
Teaching Literacy with Place-Based Learning and Outdoor Experiences

Cassidy Marinus

What is Place-Based Learning?

Our Curriculum Matter defines placed based learning as “a vibrant approach to education that takes students out in to the communities, to learn, to do and to grow as human beings. Students are given the opportunity to learn subject matter in deep and lasting ways [and] understand the places they live in.”

Benefits of Outdoor Experiences

Although taking your students outside can seem overwhelming, with all the behaviour, safety, weather, and planning considerations to be made, there are many benefits to taking your students outside as often as possible. Primary students learn about the environment through an interactive, play-based approach which hopefully plants of love a nature in them and leads to them becoming stewards of the environment in the future.

Some other benefits include:

- Risk Taking
- Overcoming Fears
- Developing Persistence
- Problem Solving
- Regulating emotions
- Investigating
- Using their imaginations

“Imagine a child playing in a small patch of woods, where the trees might be hiding places, the foundation for a fort or branches to jump and swing. The tall grade in the understory might be a bed, a hiding spot or a farmer’s field. Now compare the imaginative possibilities this child has with a slide or swing.”

-Deanna Erickson and Julie Athman Ernst,
NACC 2011

All of which are critical to the development of a child as a whole, including their executive functioning skills. Taking students outside benefits their physical development, oral language, social emotional development, and creativity.

Practical Applications

The focus of my inquiry was to find simple, practical ideas that I could use to teach literacy skills to early primary students using place-based learning and outdoor experiences.

Rhyming Game

Students can form a circle to play rhyming games, such as picking an object from a basket or the forest and saying a nonsense word that rhymes (ex. cone, pone).



Creative Printing

Sticks can also be used to write names, letters and words in dirt or sand or chalk can be used to practice the same things if there is cement near by.

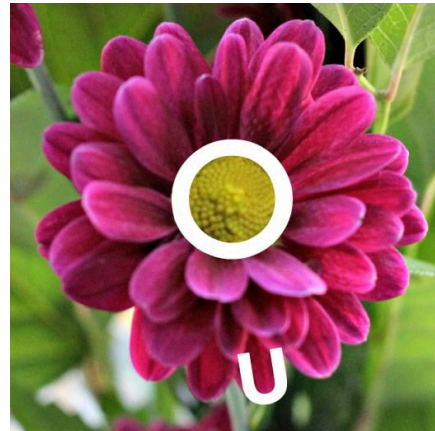
Letter Treasure Hunt

Large letters on paper are arranged around an outdoor area and students are asked to find a letter, where there will be a clue to find the next letter. Students could be asked to sound out the letter they are looking for to practice letter and sound recognition. The letter could also be placed on an object that begins with the same letter.



ABC Nature Shapes

Have students look for letters that occur in different nature objects, such as the 'o' in the centre of a flower or the 'u' in a petal. I'm sure it would be surprising to see what they can come up with!



Letter Clothes Pegs

Write letters on clothes pegs and have students clip them to objects in nature that start with that sound.

ABC Eye Spy

Have students look for letters of the alphabet in signs, etc. when going on a walk (challenge them to find all the letter of the alphabet) or say a specific letter or sound and have them find an object that begins with that, or possibly ends with it to make it more challenging. This could also be done with blended letters, such as 'sh' or 'th.'



Listening Walks

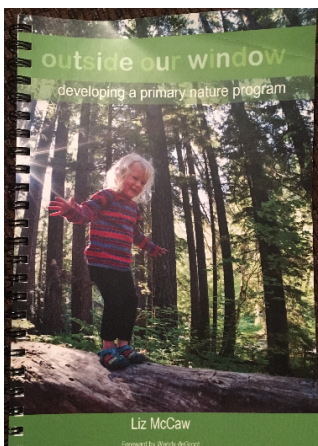
Students are taken outside to listen to and identify different sounds. Students could be asked to identify the beginning sound in the sound they hear.

Sit Spots

Have students carry their own tools, journals and books, such as clipboard, nature journals and mini books for writing and sketching. Every time they are out in the forest they can go to their sit spot (a personal space where students go for a short amount of time to observe) and they might draw and label a forest object or begin writing a story. Or students can also be asked to read at their sit spots. However, just like inside the classroom students have to bring a good fit book and work on building their stamina. In kindergarten, likely starting with one minute and working your way up to ten minutes.

Learn More...

If you would like to learn more about how the Nature Kindergarten program in Sooke came to be, here is a very interesting Ted Talk.



“Outside Our Window” is a guide written by Liz McGaw (an educator in Nanaimo who teaches a Nature Kindergarten Program) about how to set up your own nature primary program. It is a great resource that I have really enjoyed and is available at Strong Nations Publishing on Bowen.

“Last Child in the Woods” by Richard Louv is a book about how a lack of time in nature harms children and society. He also suggests solutions to the problem. It is the next book I plan to read on this topic.