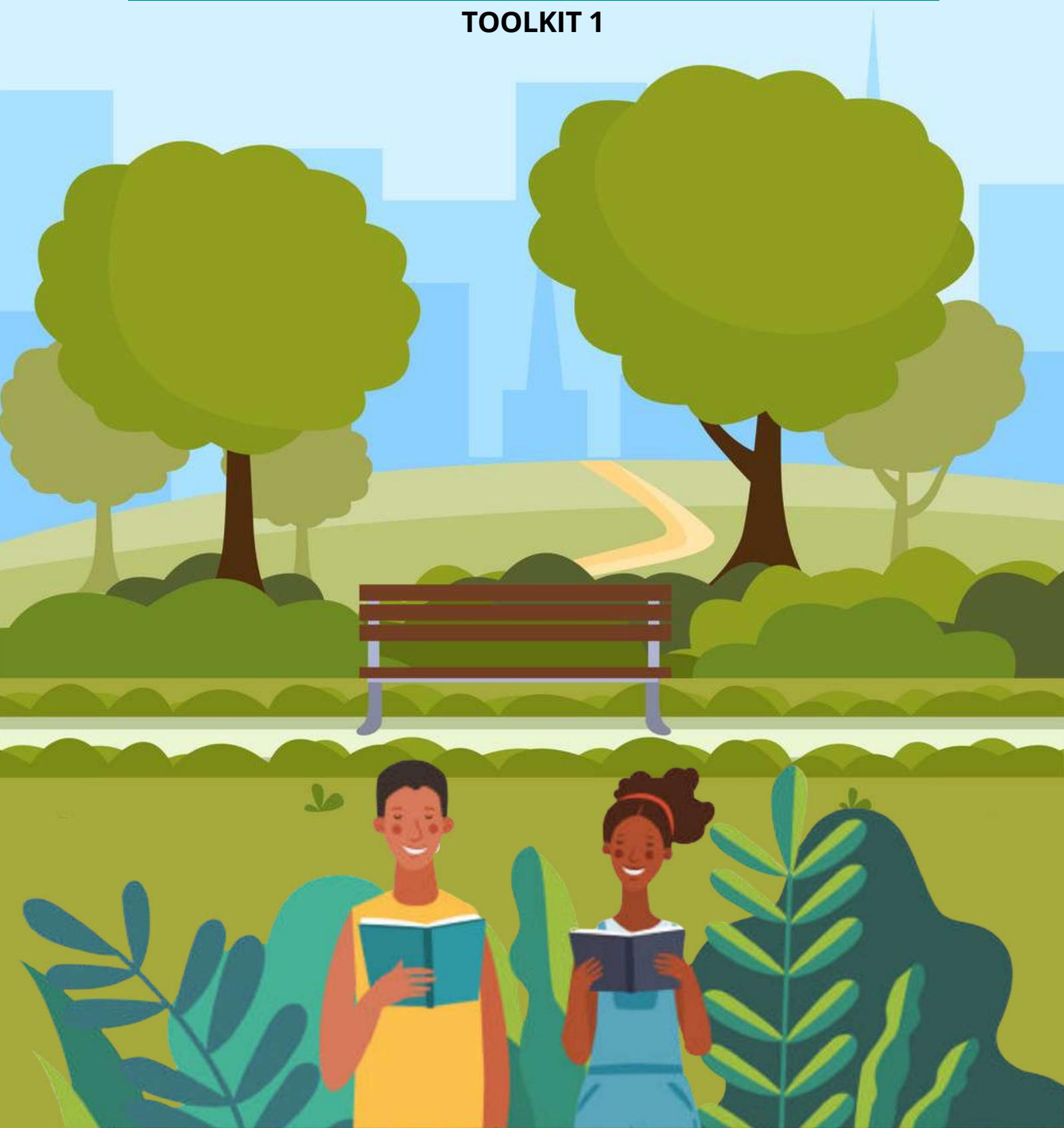


LEARNING in the OUTDOORS

AN INTRODUCTION

TOOLKIT 1



TEACHER TOOLKIT SCHEDULE

Outdoors Victoria, in partnership with the Australian Council for Health, Physical Education and Recreation (ACHPER Victoria), Geography Teachers Association (GTAV) and Parks Victoria (Parks Vic) will be creating the 2nd series of Outdoor Learning teacher toolkits. These toolkits will build upon the 1st series of Outdoor Learning toolkits which was targeted towards primary school teachers between 2018 and 2021. The 2nd series will focus on Outdoor Learning in secondary schools which are scheduled to be released within three stages between 2021 and 2023

