

OUTDOOR LEARNING MANUAL





Preface:

We are writing this from the perspective of having 7 hectares, wanting to utilise it fully, for the benefits of the students, teachers and town. How were we inspired to begin documenting the joy and challenge of outdoor learning? Eildon is a place of natural outdoor learning, camps, lakes, rivers, snow. There is great variety and quality of outdoor environments. Clear change of seasons (autumn leaves, etc.). Going through the lockdown, forced us to deliver lessons outdoors more often and we recognised the health and educational benefits of learning outdoors in this modern age.

Mission Statement:

We have developed a knack for creating lessons at Eildon Primary School that make the most of our beautiful outdoor learning spaces. The aim of this manual is to provide some examples of outdoor lessons for the different subjects that develop healthy and active students and teach curriculum concepts in an engaging, safe and skilful manner. E.g. turning “Hide and seek” into a mapping activity. In this approach to teaching and learning, the classroom is seen as learning headquarters from where lessons are introduced and from where teachers can choose to head outdoors to apply this learning.

Learning Intention: We are learning to bring the outdoor spaces into our weekly program.

Assessment Criteria: I can adapt any classroom concept to any outdoor setting and any outdoor opportunity to any curriculum concept.

Making outdoor learning a regular part of our weekly programs.

Why?

Achievement:

1. Opportunities for connecting different parts of the curriculum.
2. Accommodating different learning styles / needs.

3. Providing a variety of learning experiences / environments to encourage memory of what is being learnt.
4. Providing a concrete stepping stone to learning abstract concepts.
5. To learn the natural-world versions of classroom concepts.
6. Opportunities to display student work in the outdoor learning environment to make learning more worthwhile and increase engagement.
7. The Art of Making Memories – different environments make it easier for people to remember things, strengthening connections.
8. Retrieving Information: The outdoor environment is conducive to active involvement and participation, as it is intrinsically kinaesthetic in its nature. With the practical opportunities and multiple exposures, learning becomes more efficient and enjoyable. It demands that students be interactive.

Engagement:

1. Capitalising on the amazing surroundings at the school and around the town.
2. To entice students' senses with authentic learning experiences for concrete and abstract concepts.
3. Opportunities to take responsibility and pride in their school environment.
4. Opportunities to think creatively and be constructive, using materials and initiative: e.g. bark hut building.
5. Increasing engagement levels, thereby reducing examples of negative behaviour. E.g. kids and teachers find it fun to be outdoors.

Wellbeing:

1. Building links between the students and their community.
2. Building links between parents and student learning.
3. Encouraging positive cycle of continuous improvement of outdoor learning areas.
4. Allowing for more well-ventilated learning areas.
5. Incorporating healthy, physical learning opportunities for students and staff (outdoor elements: sunlight, etc.)
6. Exploring situations to practice resilience: bugs, wind, etc.
7. Getting away from electronic devices, e.g. screens.
8. Promoting the school by making students more visible to the community and making it more enjoyable for the community to use the school grounds.
9. Increasing independence, life skills, practical skills, safety and healthy risk-taking, within a safe, supportive environment.
10. Teaching in both contexts (indoor and outdoor) has mutual benefits for teaching in both environments.

What? The Victorian Curriculum:

Lessons designed for outdoor spaces should be based on the Victorian Curriculum (domains and capabilities) in the same way as lessons designed for classroom spaces. Adapting the Victorian Curriculum to suit outdoor situations requires teachers to understand the risks and opportunities of an environment which is less controllable. Teaching in the outdoors requires preparation, creativity, knowledge and flexibility and is different to teaching in indoor environments.

HOW? Outdoor Lesson Examples:

Maths Lessons:

Maths lessons are uniquely suited to delivery in the outdoors. This is because an entire aspect of mathematics is practical. It is widely accepted that exploring a mathematic concept in a concrete form first, facilitates the learning of the concept when it is presented in a more abstract form. It also promotes authentic learning and engagement. Finally, practical learning opportunities provided by the outdoors encourage kinaesthetic learning that delves more deeply than the surface to strengthen understanding and connect meaning.

