



# LIVING OUTDOOR CLASSROOMS

'PLAY BASED' LEARNING IN ACTION



*'HAPPY HEARTS AND HAPPY FACES HAPPY PLAY IN GRASSY PLACES – THAT WAS HOW, IN ANCIENT AGES, CHILDREN GREW TO KINGS AND SAGES.'* ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON, *A CHILD'S GARDEN OF VERSES*, 1888

- 1/. WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF TEACHING IN A **LIVING** OUTDOOR CLASSROOM.
- 2/. HOW TO GAIN SCHOOL SUPPORT, BUILD AND FUND.
- 3/. RISK VS REWARD.
- 4/. AREAS OF THE AUSTRALIAN CURRICULUM THAT CAN BE INCORPORATED INTO OUTDOOR CLASS ROOM CLASSES.
- 5/. PRACTICAL TIPS TO GET STARTED TEACHING IN AN OUTDOOR CLASSROOM.
- 6/. HARNESSING VOLUNTEER PARENT TEACHING AIDS FOR THE OUTDOOR CLASSROOM. (SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY)
- 7/. FINDING THE PLAY BASED TEACHER INSIDE OF YOU.
- 8/. THE MY ORGANIC SCHOOL **LIVING** OUTDOOR CLASSROOM DESIGN PHILOSOPHY.
- 9/. RESOURCES
- 10/. QUESTIONS & FEEDBACK.

## 1/.WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF TEACHING IN A LIVING OUTDOOR CLASSROOM?

Welcome to the exciting world of outdoor education. Outdoor classrooms have been increasing in popularity throughout schools internationally and here in Australia. Outdoor learning improves children's health, increases children's engagement with learning and leads to a greater connection with nature.

LIVING OUTDOOR CLASSROOM: We define this as a facility that combines traditional raised veggie beds with teaching aids like attached tables, outdoor chalk boards, interactive signage etc.

### PLAY BASED LEARNING

At the core of the outdoor living classroom is 'PLAY BASED' learning. 'PLAY BASED' learning not only teaches critical life skills such as resilience, teamwork and creativity but is central to children's enjoyment of childhood.

ALBERT EINSTEIN SAID, "PLAY IS THE DEEPEST FORM OF RESEARCH."

### WE NEED TO RID OURSELVES OF THE FALSE MYTH THAT LEARNING AND PLAY ARE OPPOSITES.

We must remember that the best educational outcome we can create for our children is meaningful, engaged play. Play encourages problem solving, without it we will be creating a generation of rote learners without creative problem solving skills and with a reduced capacity to innovate.

### NATURE

The settling and engaging effect of being outdoors reduces stress, increases our attention, and promotes co-operation.

The 'Outdoor Classroom Day' survey of teachers globally found that:

*"99% OF AUSTRALIAN TEACHERS BELIEVE CHILDREN NEED PLAYTIME OUTDOORS THROUGHOUT THE DAY TO REACH THEIR FULL POTENTIAL, IDENTIFYING OUTDOORS TIME, BOTH PLAYING AND LEARNING AS HELPING WITH CONCENTRATION, SOCIAL SKILLS, IMAGINATION, CREATIVITY AND OVERALL HAPPINESS."*

*84% THINK CHILDREN WHO LEARN OUTDOORS ARE MORE ENGAGED IN LEARNING.*

*AS STIXRUD AND JOHNSON (2018) STATE: CHILDREN FEEL BETTER AND PERFORM BETTER AFTER THEY HAVE BEEN OUTDOORS*

*PLAY OUTDOORS AS A CHILD CREATES MORE CONNECTION WITH NATURE AND MORE ENVIRONMENTAL GUARDIANSHIP AS ADULTS RESULTING IN VALUES FOCUSED ON PROTECTING THE ENVIRONMENT. 37 Packer (1999) in Ballantyne & Packer, (2009).*

WHY SHOULD I CARE AS A TEACHER? This is an important question and goes to the core of whether you will successfully create an outdoor classroom at your school and whether it will be actively embraced by the school community.

- a. SATISFACTION : Because you love seeing your students progress in their education journey and when they do so you feel a warm sense of satisfaction that you are on the right path.
- b. TIME WELL SPENT: The time you invest in the outdoor classroom will reap untold benefits for your student's problem solving, creativity and health.
- c. YOU CARE FOR THE ENVIRONMENT: increased time spent in a natural setting as a child has been found to equate to more environmental advocacy as an adult.
- d. IT CAN BE RELAXING AND DE-stressing: the outdoors has an immediate calming effect on both students and teachers.

## 2/.HOW TO GAIN SCHOOL SUPPORT, BUILD AND FUND.

- e. You actually need to make CULTURAL CHANGE AT YOUR SCHOOL. An effective outdoor classroom runs best when 'PLAY BASED' learning is encouraged at your school. So get busy advocating for an outdoor classroom, lobby the decision makers at your school (principal, P&C associations etc)
- f. EDUCATE TEACHERS: The outdoor classroom is of little benefit if the teachers are not educated in 'PLAY BASED' learning, perhaps you can send out a copy of this workshop document to the teaching staff at your school. A digital PDF version will be downloadable at [www.myorganicschool.com/outdoor-classrooms](http://www.myorganicschool.com/outdoor-classrooms)
- g. You need a SCHOOL ADVOCATE: is that you????
- h. FUNDS can be found at your P&C association, your school's budget, local business partnerships and grants. The outdoor classroom has to be compared to an indoor classroom... you are adding a major teaching facility where all classes can be taught.
- i. A holistic PROMOTION CAMPAIGN with an inspiring title is a good way to get the whole school on-board and initiates a cultural change at your school. E.g "Bronte loves our Earth" My Organic School is naming our program "The Veggie Buds."
- j. CONSTRUCTION can be undertaken by a local tradesperson or 'My Organic School' provides a service and additional online curriculum support (coming 2019) along with veggie seedling donation if your school operates a My Organic School Community Veggie Box Co-Op. Parents from the Co-Op are encouraged to volunteer to help in the school's living outdoor classroom.

### 3/. RISK VS REWARD.

*“WHENEVER CHILDREN LEARN, THEY MOVE FROM WHAT IS ROUTINE AND FAMILIAR – AND THUS POTENTIALLY BORING – TO WHAT IS LESS CERTAIN, MORE CHALLENGING AND HOPEFULLY MORE ENGAGING.” TIM GILL*

#### WHY IS RISK IMPORTANT

Our role as educators is to give our students the skills to build their own “capability”. Children have a natural urge to explore, to discover, to understand through trial and error. All young animals have this genetic predisposition for discovery. We need to nurture this quality or we are doing our students a disservice.

As educators we need to balance **RISK WITH REWARD** so to speak. We should always take stock of the environment, plan for risks, make our students aware of them etc.

Before taking a class to the outdoor living classroom discuss with your students your expectations and boundaries specific to your location.

### 4/. AREAS OF THE AUSTRALIAN CURRICULUM INCORPORATED IN THE OUTDOOR CLASS ROOM CURRICULUM.

Virtually all areas of the Australian Curriculum are able to be effectively taught in the living outdoor classroom. Specifically literacy, numeracy, design/technology, science and art. There is a body of class work sheets available to be taught in outdoor classrooms available on our website (coming soon 2019) [www.myorganicschool.com](http://www.myorganicschool.com)

- a. **MATHS:** position and movement are a key area that students are expected to know. Grids, co-ordinate plotting, compass bearings, practical applications of angles especially right angles. Much easier to grasp these concepts in a real world, outdoor environment. More space outside makes compass bearings and scale easier to grasp.
- b. **LITERACY:** Creative writing is an obvious choice in the outdoor classroom. Encourage student to use the visual stimulus right in front of them
- c. **NATURE JOURNALING** incorporates literacy, science and design technologies. The living veggie beds work with time based investigation, measurement and analysis of plants.
- d. **ART** is another obvious choice with the visual stimulation and less restraint due to cleanliness concerns. Found objects create wonderful montage pieces.
- e. **SHORT EXERCISES:** Make each exercise no longer than 10 -15 minutes.
- f. Move from table to table as you go from exercise to exercise. More visual stimulation increases inspiration.
- g. **DELEGATE TEAM LEADERS:** Encourage leadership qualities. (especially in mixed age composite classes

- h. **I WONDER WHY?** Research questions generated in the outdoor classroom encourage students to use the library and online resources to investigate.
- i. **EMOTIONAL BUY IN:** This is key to gaining the highest educational results. What are your students inspired by?

### MY ORGANIC SCHOOL'S "WHERE DOES YOUR FOOD COME FROM?" OUTDOOR CLASSROOM CLASSES.

The Australian Curriculum is an extensive and imposing document. If you're keen on details here are the specific areas from the Australian Curriculum that 'My Organic School' is incorporating into our online curriculum for a series of classes called "Where does your food come from?" (Launching term 2. 2019) The course will be designed for teachers to access through an LMS (Learning Management System that it is hoped will be accredited for professional development hours and teachers can then use in their outdoor classrooms:

#### **Curriculum component: Health and Physical Education**

*"contributing to healthy and active communities; identify actions that promote health, safety and wellbeing." "recognise situations and opportunities to promote health, safety and wellbeing" (ACPPS018)*

*"How eating healthy foods can influence health and wellbeing."*

*(ACPPS006) "Identify and practice strategies to promote health, safety and wellbeing." (ACPPS036)*

*"Investigate community resources and ways to seek help about health, safety and wellbeing." (ACPPS053) e.g. examining their own eating patterns by researching The Australian Guide to Healthy Eating and identifying healthier food choices.*

*"Explore how participation in outdoor activities supports personal and community health and wellbeing and creates connections to natural and built environments." (ACPPS059)*

#### **Curriculum component: Design & Technologies**

*"Identify how people design and produce familiar products, services and environments and consider sustainability to meet personal and local community needs." (ACTDEK001 - Scootle )*

*"Explore how plants and animals are grown for food, clothing and shelter and how food is selected and prepared for healthy eating." (ACTDEK003 - Scootle )*

*"Explore needs or opportunities for designing, and the technologies needed to realise designed solutions".(ACTDEP005 - Scootle )*

*"Generate, develop and record design ideas through describing, drawing and modelling." (ACTDEP006 - Scootle )*

*"Use materials, components, tools, equipment and techniques to safely make designed solutions." (ACTDEP007 - Scootle )*

*"Recognise the role of people in design and technologies occupations and explore factors, including sustainability that impact on the design of products, services and environments to meet community needs". (ACTDEK010 - Scootle )*

*"Investigate food and fibre production and food technologies used in modern and traditional societies" (ACTDEK012 - Scootle )*

*"Investigate the suitability of materials, systems, components, tools and equipment for a range of purposes(ACTDEK013 - Scootle )*

*"Investigate how and why food and fibre are produced in managed environments and prepared to enable people to grow and be healthy." (ACTDEK021 - Scootle )*

*"Select appropriate materials, components, tools, equipment and techniques and apply safe procedures to make designed*

## 5/. PRACTICAL TIPS TO GET STARTED TEACHING IN AN OUTDOOR CLASSROOM.

- a. **MOVING OUTSIDE:** Plan how your students are going to move outside, make it fun e.g tippy toes or like mice in a line and how are they going to arrange themselves when they get there. (e.g number tables similar to their indoor tables), while walking incorporate positional language "left", "right". Play Simon says: "Simon says stop", "Simon says go".
- b. **SHORT EXERCISES:** Make each exercise no longer than 10 -15 minutes.
- c. **DON'T STAY STATIC:** Move groups from area to new area between exercises. More visual stimulation.

- d. **TEAM LEADERS:** Delegate team leaders and encourage leadership qualities. (especially in mixed age composite classes)
- e. **TIME OUT AREA:** Pre-plan a time out area for students that need to be separated from the class with compassion. Have similar equipment, nature supplies etc in the 'time out' location so they can still keep engaged.

## 6/. HARNESSING VOLUNTEER PARENT TEACHING AIDS FOR THE OUTDOOR CLASSROOM. (SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY)

Parents and the local community are an underutilised asset just waiting to be asked to volunteer at primary schools.

An outdoor classroom is an easy and accessible way for volunteers to get involved. Each group in an outdoor classroom can do with a little extra 'PLAY BASED' mentoring.

Gardening is a passion that the local community loves to share.

Cloud based rostering software like [www.signup.com](http://www.signup.com) is an excellent resource to organise volunteers. Links can be placed in the school newsletter.

If your school operates a My Organic School Veggie Box Co-Op then you have access to a motivated body of parents with aligned health and nutritional values.

## 7/. FINDING THE PLAY BASED TEACHER INSIDE OF YOU.

**PLAY** is all about presence, connection and empathy. The modern indoor classroom can quickly turn into a stressful, rules based environment. The outdoor classroom gives us an opportunity as teachers to step into a different style of teaching. However, to get to this place we need to firstly check in with our selves.

**BEFORE AN OUTDOOR CLASS ASK YOURSELF QUESTIONS:**

- a. **DO I FEEL STRESSED OR ANXIOUS? WHY?**
- b. **DO I FEEL SPONTANEOUS AND PLAYFUL?:**
- c. **WHAT DO I NEED TO DO TO GET TO A PLACE WHERE I CAN EFFECTIVELY TEACH IN A PLAY BASED LEARNING STYLE?** Maybe something as simple as a glass of water, a snack, stretching with the whole class etc can do the trick

## 'GUIDED MEDIATION' to get into a play based learning state of mind:

To access that place of play inside of you I'm going to guide you through a short visual meditation, so take a moment to close down your eyes if it's comfortable and turn your gaze away from the outside world for a moment. Take a deep breath into your belly and slooowwly exhale it out, allowing your whole self to sink, anchoring yourself in the present moment. Noticing the feeling of your feet on the ground wrapped inside your shoes and socks, feel and hear your breath flow through your body, the way your belly moves with it, in a soothing, lulling, rhythmic motion. Let yourself relax, relax into the depth of yourself for a moment, in acknowledging that just for this moment there's no need to do anything, go anywhere, but be here, in your entirety, right now.

From this space of presence, I want you to imagine yourself shrink in size for a moment, shorter legs, arms, body – the world around you becoming larger, looming over you. You are back in your 8 year old self – a child in Grade 2 or 3, remembering your teachers, where you lived, your closest friends perhaps, the things you did after school. And I'd like you to look back at this time in your life, as vaguely or vividly as you remember it, and try to recall an experience, when you were completely engrossed in the moment, fascinated, happy, curious and at ease – nothing else mattered.... It may have been as simple as playing with your dog in the backyard, or paddling in the water with siblings or a parent beside you, maybe it was listening to your favourite bedtime story as your mother stroked your hair... just take a moment to recall this timeless experience (long pause).

Recalling in depth, the people or objects and colours around you, the sounds... smells... feeling of your environment... perhaps your thoughts, or your sense of thoughtlessness, the feeling in your body at this moment, soaking it aalllll in. The whole thing, and you in it. The world as a mysterious, limitless place, with endless possibilities for dreaming and discovery (long pause).

And now, slowly let that memory gently fade away, with gratitude for your unique experience, that child who still lives and breaths inside you, the infinite discovery and joy that he or she knows exists in the world.

Bring yourself back to the heartbeat in your chest, the breath in your grown-up lungs, your feet on the ground below you... a deep inhale, exhaling slowly... taking a few moments to open your eyes and rest in the residue of your memory.

( WITH THANKS TO DAFNA KRONENTAL, mindfulness facilitator)

## EXERCISES:

- 1/. PROPOGATION
- 2 /. PLANTING
- 3 /. TASTING, SMELLING, EXPLORING.

## 8/. THE MY ORGANIC SCHOOL LIVING OUTDOOR CLASSROOM DESIGN PHILOSOPHY

### THOUGHTFUL DESIGN AND EASILY EXPANDED

We believe the living outdoor classroom benefits from being beautifully designed, well positioned, irrigated, with excellent interactive signage, have attached tables for classes, excellent organic soil and a diverse assortment of start up organic seedlings planted and mulched to create an awesome learning facility. It's important that a plan for future expansion is taken into account.



Thoughtful design and planning creates an outdoor living classroom that will have a significant impact on a school's learning outcomes. The facility will be appreciated by teachers, students and parents who will embrace the living outdoor classroom as a cherished component of the school's learning matrix.

### EXAMPLES OF MY ORGANIC SCHOOL'S INTERACTIVE SIGNAGE





## 9/. RESOURCES

Australian Assc of Environmental Education  
<https://www.aaeensw.org.au/our-work/nature-education>

Outdoor Classroom Day Ausralia  
<https://outdoorclassroomday.com.au>

Sustainable School NSW  
<https://www.sustainableschoolsnsw.org.au>

My Organic School: Outdoor Classrooms  
<https://www.myorganicschool.com/outdoor-classrooms>

## 10/. QUESTIONS & FEEDBACK, NOTES.

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