2021

- 1 Introduction to Outdoor Learning (Secondary)
- 2 Outdoor Learning In Geography*
- 3 Outdoor Learning in Physical Education

2022

- 4 Outdoor Learning in Arts*
- 5 Outdoor Learning in English
- 6 Outdoor Learning in Health*
- 7 Outdoor Learning in History*
- 8 Outdoor Learning in Languages (LOTE)*

2023

- 9 Outdoor Learning in Mathematics*
- 10 Outdoor Learning in Science*
- 11 Outdoor Learning in Technologies*
- 12 Outdoor Learning in Cross-Curriculum Priorities*
- 13 Outdoor Learning in Indigenous Education*
- 14 Outdoor Learning in Secondary Education (Book)*

Outdoors Victoria, in partnership with ACHPER (Victoria), GTAV, and Parks Victoria, are always interested in finding out what is occurring outdoors in your school. If you are proud of a new program you have implemented or would like to be involved in, or contribute to any of the Teacher Toolkits, contact any of the above organisations.

Outdoors Victoria, in partnership with ACHPER (Victoria), GTAV, 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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Throughout the construction of this teacher toolkit, careful attempts have been made to ensure the included activities and explanations do not contain offensive materials, the materials contained in this document will be periodically reviewed. As a result of this review, some activities may be tweaked and an updated version may be uploaded to the relevant website in which this document was downloaded. Before implementing activities or content included in this document please review to ensure the appropriateness for your class and or school.

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?



The definition of Outdoor Learning varies significantly depending on the scholar, teacher, or location, with each definition and practice receiving support from different individuals and organisations. Below are examples of different definitions used throughout the world, including within various education systems, before noting the Australian definition, which will be used for the remainder of these toolkits.

“ *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 Education Scotland;

“ *Being outdoors and active is a vital part of growing up and living a healthy and fulfilled life. Outdoor learning benefits children, young people, and adults alike. It engages our hearts through what we feel and the emotions we experience; our heads through what we think, see and say; and our hands through our physical experiences, including how we move through the space the outdoors provides. Outdoor learning can happen anywhere – from the school grounds to local greenspace, from the high street to national parks; from outside your front door to the rest of the world* ”

Education Scotland

“ *Outdoor learning is predicated on the idea that learners engage with contexts outside a brick-and-mortar classroom setting. The outdoors can provide easily accessible contexts for content of interest. Outdoor learning can be defined as learning in an outdoor context based on experiences and interactions with physical and cultural phenomena. Outdoor learning is relevant in that it is a reality each of us has a connection to but has not been fully vetted for use across educational contexts* ”

Brant G. Miller - *Outdoor Learning*

For this series of Outdoor Learning toolkits, the definition used for Outdoor Learning will remain consistent with the previous series dedicated to Outdoor Learning in primary school. That is the definition used by the Australian Curriculum.

“ *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.* ”

The Australian Curriculum

What is Outdoor Learning? *cont.*

Within the Australian curriculum, Outdoor Learning is noted as one of seven curriculum connections; these connections “allow educators to draw connections across the dimensions of the Australian Curriculum on various conceptual themes.” Other curriculum connections include



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>

This Australian curriculum’s outdoor learning framework allows teachers to deliver “students to experience guided, integrated learning across the curriculum in natural environments. Students have the opportunity to gain unique and specific benefits from outdoor learning. They develop skills and understandings while valuing a positive relationship with natural environments and promoting the sustainable use of these environments”. Building further upon the rationale for the inclusion of Outdoor Learning within the Australian curriculum, it is noted that 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 difference between Outdoor Education, Outdoor Recreation, and Outdoor Learning?

Before divulging into the numerous benefits of embedding outdoor learning into a secondary school program, it is important to note that there is often confusion between Outdoor Learning, Outdoor Recreation, and Outdoor Education within the secondary sector. Although all of these types of outdoor-based education contain similarities, there are many differences that are important to note.

Outdoor Education

“Outdoor education engages students to develop positive relationships with self, others, and with outdoor environments through interaction with the natural world. Outdoor education usually involves residential or journey-based experiences to impart personal, social and critical thinking capabilities, physical skills, and subject-specific knowledge.”

Department of Education - Policy [↗](#)

Outdoor education is reflected in the Victorian Curriculum:

- Outdoor learning is included in F–10 Health and Physical Education in the content descriptions and also as a Focus area (Challenge and adventure activities).
- At the VCE level, students can undertake VCE Outdoor and Environmental Studies.
- For VCE VET students, the revised VCE VET Certificate II in Outdoor Recreation is in its first full year of delivery in 202.

