



Teaching Outside the Classroom: Charting the Course for an Enhanced Outdoor Learning Experience

Presentation link:

[https://tinyurl.com/
mrpc83kt](https://tinyurl.com/mrpc83kt)



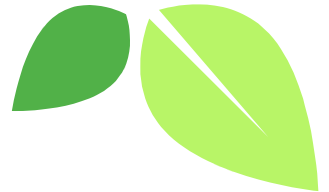
Presented By



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Learning Objectives

1. Understand diverse teaching concepts and activities such as sound mapping and mini-campus field hikes and how they can enhance the learning activities in traditional classrooms. New concepts and examples will be explained and learning outcomes identified.
2. Understand the benefits that outdoor environments can have on wellbeing and social emotional learning, for all students and staff. Participants will be able to apply knowledge gained to design evidence based outdoor environments.
3. Understand how to design evidence based designed outdoor environments and will be able to diagram a space as part of the presentation.
4. Gain knowledge on organizations working to publish research on outdoor learning environments and learning



Objectives

- Review some emerging trends affecting elementary schools
- Consider our outdoor spaces as ways to meet student and staff needs of today
- Explore and apply the 'floor/ceiling' model to our outdoor spaces

Lens

- Elementary schools
- Outdoor area
- Students, teachers, & staff



The last normal school year

...for students in...

Grade 7

Grade 6

Grade 5

Grade 4

Grade 3

Grade 2

Grade 1

Kindergarten

was

Grade 4

Grade 3

Grade 2

Grade 1

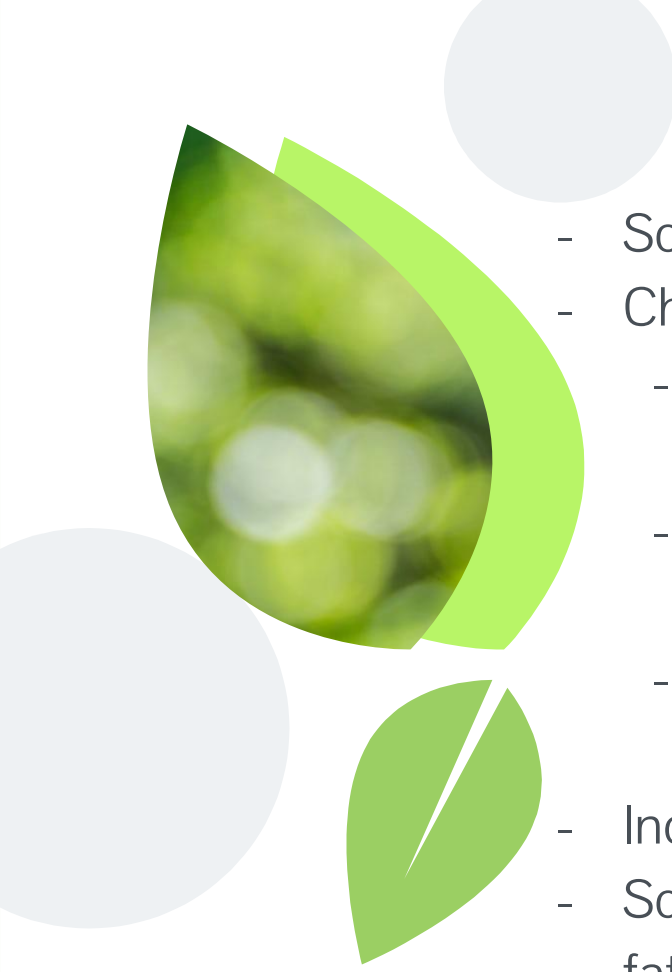
Kindergarten

never

never

never

@weareteachers



Commonly Seen Trends

- Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) for students and staff
- Child development in the elementary grades
 - Emotional: changing development timelines; trauma-coping mechanisms
 - Social: isolation from peers even when physically together; reluctance to engage
 - Physical: less active overall; difficulty sustaining traditional instruction
- Increased gaps in learning
- School staff facing problem-solving and decision-making fatigue



