g. – walking along the creek exploring, Cubby Building)
- Identifying scat and animal markings
- Looking for wildlife and using Boon Wurrung language, for example, Koala is a Guborra
- Working with rangers to plant out areas with indigenous plant stock. Children learn about habitat
- Listening to the storytelling tree that tells stories about the area
- Visiting Bundjil's nest – a sculpture we have placed in the reserve in recognition of the Aboriginal communities
- In addition to the offsite Outdoor Learning programs, Balnarring has also included many natural elements and spaces for children's play at the Preschool such as large sand/grassed areas and boulders to scramble over.
- In the curriculum, the First People's perspective has been included in recognition that it is the right of every child, both non-indigenous and indigenous, to learn about the oldest living culture in the world. Learning Outdoors relates well to the connections the Indigenous community have to Country and how successfully they live with nature.



School Case Study - Balnarring Preschool (Outdoor Learning) *cont.*

Enablers

- Enthusiasm and commitment of teaching team
- Teachers' knowledge of the beach
- Support of committee of management, elected from the parent body
- Support of local ranger
- Support of families
- Children's interaction with the environment
- Safe, interesting, natural environment close to the Preschool
- New staff look forward to working at the Preschool with the expectation of engaging in the outdoor programs

Barriers

- Ensuring appropriate funds for appropriate wet weather clothing
- Encouraging families to have their children Learning Outdoors on potential wet weather days

Impact

Balnarring Preschool has found the implementation of outdoor learning has effected positive change in many aspects of their school curriculum, including;

- Increased enrolments, particularly from Indigenous families,
- Children teaching their families about the environments and Boon Wurrung language/stories,
- Children being connected to the environment through being involved in conservation projects,
- Strengthening the philosophy of Outdoor Learning every year as staff skills in teaching outdoors grow,
- Ease of raising funds through grants and fundraising,
- Families sharing their thoughts on the program and the positive impact it is having on their children in the areas of increased physical activity, teamwork, resilience, academic progress and physical literacy.

Balnarring Preschool has been able to affirm that change has occurred through the implementation of Outdoor Learning by noting;

- Parents' reflections
- Children's level of engagement and development
- Reflections of other teachers who visit the program and Centre.

School Case Study - Balnarring Preschool (Outdoor Learning) *cont.*

Next Steps

Balnarring Preschool is constantly looking to evolve its Outdoor Learning program by

- Developing policy documents to ensure Outdoor Learning continues to be an integral part of the centre,
- Ensuring funds are allocated in the yearly budget,
- Writing a First Peoples policy into the Outdoor Learning curriculum,
- Developing and providing further Professional Development in Outdoor Learning and First Peoples culture,
- By continuing to seek further grants and contacts to ensure the longevity of the program.

Sample: This case study was prepared by Outdoors Victoria in partnership with the Victorian Department of Education and Training.

Disclaimer: The Department of Education and Training does not necessarily endorse external programs and any decisions are best made at the school level.



Sample letter to families

Dear Families,

The outdoor learning environment plays an important role in the curriculum, providing students with opportunities to experiment and explore; ask questions and make observations; solve problems and build theories. To enrich their learning experience, your child will be involved in learning activities on the school ground and walking field trips within the community throughout the year.

You can help by:

- Dressing your children for Outdoor Learning every day, in Summer, Autumn, Winter, Spring
- Providing a change of clothing and shoes in case they are needed. If your child gets dirty, they have been active and engaged in their learning
- Providing rubber boots for outdoor explorations when the ground and the grass is wet. Providing a reusable water bottle and a high energy snack
- Signing and returning the attached Walking Field Trip form

Recommended Clothing:

- Wool socks
- Running or hiking shoes and a pair of rubber boots
- Layers that are breathable and wick moisture away from the skin
- The outer shell of waterproof, windproof clothing, including a rain jacket and rain pants

When it is cold, please add:

- Warm and waterproof hat and gloves that slip on and off easily
- Extra layers, including a warm and waterproof winter jacket and snow pants
- An extra pair of warm gloves and warm socks (students should carry these in their bag)
- Winter boots

When it is warm, please provide:

- A sun hat
- Sunscreen.

How to pitch Outdoor Learning to students & staff

How to pitch Outdoor Learning to staff

One of the most important aspects of an Outdoor Learning program is ensuring school staff understand and embrace the Outdoor Learning program. Having programs in the outdoors is often out of the comfort zone for many staff therefore it's important you ease potential concerns before the establishment of the program. Here are 5 tips for pitching Outdoor Learning to staff

The benefits of Outdoor Learning:

- Extending teaching capacity.
- Ability to utilize a new medium to educate students.
- Promoting lifelong enjoyment in the outdoor environment.
- Better utilization of school grounds and facilities.



How to pitch Outdoor Learning to students

With the increasing reliance on technology and technology-based learning, it is important to go outside and away when possible. When pitching Outdoor Learning to students it's important to think about the following concepts:

- Seeing something new and gaining new practical knowledge.
- A chance to explore the school ground and the environment.
- An opportunity to have fun and enjoy themselves.
- Be able to stand up and be physically active.
- Socialize with their classmates in a different environment.

Conclusion

If you have any activities or have feedback or want to discuss certain activities further, please consider emailing Outdoorlearning@outdoorsvictoria.org.au.

Acknowledgments

This teacher toolkit could not have been created without the work and dedication of educators throughout Australia. Educators often need to look at their local environment and create activities that suit their needs for that day, we thank you for sharing your activities and hope others reading this document can utilise your creative thinking and implement these activities.

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- Outdoors Victoria
- ACHPER (Victoria)
- Environment Education Victoria
- Geography Teachers' Association of Victoria (GTAV)
- Parks Victoria

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