There is substantial evidence to indicate that adequately planned and well taught outdoor education curricula can have a positive effect on student outcomes, including educational, interpersonal, social, and critical thinking skills, as well as mental and physical health.

Quality outdoor education can:

- Enhance enquiry, critical thinking and reflection skills.
- Make significant contributions to literacy and numeracy.
- Increase students' sense of confidence and efficacy.
- Improve mental health and wellbeing and increase physical health in young people
- Improve environmental knowledge and an understanding of culture, heritage and place history.
- Teach students to assess risk and make judgements about risk management.

Department of Education - Value Outdoor Education [↗](#)

This information has been obtained from Education.vic.gov.au and their respective websites and policies.

Outdoor Recreation

According to the Australian Curriculum, outdoor recreation is

“Physical activity in outdoors or natural settings provides opportunities to connect individually, in small groups, or as a community to the outdoor environment.”

Australian Curriculum - Outdoor Recreation [↗](#)

The difference between Outdoor Education, Outdoor Recreation, and Outdoor Learning? cont.

Within Outdoor Recreation, students are challenged and develop new skills and abilities – both physical and mental. Active outdoor recreation provides an alternative option for people who do not want to participate in traditional organised sport. Outdoor Recreation.

Quality outdoor recreation can provide substantial benefits across four categories of personal, sociocultural, education / environmental, and economic benefits. These categories are briefly outlined below; for further information, please consult Outdoor Recreation in America by Jensen and Guthrie (2006), specifically chapter three.



Examples of Outdoor Recreation in a schooling program include but are not limited to:

- Abseiling
- Archery
- Ballooning
- Birdwatching
- BMX
- Boating
- Kayaking
- Kite flying
- Mountain biking
- Mountaineering
- Nature play
- Nature studies
- Orienteering
- Photography
- Picnicking
- Bodyboarding
- Bouldering
- Bushwalking
- Camping
- Canoeing
- Canyoning
- Ropes courses
- Running
- Sailboarding
- Sailing
- Scooting
- Scuba diving
- Sea kayaking
- Skateboarding
- Skiing
- Caravanning
- Caving
- Climbing
- Conservation
- Cross country skiing
- Cycling
- Snorkelling
- Snowboarding
- SUP
- Surfing
- Surf rafting
- Swimming
- Trail bike riding
- Trail Running
- Tree climbing
- Expeditions
- Fishing
- Frisbee
- Geocaching
- Hang-gliding
- Horse riding
- Walking
- Wildlife watching
- Windsurfing
- Touring
- Slacklining
- Rock climbing
- Trekking
- Skygazing
- Rafting

Outdoors Queensland - What is Outdoor Recreation [↗](#)

Outdoor Learning

Outdoor Learning differs from Outdoor Recreation and Outdoor Education as it does not rely on adventure-based activities or specific environments to facilitate learning. Outdoor Learning typically takes place beyond the school classroom and can take place across the whole curriculum, be that undertaking a trigonometry lesson on tree heights in the school grounds or analysing water flows within a science lesson.

In Summary

In totality, Outdoor Learning is taking students outside (typically still within the school grounds), to enhance teaching and learning that normally takes place inside the classroom. Whereas Outdoor Education (often referred to as experiential learning) typically involves more organised activities, not in the school ground that emphasise teamwork, awareness of the environment, and resilience, to name a select few. Outdoor Recreation, in comparison, typically refers to specific outdoor adventure activities outdoors, including rock climbing, whitewater rafting, or bushwalking.

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 [\[link\]](#)

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 [\[link\]](#)

“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 [\[link\]](#)

“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 [\[link\]](#)

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** [\[link\]](#)

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](#) [\[link\]](#)

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](#) [\[link\]](#)

State of play in Outdoor Learning *cont.*

In November 2018 Active Healthy Kids Australia released its **2018 Scorecard** ² 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 ²