Trends on the Horizon

- Recalibrating Blended Learning
- Teacher turnover will continue to increase = more new teachers each year = need for ease of implementation
- Veteran teachers are moving more toward 5-8 years vs. 15-20+ years
- Statewide preK includes several components of outdoor learning spaces & certifications



Trends on the Horizon

- Ranges of child development (emotional, social, physical) trending wider at more ages and for longer in the school year
- Increased need for calm spaces and calm experiences for both students and staff
- Decrease in overnight camping field trips

Why Focus on Outdoor Learning?

Outdoor Areas are Available Everywhere

Almost every campus has an outdoor space that can be used more effectively, creatively, and efficiently



Benefits: Outdoor Learning



SEL

Brain breaks and emotional breaks outside

Reduces stress levels and promotes a sense of place and well-being

Provides social interactions in a less-formal environment

Structured Play

Play with a purpose; very young children learn primarily through play

Opportunity for increased activity levels

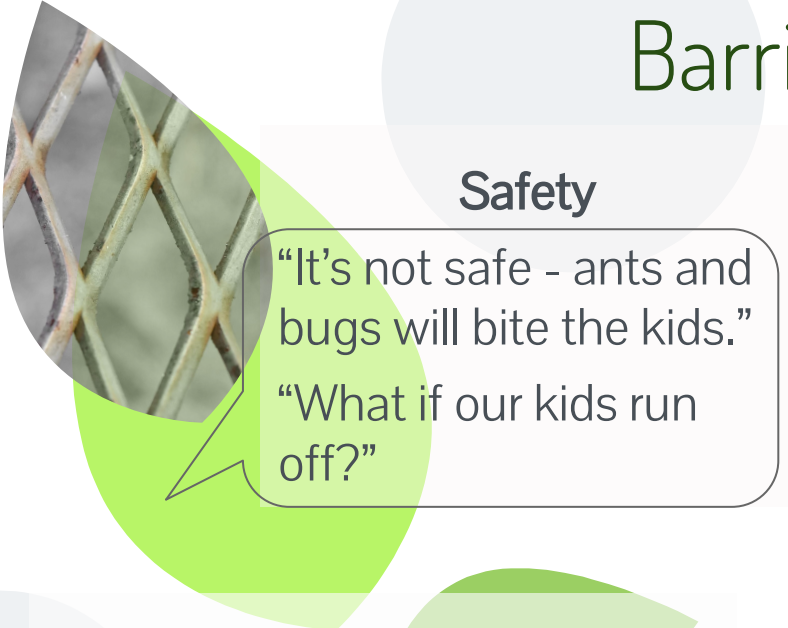
Connection to Natural Phenomenon

“Is the moon visible only at night?”

“How do shadows change during the day?”

“Where did that puddle go?”

Barriers: Outdoor Learning



Safety

"It's not safe - ants and bugs will bite the kids."

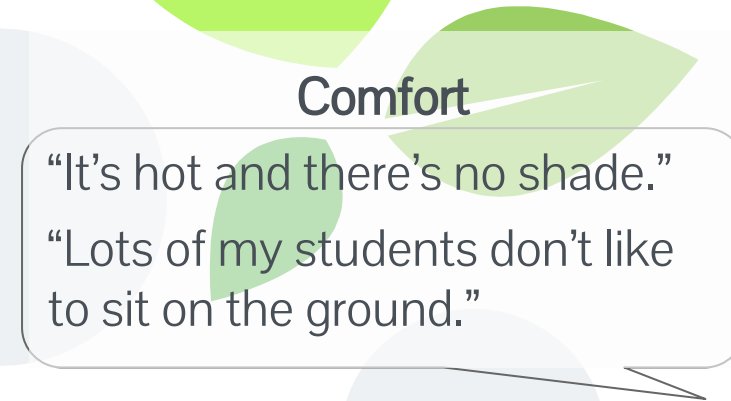
"What if our kids run off?"