Juniors (F – 1) – Transformations: Understanding flips, turns and slides in the playground. Students look at different playground equipment where you can do a flip, turn and slide. Using their clipboards and an appropriate scaffold (e.g. worksheet), students record how a shape changes with each of these transformations.

Middles (Grade 2 – 4) – Graphing: Graphing types of weeds found in the veggie patch. Students collect weeds, sorting them into piles, label, count them, graph and analyse their data.

Seniors (Grade 5 – 6) – Area: Calculating area to plant seeds / seedlings in the veggie patch. Students have to work out how many seeds can go into each garden plot, by calculating the area of each plot and the space required for each seed. Using formal units to convert their measurements.

English Lessons:

English lessons are also well-suited and easily adapted to delivery in the outdoors. This is because they inspire imagination as students are immersed in a stimulating environment that is naturally conducive to description and creativity. As a painter would paint a landscape in oils, so a writer can describe it in words. It also promotes authentic learning and engagement as it does in Maths. Discussions can be more organic, e.g. brainstorming the way a duck waddles as it goes past. By seeing an object in real life, the writer is given a

scaffold to describe it, which is a step to describing it in the object's absence in the classroom. As we write about the world, so we should go into it to explore it and observe it.

Juniors (F – 1) – Scavenger Spelling: Teacher posts spelling words written on flash cards on different play equipment and areas around the playground. Students need to find and write down the complete set of their spelling words. This helps to develop a mental image of their words because they are in a different geographical position.

Middles (Grade 2 – 4) – Expressive Reading: Students work in pairs to read aloud, practicing adjusting volume and pace to develop expression in their reading. This will include developing the voices of characters. Using clipboards to record partner feedback.

Seniors (Grade 5 – 6) – Descriptive Writing: e.g. Using a “Y Chart and the 5 senses, students describe, using adjectives, adverbs, similes and metaphors, the outdoor environment in which they find themselves immersed. Students then return to class and write a short narrative, with the aim of incorporating that same descriptive practiced earlier in the outdoors. Students are able to access more than just what they already know (e.g. discovering new plants, animals, etc.)

Science / Technology Lessons:

Juniors (F – 1) – Identifying simple machines: in the playground, students identify inclines, pulleys and levers to sort into a table.

Middles (Grade 2 – 4) – Living Vs. Non-Living: Noticing and sorting living / non-living things. Students record this in a table, justifying their reasons.

Seniors (Grade 5 -6) – Anatomy: Travel into the Arboreal Wonderland, notice animals such as kangaroos, their features, movement, behaviour. Fill in a diagram of a kangaroo on a sheet, labelling the different parts.

Art Lessons:

Juniors (F – 1): Collect different shaped leaves, sticks, etc. to make: mandalas, leaf rubbings, pressed leaf arrangements (laminated), necklaces, wall hangings, hall stand displays (picture frames), collages, create natural paints, basket-weaving (using local Aboriginal knowledge) and more! *Literacy connection:* write down the steps for this procedure.

Middles (Grade 2 – 4): Pendulum paintings, paint flicking, large-scale chalk drawings (street art), mud art, sandpit sculptures, live sketching: plants, animals, landscapes, still life (using clipboards).

Seniors (Grade 5 – 6): Using art for school improvement: tile mosaics around garden beds, topiary, sculptures for garden walks, flowerbed arrangements, rebound wall graffiti art, photography, artworks around the school (gallery walks)

Art exhibitions: intraschool and community-based (e.g. fishing festival). Kids explaining their creations, asking each other questions.

Inquiry Theme:

Each term Eildon Primary School chooses a theme of inquiry around which its lessons revolve. The themes vary from term to term and cover all of the humanities, health, science and technology learning areas (see attached sequence). An example of one of these Inquiry themes is Dinosaurs. During this term, teachers and students spent time in the outdoors searching for plant life that the dinosaurs had, digging for fossils in the sandpit, scouring the Arboreal Wonderland for bones, searching the gardens for lizards. Teachers found ingenious ways to incorporate Literacy and Numeracy into these activities, capitalising on the original focus of the lesson, which was to do with science.

