

CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT

Outdoor Teaching Strategies

Classroom Management Strategies for the Outdoors

Participation in outdoor activities may require alternative class management strategies from those applied in indoor settings. Students who have had little previous experience in outdoor settings may require reinforcement of appropriate rules of behaviour.

Suggestions to Teachers

- To **build a cooperative mind-set**, brainstorm a list of “**ground rules**” for the outdoor classroom. These can be posted on a wall in the classroom (with explanations) and a shorter version can be typed and put into a page protector or laminated and kept on an additional clipboard.
- **Anticipate issues and concerns.** Address any fears of being outside
- School grounds may often be better used as a site for **direct experience** rather than a site for direct instruction.
- **Practice, practice, practice.** Choose short excursions with a single focus to practice behaviour expectations (*e.g., we are going to look for five examples of weathering*). Students will learn quickly that the outdoors is simply an extension of your classroom.
- **Keep students accountable** to the expectations. Explain to students that they need to help each other stay on task. Attach a class list to your clipboard and track their behaviour using whatever system you use indoors.
- **Get help.** Invite community workers, parents and specialists to join in your activities and work with the students. Outline ways they can help, and when they should call upon you for assistance.



Groupings

- Develop productive **"study buddy" group** relations by recognizing, rewarding and building on positive interpersonal dynamics. Know who works well with whom and reward students by letting them choose their partners. Be attentive and inclusive of students with special needs.
- **Arrange work groups. Groups of 2 to 4** people work well. When possible, partner behaviorally challenged students with an adult.
- **Assign cooperative learning roles** to group members such as equipment manager, time keeper, data recorder.

Plan Your Lesson Flow to Maximize Student Learning and Focus

Joseph Cornell in *Sharing Nature with Children* recommends structuring outdoor activities to maximize learning by "awakening enthusiasm and curiosity" and engaging students in direct experiences. Consider the following in your planning:

Active Activities

- A short active activity can channel excess energy and prepare students to focus on a more detailed task.

Observation and Direct Experiences

- Allow children to engage with nature on a meaningful level. Foster a deeper understanding of the natural world by providing students with opportunities to use their senses, develop their observational skills, engage in hands-on exploration and experimentation and make personal connections to nature.

Reflection

- Provide an opportunity for children to share their thinking and inspiration, learn from one another and consolidate their own learning.



Introducing an Activity

- **Introduce the lesson indoors** where students are less distracted. School grounds are better used as a site for direct experience rather than a site for direct instruction.
- **Establish a focus** or reason for going outside. Explain clearly what specific tasks are to be accomplished.
- **Define vocabulary** and provide background knowledge.
- **Sort Equipment** or materials. Choose 2 Outdoor Classroom leaders who are in charge of any additional supplies that are taken outside.

When You Are Outside

- Decide on an **attention getter**, usually a whistle or bird call, Consider also using signals so that you don't have to shout simple instructions (i.e. thumbs up means to keep working and a wave means to come back to the meeting place). When the signal is given, students need to immediately **stop, look and listen**.
- **Use teaching circles**. Practically speaking, circles allow you to see all your students at a time. They allow all students to participate and leave no one lingering on the outside of the group.
- **Use learning centres**. Create a number of activities in different bins and place them at different locations. Have students rotate through the activities or choose the activities which interest them.
- **Clearly indicate boundaries**. Use natural structures in the schoolyard, pylons, flagging tape or yarn as boundaries. Confine outdoor activities to the smallest area possible to facilitate gathering and giving directions if activities need to be modified.
- **Circulate Constantly**. Circulating among the groups of students allows you to assess their understanding of the task and help clarify if necessary. Students will also use this time to share their discoveries, and it is a wonderful time to build relationships and the sense of wonder for outside learning.
- **Model respect for living things**. Emphasize that all living things, plants, animals and fungi are returned back to their original location. In terms of gathering, The National Wildlife Federation promotes the "1 in 20 Rule. Collect a plant only if more than 20 of the same species are growing in the immediate area. This applies to parts of plants as well—remove only one leaf from a shrub with 20 leaves.
- To maximize the learning time outdoors, **plan for learning activities between locations and during transitions**.
- **Be flexible**. Use teachable moments when they appear. Have alternate plans if the weather changes quickly.

Constructive Time Fillers

- By providing students with their own outdoor kits, they will have a sketch book and a basic journal that they can work on if they complete a task early. Visit Teachers Corner at www.evergreen.ca for a list of ideas and supplies for your own outdoor activity kits.



Back Inside

- **Use what you found outdoors.** From data and observations, to photos and artwork, connect outdoor learning and data to your indoor learning across the curriculum.
- **Post it, Show It.** Digital pictures, maps, or student work directly related to the excursion help to illustrate the connection between the outdoor experience and the classroom curriculum.

Continuity of Programming

- Student skills and behavior will generally improve with increased contact and familiarity with the routines and expectations that accompany outdoor learning activities.
- School programs that provide outdoor learning activities from K to 7 will develop a continuity of appropriate school ground learning behavior.

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