Design

"There's nothing out there except playground equipment, cement, dirt, and a fence. Honestly, ours (campus) looks like a prison yard."

Control

"When I try to take students out, they think it's recess and just want to play."



Comfort

"It's hot and there's no shade."

"Lots of my students don't like to sit on the ground."

Time

"I don't have extra time to take them outside."

Use

How do I take students outside for instruction/SEL/structured play?

Ceiling



Floor



Chess has a very high floor: it's harder to learn how to start and may appear so complex that some may never attempt it.

The game of tic-tac-toe has a low floor: it's easy to understand how to get going.

Floor level tells us how easy it is for a student to jump in to an experience.

Floor

Ceiling

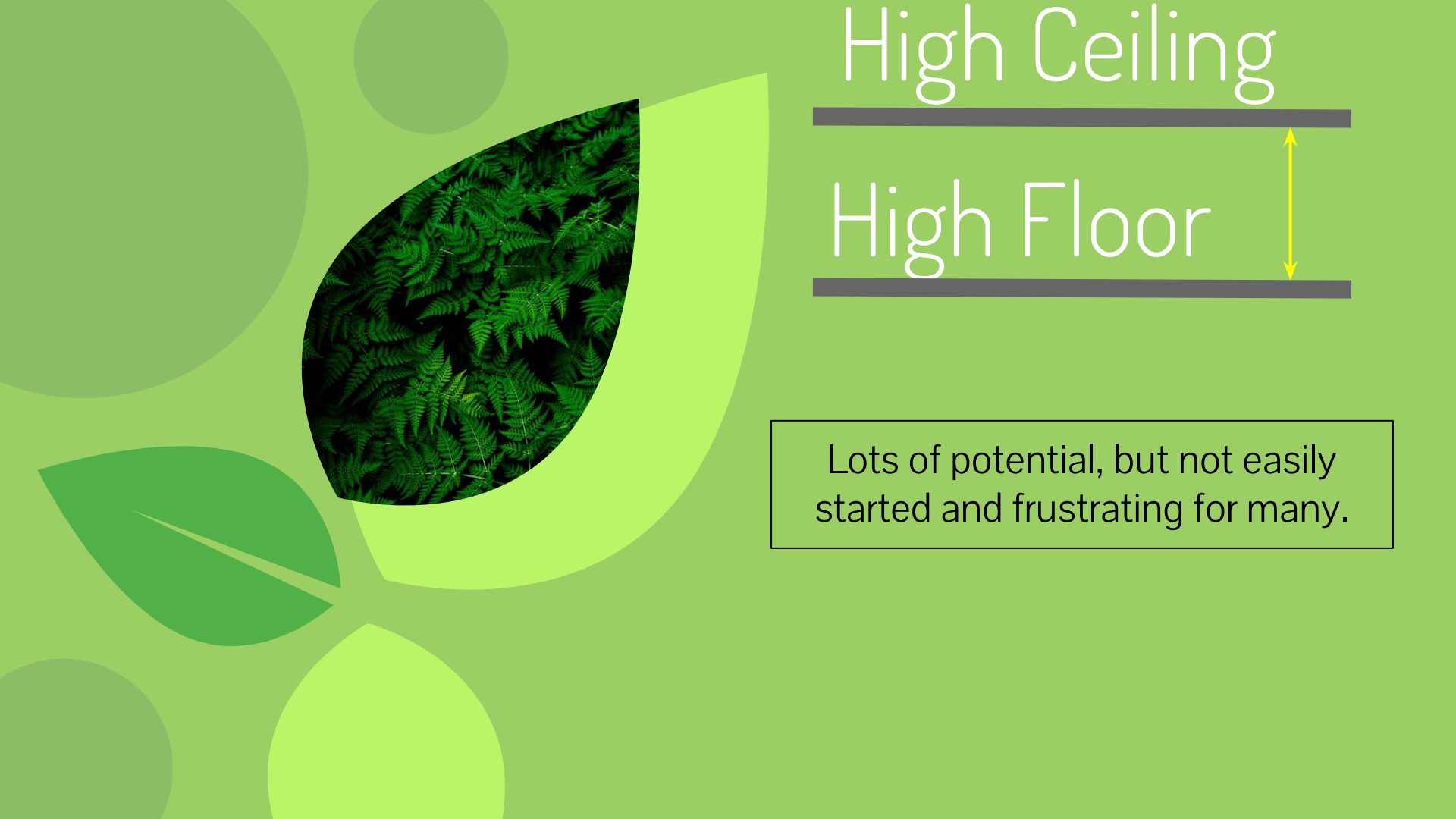
Ceiling level represents the potential room for growth.

Chess has a very high ceiling: life-time players continue to learn; it can be rewarding to those who are determined to play.

Tic-tac-toe has a very low ceiling: it's so easy to master and players get bored.

Floor





High Ceiling

High Floor



Lots of potential, but not easily started and frustrating for many.

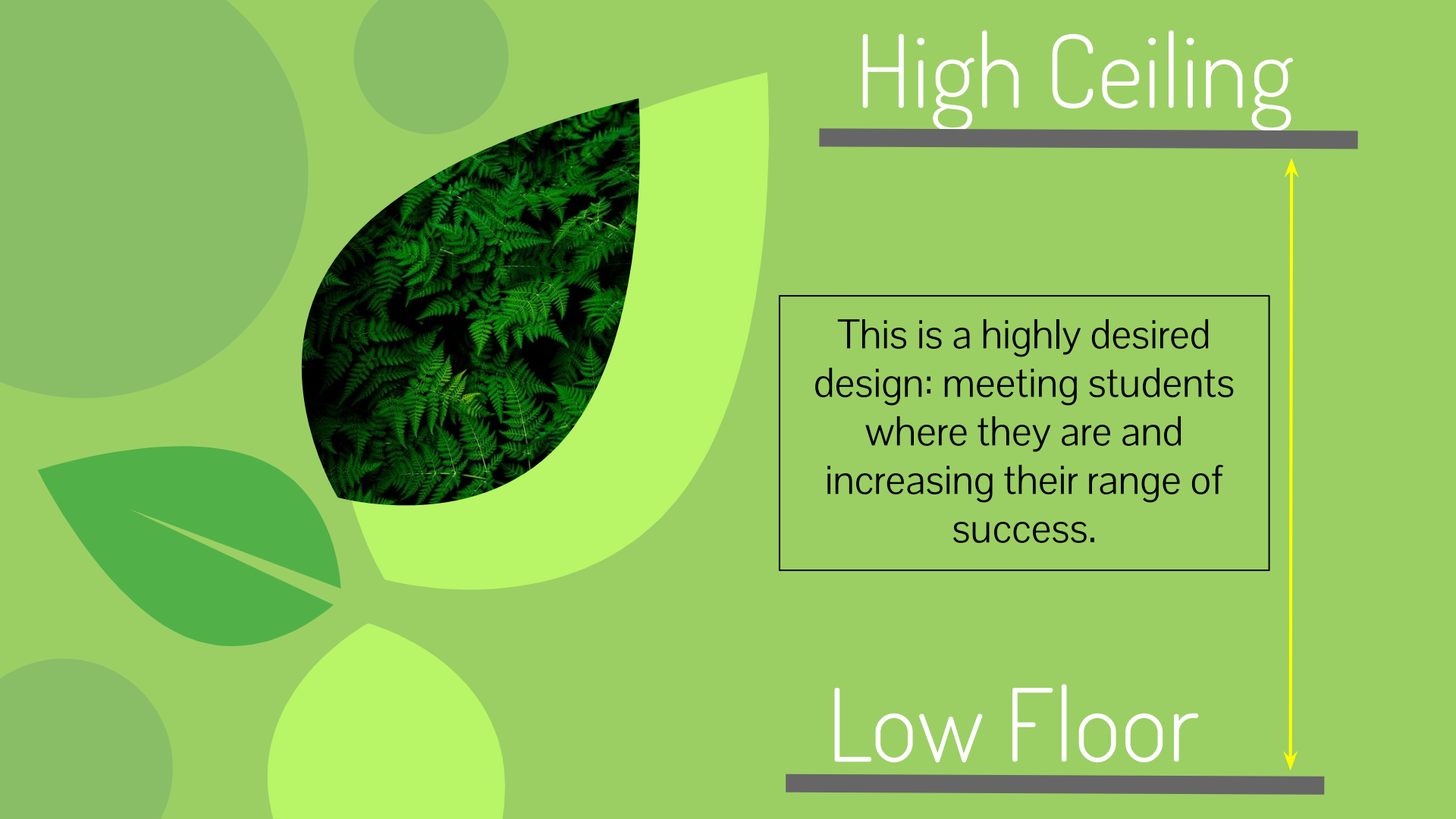


Easy to do, but uninspiring and does not offer much potential for growth.

Low Ceiling

Low Floor





High Ceiling

This is a highly desired design: meeting students where they are and increasing their range of success.

Low Floor

Design Pieces Educators Use

To Lower Floors

I Model, We Try, You Do: Gradual Release Method

Start with a Sandbox: Play Around Before Doing the 'Real' Work

Simplify: Reduce Complexity: Try This or That

Feedback: Praise the Successes and Gently Guide Toward the Goal



Design Pieces Educators Use

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I Model, We Try, You Do: Gradual Release Method

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High Ceiling

Has many right answers, including ones never seen before

Many paths to get to the right answer

Participants who are good keep going and get better

Others are interested and asking “What is going on over there?”

Low Floor



The Environment

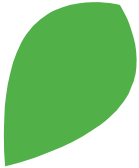


Applying the Concept

Low Floor & High Ceiling

How can design lead to big benefits?

Can we develop design ideas that start at a low floor and can go all the way to a high ceiling?



Outdoors = Engagement



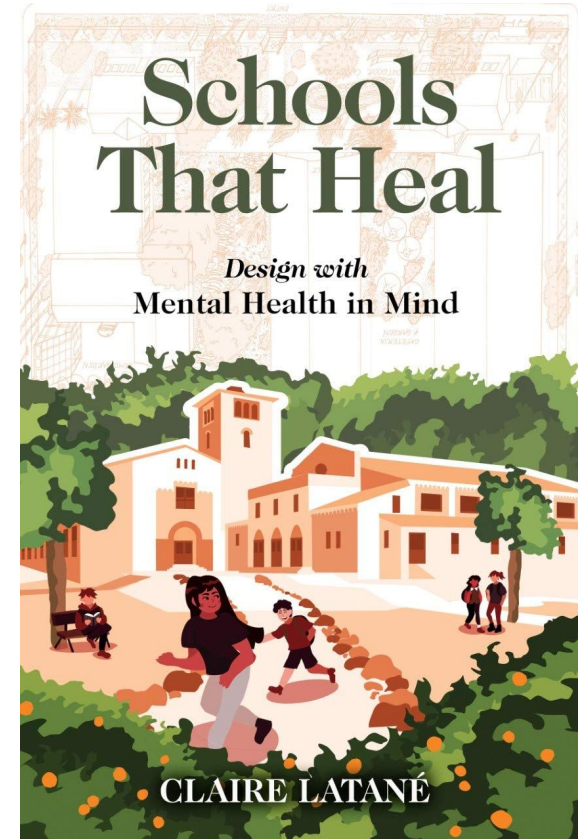
- A recent (2018) study of children ages 9 and 10 revealed that hands-on lessons in nature produce students who are more engaged in their other academic studies.
- Moreover, a report from UC Berkeley points to more than 100 studies that demonstrate how exposure to nature can have positive impacts on thought processes, as well as our physical and mental health.

Outdoors = Wellness



- There is no question that being in nature reduces the physiological symptoms of stress in our bodies.
- What this means is that we are less likely to be anxious and fearful in nature, and thereby we can be more open to other people and to creative patterns of thought.

Outdoors = Wellness



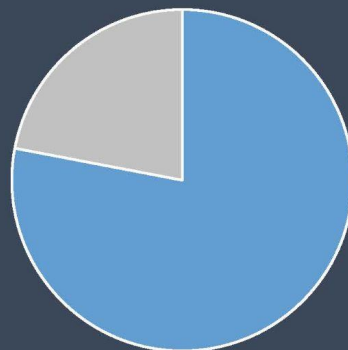
Does outdoor education benefit students?



EVIDENCE-BASED DESIGN STUDENT AND TEACHER PERCEPTION

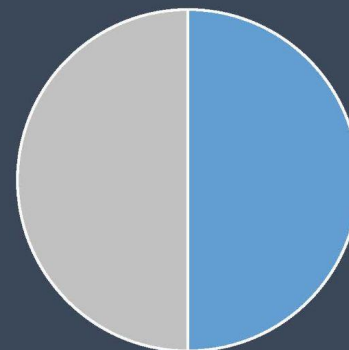
BEFORE OUTDOOR LEARNING INTERVENTION

Outdoor Learning Could Engage
Students Academically



■ TRUE ■ Sometimes ■ Not True
78% 22% 0%

Outdoor Learning Could Engage
Struggling Students Academically



■ TRUE ■ Sometimes ■ Not True
50% 50% 0%

* Lisa Strong, "Classrooms without Walls: A Study in Outdoor Learning Environments to Enhance Academic Motivation for K-5 Students" (master's thesis, California State Polytechnic University, Pomona, 2019).

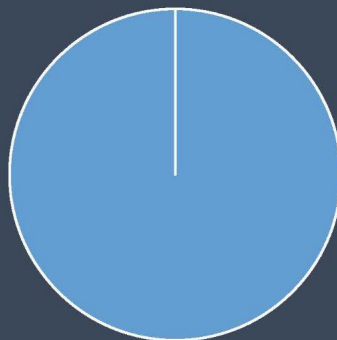
SOURCE: Schools that Heal

Does outdoor education benefit students?



EVIDENCE-BASED DESIGN STUDENT AND TEACHER PERCEPTION AFTER OUTDOOR LEARNING INTERVENTION

Outdoor Learning Could Engage
Students Academically



■ TRUE ■ Sometimes ■ Not True
100% 0% 0%

Outdoor Learning Could Engage
Students Academically



■ TRUE ■ Sometimes ■ Not True
100% 0% 0%

* Lisa Strong, "Classrooms without Walls: A Study in Outdoor Learning Environments to Enhance Academic Motivation for K-5 Students" (master's thesis, California State Polytechnic University, Pomona, 2019).

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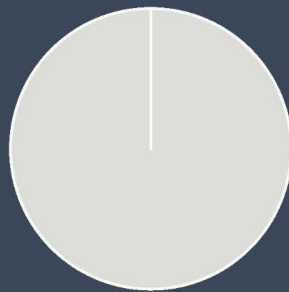
Does outdoor education benefit students?



EVIDENCE-BASED DESIGN STUDENT AND TEACHER PERCEPTION

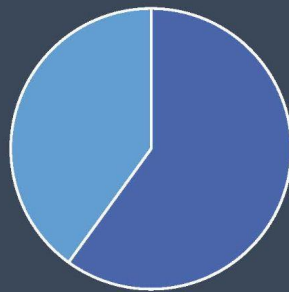
HOW DO STRUGGLING STUDENTS FACE SETBACKS?

Before Teaching Outdoors



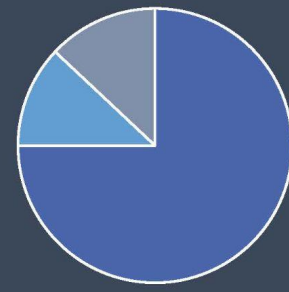
0% ■ Bounce Back
0% ■ Work Harder
100% ■ Give Up Too Quickly
0% ■ Get Overwhelmed

After Teaching Outdoors



60% ■ Bounce Back
40% ■ Work Harder
0% ■ Give Up Too Quickly
0% ■ Get Overwhelmed

After Returning to Classroom



75% ■ Bounce Back
12% ■ Work Harder
0% ■ Give Up Too Quickly
13% ■ Get Overwhelmed

* Lisa Strong, "Classrooms without Walls: A Study in Outdoor Learning Environments to Enhance Academic Motivation for K-5 Students" (master's thesis, California State Polytechnic University, Pomona, 2019).

SOURCE: Schools that Heal



“There I feel that nothing can befall me in life—no disgrace, no calamity (leaving me my eyes), which nature cannot repair.”

Ralph Waldo Emerson

The reality too often



And, this is also a reality...

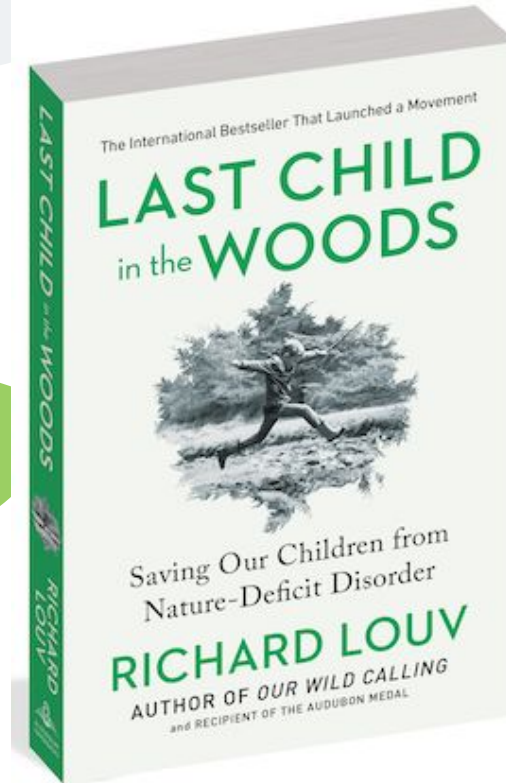


FAMILY WALK

Gatis
Sluka

- Today, technology has emerged as a primary frontier of childhood exploration.

And, this is also a reality...



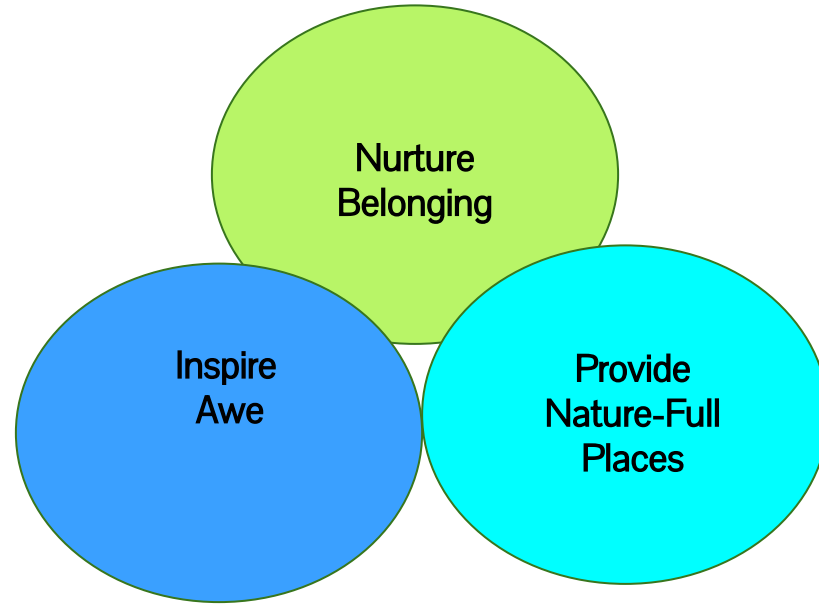
- Disengagement from the natural environment results in “nature-deficit disorder,” which, correlates with attention difficulties, greater rates of physical and emotional illness, and reduced use of our senses.

