

Community Garden: A Personal Reflection  
PED3112: Teaching at the Primary Division: Language Arts and Social Studies  
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Teachers can use community gardens as part of an interactive, holistic approach to connect curriculum standards with nature, while supporting wellness and community building. I recently attended a workshop hosted by Genvironment, where we were invited to consider how being outdoors can support and enhance learning. Engaging with nature increases wellness, lowers stress, and is an opportunity for community building. In a school setting, the environment itself can help resolve behavioural challenges. Outdoor education can be an effective strategy for student engagement and learning.



A highlight for me was considering how we can support students to dive into deep learning, that is, being able to relate, to transfer, and to apply knowledge. I believe best teaching practices integrate subjects and meet students where they are at. One can sense the flow of the class in moments like a lesson, or over a period of time like a week. Harnessing this energy flow as a tool is a powerful resource in making learning happen. When students are outdoors, the holistic environment can give energy to the flow of learning, enabling open-ended exploration to weave the curriculum content into the real world.

As an educator, I wonder how outdoor education can be used in the public system, given limitations on class sizes, special permission for outdoor activities, availability of space, and even the changing weather throughout the school year. I am curious how to sustain nature spaces in a school community, especially for schools that are not near a forest.

When students work outdoors, there's an opportunity to do more than the same work they would do indoors at a desk. For example, the Social Studies curriculum at the primary level

describes changes in our roles, our communities, our traditions, our work, and our living



environment. Using food as a theme, there is a rich history on food gathering and meaning given to food, both of which have been affected by changes in urbanization, climate change, farming, development of plant varieties, diet culture, and seasonal food. Most Canadian families rely on grocery stores to access food. Growing food in a community garden can provide students with a solid entry point for a lesson on how food affects our community traditions that is hands-on and meaningful.

Outdoor education also gives students real world experiences with mathematics and the arts. Math and nature make a great couple — nature can be easily connected to numeracy through math hunts, surveys, games, and exploration. Outdoor education allows the student to enter the math conversation by noticing, wondering, and searching, all of which can support their natural curiosity. Getting outside is not just a body break strategy, but is an active vehicle to support learning conversations. Nature provides open-ended connections for students to explore in the art curriculum including shapes, colours, patterns, and light.

Assessment in outdoor education extends beyond worksheets. It requires trained educators who know their curriculum and their students.

My associate teacher recently shared that many of the jobs our students will have in the future may not yet exist. Students will be better prepared as they integrate their knowledge and connect it to the real world. Outdoor education creates a focal point for paving this path to support students to engage more deeply with their learning.