P.E.:

Except in the case of inclement weather, all P.E. lessons are conducted outdoors, making use of all suitable outdoor learning areas. Teachers and students adhere to the Sun Smart Policy (see attached). Where possible, lessons are linked to the Inquiry theme.

L.O.T.E.:

Students at Eildon Primary School enjoy learning Indonesian in the outdoors. They are able to form sentences about what they see using Indonesian language, learning their Indonesian names. Games are a fun way to help learn a second language and these are incorporated into the games where possible.

Capabilities

Creative and Critical thinking: e.g. How can we problem-solve in this unusual environment?

Ethical thinking: What do we have to consider regarding the environment? How can we affect change responsibly?

Interpersonal: How do we interact with each other in the open environment? Where are the boundaries (personal, geographical, physical, visual, environmental)? Risks and safety? Supervision (whistle). Strangers, animals. Parental and community involvement – can we invite people in to come and help us? E.g. Fisheries comes to the school classrooms vs. comes and teaches in the Arboreal Wonderland.

Intercultural: How do different cultures use the outdoors? Indigenous peoples and plants. What is native vs. introduced (blackberries, rabbits, etc)? What are local customs, resources, foods, traditions? Celebrations. Can we recreate foreign environments? E.g. turn some land into a desert. Modified environment. How do students from overseas become familiar with the Australian outdoors? How can we learn about their culture's outdoors as well?

Wellbeing

It is well known that learning in the outdoors has a positive impact on wellbeing. On a regular basis, students and teachers enjoy having wellbeing-focussed lessons outside. Teachers base their wellbeing focus lessons on School Values and resource the lessons using Respectful Relationships and Bounce Back documents.

E.g. gardening, billy cart races, building activities, chaplaincy groups, hens, etc.

School Values

It is an expectation that students will demonstrate the school values during their time in the yard, including Recess and Lunch, as well as outdoor lessons. Examples of Respect, Resilience, Integrity, Cooperation, Achievement and Altruism are rewarded each week at Assembly through Student of the Week certificates. **Activity:** Link your schools' values to the benefits of learning outside.

Teaching styles / strategies

Our teaching in the outdoors requires a slightly different set of teaching skills, for example the use of your voice. Teachers should consider the weather, conditions (e.g. ground), hazards, time of year, student behaviour, wildlife, sun, resources, equipment, emergency procedures. Teachers may adapt a more authoritative style of leadership to ensure the safety and education of all. Teachers will negotiate with students the expectations for learning outside prior to leaving the classroom and in some cases may create a class agreement (see Behaviour Flowchart).

Risk management: appropriate clothing, hats, sunscreen, drink bottles, wildlife (deer, snakes, mosquitoes, bones, etc.), tripping hazards,

Related School Policies / Appendices

- Child Safe Standards
- Sun Smart Policy
- Risk Management Plan
- Emergency Management Plan and Policy

Work programming:

Where does it fit in? Teachers document their outdoor lessons in their regular work program. From time to time, teachers will throw their learning programs out the window because of opportunistic outdoor conditions.

Consider: Do we put in a section on our work plans for daily / weekly outdoor lessons?

Consider: How can we guide ourselves as teachers to do outdoor lessons? What visual prompts do we have around our teachers' desk / on work programs to guide our outdoor teaching activities / time –slots, to remind us that it is pleasant and conducive to learning?

Consider: How can we support each other and ourselves to refine our teaching in the outdoors? E.g. learning walks, peer observations and professional reading. Attending the International Outdoor education Research Conference.

Where?

List and describe the learning spaces:

Oval, vegetable garden, playground, basketball court, sheltered table areas, Arboreal Wonderland, stump circles x 2, soccer pitch, outdoor tennis court, asphalt areas, sandpit, bike track, cricket pitch, shade sail area (drama).

Consider: Which spaces are best suited for certain activities at your school?

Consider: Risk management factors for each area.

Teaching in the outdoors: expect the unexpected and enjoy the rewards!

Appendices:

- LINK to policy advisory library – guidelines for different outdoor activities, e.g. abseiling.
<https://www2.education.vic.gov.au/pal>
- Photos of outdoor learning examples.

Photos of outdoor learning at Eildon Primary School:







