

How Natural Environments Are Being Used by Teachers to Improve Student Learning and Wellbeing in Australia

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Abstract : This paper is designed to provide a review of the literature concerning the impact of natural environments on student learning and wellbeing in Australia. Specific areas of interest include how child-led and teacher-led pedagogies differ in outdoor learning settings, and the impact of each approach on children's well-being, behavior, relationships with others as well as educational outcomes. The review will include links to possibilities for future research, including a Ph.D. currently being undertaken in Australia, which aims to fulfill a considerable gap in psychological, educational and outdoor learning research, regarding how natural environments are being used by teachers to improve learning and wellbeing among primary school students. The proposed study aims to understand if children's experience of learning, 1. in a natural environment, and 2. in a child-led way, can support and strengthen their skills across several areas of development, including those required for positive educational outcomes. Data will be collected from a sample of primary school students and teachers via both quantitative and qualitative methods, including a pre- and post-questionnaire, direct observation, and semi-structured interviews. The study will have valuable implications for the provision of quality education as well as the promotion of good health and wellbeing. The implications of the research will be useful not only for teachers and parents but also for Psychologists working with children and young people in both a school and clinical setting. Understanding the impacts and implications of child-led learning and exposure to natural environments provides the opportunity to build on the current school curriculum. The inclusion of child-led experiences in nature may provide a simple way to build enthusiasm for school and learning, cultivating skills for life and relationships as well as meeting current curriculum requirements and building capacity for ongoing academic pursuits. In addition, understanding the impact of learning in a natural environment on wellbeing will assist in the development and dissemination of an educational model that could help mitigate the negative health outcomes associated with reduced physical activity and decreasing contact with nature among children.

Keywords : child-led learning, educational outcomes, natural environments, wellbeing

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