

5. Outdoor education in modern school

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To start the discussion of the effectiveness and importance of outdoor education in modern school, we should define precisely what this commonly used expression means. As stated in Wikipedia: ‘Outdoor education usually refers to organized learning that takes place outdoors.’ or ‘The term ‘outdoor education’ (...) is used broadly to refer to a range of organized activities that take place in a variety of ways in predominantly outdoor environments.’

It is also worth noting that the expression ‘outdoor education’ can be often replaced with such related synonyms as: adventure education, outdoor learning, outdoor school, challenge education or experiential education. However, the hallmark of all these terms is their focus on the outdoor side of the education.

It seems to be very important to mention that there is also one more term describing this kind of education. It is ‘education outside the classroom’. The definition found in Wikipedia says that it ‘describes school curriculum learning, other than with a class of students sitting in a room with a teacher and books.’ The idea described in the explanation above currently enjoys a revival because of the recognition of benefits from the more active style of learning. Being aware of the effectiveness and importance of outdoor education, teachers in modern school try to focus on well – chosen and suitably adapted activities and teaching aids that can develop an outdoor learning curriculum.

It is generally known that the most effective way of learning is through active participation and observation of the world. Wright admitted that: ‘Things we see play an enormous part in effecting us and giving us information. We predict, deduce and infer, not only from what we hear and read but from what we see around us and from what we remember having seen’.

For the above mentioned points, teachers should make a special effort to create opportunities for students to improve their learning in the real world in a manner that is not possible in a classroom. Practice shows that students understand the new material much

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better if teachers’ explanations are accompanied by real, authentic materials and if they can take active part in lessons.

According to Julian Edge ‘Each teacher (...) has to make appropriate decisions for his or her own classroom. There is no single ‘best way’; there are teachers who use their intelligence, knowledge, experience, skills, sensitivity, creativity and awareness to help other people learn.’

With the reference to the above information, we can enumerate the main aims of outdoor education:

- to teach students how to overcome adversity
- to enhance personal and social development
- to improve communication skills
- to motivate students
- to improve problem solving skills
- to enhance teamwork
- to teach outdoor survival skills
- to understand natural environment, history and national heritage
- to learn by doing and observing the world
- to learn using authentic materials and involving senses
- to stay healthy and keep fit
- to know more about the nearest surrounding

The benefits of learning outside the classroom are really significant. Well – planned out – of – classroom activities not only enhance pupils’ learning, but can also re – engage those students who are hard to motivate. What is more, the experiences and memories from them are extremely durable and can provide a learning venue that matches students’ natural inclination to know more about things.

It is also worth mentioning that outdoor learning improves pupils’ personal, social and emotional development. It gives self – confidence, a sense of belonging, feeling valued and makes communication skills much better. Participating in out – of –classroom activities lets young people become more optimistic and responsible for each other. It helps to build up the atmosphere of friendship and togetherness among the class and evokes a feeling of

greater equality between students. Pupils' emotional health and self – esteem improve and they do not feel barriers between them. Teachers can observe better relationship between pupils and less discipline and behaviour problems.

Participation in new activities in outdoor environments can change pupils' attitudes and raise their aspirations and motivation. Students are enriched by first – hand experiences and the diversity of activities and authentic materials bring spontaneousness into the routine, often monotonous, classroom atmosphere. Furthermore, rising new challenges and living alongside their peers help students to become more adaptable, communicative and confident. It can also encourage successful learning and build positive attitudes which lead to improvements in achievement and motivation.

There is no doubt that outdoor learning can benefit pupils of all ages and can be successful in a variety of settings. It enriches the curriculum and improves educational attainment. While taking part in outdoor activities, students enjoy themselves so much that they often do not even realize they are learning, which can help produce the greatest achievements.

It is popularly believed that out – of – classroom activities can have a positive impact on students' long – term – memory as well as have the potential to raise attainment. Those activities help to improve engagement, achievement and motivation to learn. Moreover, outdoor education and contact with the real world and authentic materials outside the classroom can improve the development of responsible citizens – students can feel members of the local community with greater sense of place, pride and responsibility for it. They can be closer to their nearest surrounding and be more aware of it as well as appreciate their studies from a different and more active perspective.

According to Edge: 'Authentic materials bring the means of learning and the purpose of learning close together, and this establishes once again a direct link with the world outside the classroom.'

Staying outdoors and taking part in different out – of – classroom activities is of significant benefit to students' physical and psychological health. To confirm this statement let us quote Griffin, Hine and Peacock: 'There is substantial evidence that links the natural environment with good physical health and psychological wellbeing. It indicates that nature can make positive contributions to our health, help us to recover from pre – existing

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stresses or problems, have an ‘immunising’ effect by protecting us from future stresses, and help us concentrate and think more clearly.’

To sum up, students and teachers can stay fit and healthy as well as feel much more relaxed while having their lessons outdoors. Additionally, they can improve their knowledge, awareness and appreciation of the natural environment and their connection with it. Taking those facts into account, it could be suggested that teachers ought not to stick firmly to a traditional whole – class teaching, but try to put outdoor activities into practice during the lessons. Such a situation creates favourable circumstances for learning and teaching in a relaxed, friendly atmosphere and staying healthy and fit.

It is universally known that outdoor education contributes to learning in a range of school subjects. Out – of –classroom activities can enhance teaching of:

- science and geography
- physical education
- history and citizenship
- art and design
- environmental and countryside education
- foreign languages

Taking everything into consideration, it can be stated that outdoor education has a strong impact on students’ motivation, interests, development of different skills and health. It is of a significant benefit to pupils, teachers and its important role cannot be omitted in modern schools because it makes the process of learning and teaching attractive and more effective.

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