

OUTDOOR PLAY

Access to nature is essential for well-being
(Cree & Robb, 2021).

“Outdoor education is an experiential learning approach that encourages children to **explore, connect, and learn from the natural world**”
(Schroth, 2023, p. 6).

“The more children access **green spaces** and wilder spaces, experiencing multiple relationships, **the healthier** they are throughout their **lives**” (Cree & Robb, 2021, p. 43).

“[Outdoor play] gets children outdoors and allows them to **engage with nature** and the world in which they live [and promotes] ... a better understanding of the natural world”
(Schroth, 2023, p. 97).

Outdoor play is a key part of the Whole School,
Whole Community, Whole Child model
(Hodges et al., 2022).

A child-led approach in which we want to encourage autonomy, self-control and the development of intrinsic motivation and self-worth” (Cree & Robb, 2021, p. 51).

PHYSICAL BENEFITS OF OUTDOOR PLAY

Outdoor play allows children to **test the limits** of their physical development (Little & Wyver, 2008).

Active time outside in the fresh air and sunshine has a **positive effect** on physical health (Schroth, 2023).

Outdoor play is necessary to optimizing the **physical development** of children at school (Ramstetter & Murray, 2017).

Outdoor play leads to greater levels of **physical activity and fitness**. When included in the school day, outdoor play is an important step towards children participating in the recommended 60 minutes of moderate to vigorous physical activity per day (Ramstetter & Murray, 2017).

Outdoor education “increases physical activity which in turn improves **weight control, reduces cardiovascular disease and metabolic syndrome, improves bone health, and increases muscle strength** (Hodges et al., 2022, p. 965).

Outdoor play has a positive effect on **physical fitness** (Schroth, 2023).

According to the Canadian Mental Health Association (2017)

Being outside “significantly reduces cortisol (the stress hormone), and raises endorphin levels and dopamine production (both of which may promote happiness).” It can also help regulate your sleep cycle and increase physical activity.



“Interestingly, participating in **green exercise** activities **alters the perception of effort**. For those people engaging in green exercise, the nature element may help achieve a **greater intensity of exercise without perception of effort changing**. If a person perceives exercise to be easier, it has the potential to be more **enjoyable**. By reducing the perceived effort experienced during green exercise, a greater intensity may be achieved during the exercise whilst also maintaining adherence to and **motivation for the activity**” (Gladwell, 2013, p. 5).

MENTAL BENEFITS OF OUTDOOR PLAY

“Nothing activates a child’s brain like unstructured, outdoor play. Outdoor play affects children’s health, mental focus, and capacity for creative thinking. It provides children with opportunities to explore the world around them, interact with others playfully, and use their imaginations.” (Rhea & Bauml, 2018, p.57)

Benefits to Learning:

- Provides rich **learning** and **problem-solving** (Little & Wyver, 2008).
- Tests the limits of **intellectual development** (Little & Wyver, 2008).
- Increases **creativity** (Cree & Robb, 2021; Schroth, 2023).
- Develops **critical thinking** and **leadership** (Schroth, 2023).
- Has a positive effect on behaviour in classroom
 - Improves student **self-regulation**, increases students’ ability to sustain **attention**, and increases student **on-task** behaviour (Hodges et al., 2022).
 - Helps children to be more **calm**, more **relaxed**, and more **positive** (Hodges et al., 2022).
 - Reduces fidgeting, moving around the room, asking to go to the nurse or bathroom, staring into space, or talking to themselves which leads to **increased learning** (Rhea & Bauml, 2018).
 - Improves **attentiveness** in class (Ramstetter & Murray, 2017).
- Improves **cognition and learning** (Cree & Robb, 2021; Ramstetter & Murray, 2017).
- Has a positive impact on academics such as **reading, writing and mathematics** (McCree et al., 2018; Schroth, 2023).
- “Develops **independence** and **problem solving**” (Schroth, 2023, p. 98).

Mental Health Benefits:

- Positive effect on **mental health** and **wellbeing** (Gladwell, 2013; Schroth, 2023).
- Helps children to mentally **decompress** (Ramstetter & Murray, 2017).
- Has **restorative** benefits for mental fatigue (Gladwell, 2013).
- **More beneficial** to mental health over indoor activities (Gladwell, 2013).
- Positive impact on **psychological health** especially when exercise is incorporated (Gladwell, 2013).

Outdoor education is particularly suited to diverse student populations because it offers a different kind of learning which can “change the trajectory of school performance, lead to increased student achievement, motivate both teachers and learners” and reward students who engage through less traditional methods (Schroth, 2023, p. 100).



SOCIAL EMOTIONAL BENEFITS OF OUTDOOR PLAY

Outdoor education provides an “ideal way in which to improve group dynamics by providing children with the opportunity to learn how to work with others” (Schroth, 2023, p. 104).

Outdoor play is necessary to optimizing the social and emotional development of children at school (Ramstetter & Murray, 2017).

Outdoor play has a positive effect on interpersonal development (Schroth, 2023).

“Nature provokes our level of compassion and kindness for ‘the other’” (Cree & Robb, 2021).

Outdoor play provides opportunities for social wellbeing and feelings of school belonging (Hodges et al., 2022).

Through outdoor play, children...

- Develop **social skills** and competencies (Hodges et al., 2022; Little & Wyver, 2008; Schroth, 2023).
- Test the limits of their **emotional development** (Little & Wyver, 2008)
- Learn **self-regulation** skills (Cree & Robb, 2021; Harper & Obee, 2021; McCree et al., 2018).
 - Emotional literacy (Cree & Robb, 2021),
 - The ability to self-soothe (Cree & Robb, 2021).
- Practice peer-to-peer social and emotional skills like **communication**, **cooperation**, and **problem solving** (Ramstetter & Murray, 2017).
- Experience **improved moods** and attitudes (Hodges et al., 2022).
- Learn to build social skills, learn **conflict resolution**, and develop **problem-solving skills** (Hodges et al., 2022).
- Experience **a reduction in stress, tension, anger and depression** (Canadian Mental Health Association, 2017, Gladwell, 2013).

“Children develop a sense of community through outdoor education as they work together and “build a sense of common purpose and respect for the work of peers” (Schroth, 2023, p. 99).



* SPIRITUAL BENEFITS OF OUTDOOR PLAY

REMINDER

According to the medicine wheel, our spirit is a crucial part of self. If we are to help our students find balance and live good lives, we must also consider their spirit.

When we address spirit in an educational context, we can think of **the spirit that lives inside of us, our strength, our resilience, our joy.**

(The qualities that are key to protecting us from being overwhelmed by stress)

“Being outdoors, experiencing all kinds of weather, benefits mental health as it helps children understand that they can “thrive and succeed in almost any environment and any conditions” (Schroth, 2023, p. 98).



OUTDOOR PLAY positively effects...

- **Resiliency** and ability to overcome adversity (Cree & Robb, 2021; Harper & Obee, 2021; McCree et al., 2018; Schroth, 2023).
- **Self-esteem** (Canadian Mental Health Association, 2017; Gladwell, 2013; Harper & Obee, 2021; McCree et al., 2018; Schroth, 2023) .
- **Self-worth** (Cree & Robb, 2021).
- **Self-analysis** and **personal growth** (Schroth, 2023).
- Feelings of **revitalisation** (Gladwell, 2013).
- **Quality of life** (Canadian Mental Health Association, 2017).
- **Freedom** and **autonomy** (Cree & Robb, 2021; Hodges et al., 2022).





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KIRSTEN PRIESTLEY

UNIVERSITY OF MANITOBA
MASTERS OF EDUCATION
COMPREHENSIVE PROJECT

March 2024