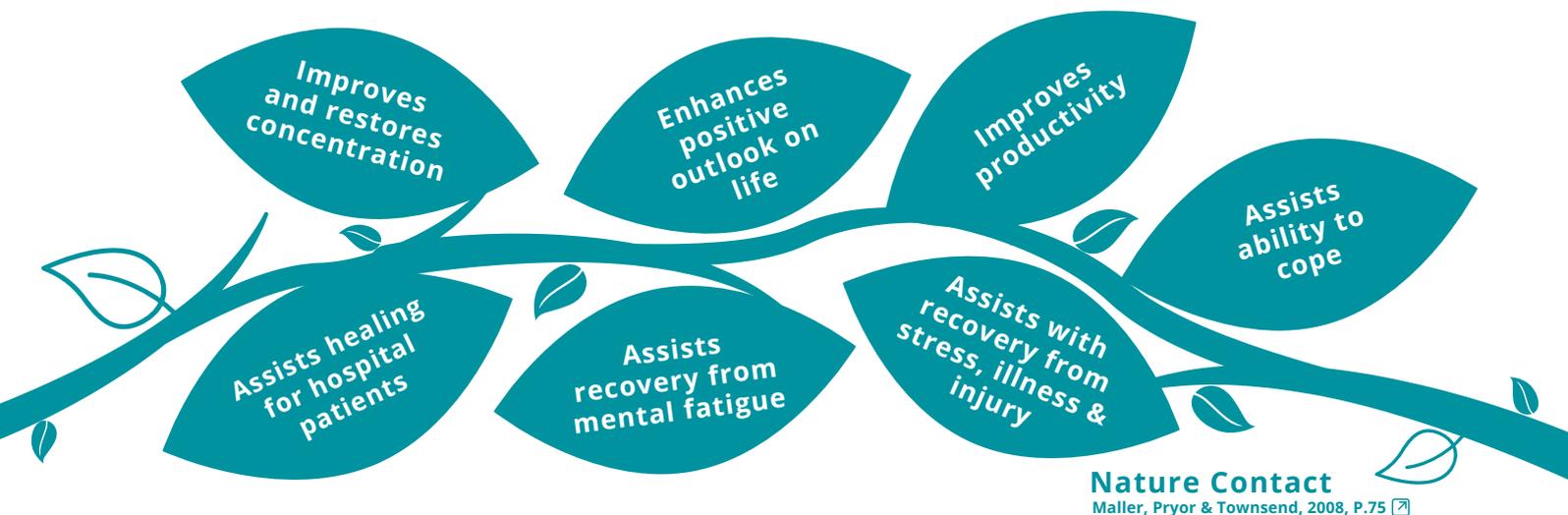
As we can see from this small snapshot, young people are spending less time outdoors. This is due to a range of factors such as the increase of urban sprawl, access to more convenient transport methods and helicopter parenting.

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.

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, Wyver, 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](#) 

Benefits of Outdoor-Based Learning for Children's Development

Paci (2016) finds that when "looking at the broad range of benefits of exposing children to nature suggests that we should place greater emphasis on incorporating nature into children's lives"(p.9). Within the Australian Curriculum, the following benefits are noted

“ *Students 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* ”

”

Further research by Paci (2016) and other researchers "has revealed that experiences in the outdoors can promote children's healthy physical wellbeing, improve children's emotion regulation, support psychological wellbeing, and help foster social skills and friendships" (p.9)

[Outside the Walls: Exploring the Benefits of OutdoorBased Learning for Children's Development](#) 



Research into Outdoor Learning

Outdoor Learning is an area that is growing with research, from how to implement outdoor learning programs, the benefits of different programs, the history of outdoor learning throughout various countries, or research analysing the curriculum of outdoor learning. Below is a section of outdoor learning research studies from prominent Australian researchers and researchers throughout the world. If you are interested in finding out more about outdoor learning, the following articles will provide a solid starting point.

Clark, S., & Loch, S. (2021). A vision for experiential outdoor learning. *Independence*, 46(2), 32-34.

Collins, M., Dorph, R., Foreman, J., Pande, A., Strang, C., & Young, A. (2020). A field at risk: The impact of COVID-19 on environmental and outdoor science education. The Lawrence Hall of Science, Policy Brief.

Cotic, N., Plazar, J., Istenic Starcic, A., & Zuljan, D. (2020). The Effect of Outdoor Lessons in Natural Sciences on Students' Knowledge, through Tablets and Experiential Learning. *Journal of Baltic Science Education*, 19(5), 747-763.

Gray, T. (2019). Outdoor Learning and psychological resilience: Making today's students better prepared for tomorrow's world. *Curriculum Perspectives*, 39(1), 67-72.

Maller, C. (2005), Hands-on contact with nature in primary schools as a catalyst for developing a sense of community and cultivating mental health and wellbeing in Learning in the Natural Environment: Review of social and economic benefits and barriers

Neville, I. A., Petrass, L. A., & Ben, F. (2021). The impact of an outdoor learning experience on the development of English creative writing skills: an action research case study of year 7 and 8 secondary school students in Australia. *Journal of Adventure Education and Outdoor Learning*, 1-14.

Ofsted (2008), Learning outside the classroom. How far should you go? in Learning in the Natural Environment: Review of social and economic benefits and barriers

Parker, L. (2020). Outdoor learning in the Australian curriculum. *Interaction*, 48(4).

Passy, R. A., Bentsen, P., Gray, T., & Ho, S. (2019). Integrating outdoor learning into the curriculum: an exploration in four nations.

Peacock, A. (2006), Changing minds: the lasting impact of school trips in Learning in the Natural Environment: Review of social and economic benefits and barriers

Quay, J., Gray, T., Thomas, G., Allen-Craig, S., Asfeldt, M., Andkjaer, S., ... & Foley, D. (2020). What future/s for outdoor and environmental education in a world that has contended with COVID-19?. *Journal of Outdoor and Environmental Education*, 23(2), 93-117.

Randler, C., Ilg, & Kern, J. (2005), Cognitive and emotional evaluation of an amphibian conservation program for elementary school students in Learning in the Natural Environment: Review of social and economic benefits and barriers

van Kraalingen, I. (2021). A systematized review of the use of mobile technology in outdoor learning. *Journal of Adventure Education and Outdoor Learning*, 1-19.

Waite, S. (Ed.). (2020). *Outdoor Learning Research: Insight into forms and functions*. Routledge.

Waite, S., Passy, R., Gilchrist, M., Hunt, A. & Blackwell, I. (2016), *Natural Connections Demonstration Project, 2012- 2016*

Outdoor Learning & the COVID-19 Pandemic

It is clear that the events of the COVID-19 pandemic have had a drastic effect on the world since 2019. As noted by Allen-Craig (2021), “Educators have been asked to re-invent our teaching and our courses. As educators, we have adapted creatively in the online world, and our students have achieved the learning outcomes” (p.94). So what will be the outcome for Outdoor Learning throughout the remainder of the pandemic and into the world post its most significant impacts?

The outdoors has been used as a teaching/learning tool when coping with pandemics dating back to classes taking place on rooftops of New York buildings or on abandoned ferries in the earlier 1900s to combat tuberculosis or the plague, originally stemming from the concept of the German open-air school which began in 1904. By 1914, these schools were forced to close by medical officials due to weather, expense, and effectiveness. However, the learnings from more than 100 years ago provided an outline of a potential approach to the COVID-19 pandemic in 2019.

Gray, 2020 within the article titled *What future/s for outdoor and environmental education in a world that has contended with COVID-19?* Writes that;

“

Epidemiologists learned that Coronavirus does not last for extended periods outdoors. Danish schools returned in April after lockdown with recommendations to “hold classes outside so that children can be outdoors as much as possible” (Mulvahill, 2020). In Scotland, the pandemic may “push parents and teachers to embrace the benefits of education in the outdoors” (Brooks, 2020).

”

Although the COVID-19 pandemic has caused a significant upheaval within society, As Neill and Foley (2021) find, “COVID-19 also presents opportunities. Higgins (2020) suggests that although COVID-19 pandemic may be a factor stimulating interest in the role outdoor learning can play in post-Coronavirus school recovery. While “social distancing,” class sizes, limitations of the school estate, etc., may be driving factors, interest in outdoor learning amongst policymakers is palpable, and there is growing recognition of its potential in education, health, and well-being benefits (p.100). COVID-19 has introduced Outdoor Learning to educators and parents worldwide and highlighted the importance of the natural world within education (Crossley, 2020). One would need a crystal ball to predict the trajectory outdoor learning will take over the coming years, although it will undoubtedly never be the same.



Quay, J., Gray, T., Thomas, G., Allen-Craig, S., Asfeldt, M., Andkjaer, S., ... & Foley, D. (2020). What future/s for outdoor and environmental education in a world that has contended with COVID-19?. Journal of Outdoor and Environmental Education, 23(2), 93-117.

Halperin, D. T. (2020). Coping with COVID-19: learning from past pandemics to avoid pitfalls and panic. Global Health: Science and Practice, 8(2), 155-165.

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.

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.

Furthermore, the following organisations and staff have assisted in the creation of this document including;

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

Get in contact:

Outdoorlearning@outdoorsvictoria.org.au
www.outdoorsvictoria.org.au/contact