Also, this is a reality...



- In the United States, the percentage of children and adolescents affected by obesity has more than tripled since the 1970s.
- We are witnessing a general decline in fundamental movement skills in children.
- Children as young as 9 show a lack of physical literacy.
 - Physical literacy is the ability to move with competence and confidence.

Outdoors Spaces



Claire Latane, Schools that Heal

Nurture Belonging



- Welcoming entry and edges
- Organize space by activity level
- Honor students' lived experiences
- Create quiet places and cozy spaces
- Let them sit, lie down, swing, rock, walk

Claire Latane, Schools that Heal

Nurture Belonging

— Welcoming entry and edges



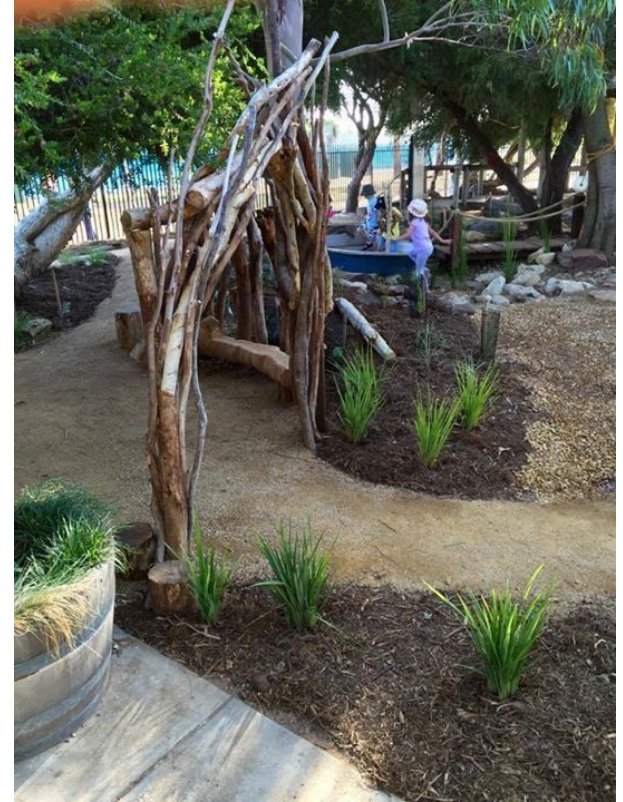
Nurture Belonging

- Welcoming entry and edges



Nurture Belonging

— Welcoming entry and edges



Nurture Belonging

— Organize space by activity level



Nurture Belonging

- Honor students' lived experiences



Nurture Belonging

- Create quiet spaces and cozy places



Nurture Belonging

- Let them sit, lie down, swing, rock or walk



Nurture Belonging

— Let them sit, lie down, swing, rock or walk



Nurture Belonging

- Let them sit, lie down, swing, rock or walk



Nurture Belonging

- Let them sit, lie down, swing, rock or walk



Nature Full Places



- Design for all species
- Work with natural processes
- Locate trees and gardens strategically
- Provide natural experiences
- Create natural activities

Claire Latane, Schools that Heal

Nature Full Places

— Design for all species



Nature Full Places

- Design for all species



Nature Full Places

— Work with Natural Processes



Nature Full Places

- Locate Trees and Gardens Strategically



Nature Full Places

- Locate Trees and Gardens Strategically



Nature Full Places

- Provide Natural Experiences



Nature Full Places

- Provide Natural Experiences



Nature Full Places

- Provide Natural Experiences



Nature Full Places

- Create natural activities



Nature Full Places

- Create natural activities



Nature Full Places

- Create natural activities



Inspire Awe



- Design for wonder, beauty and awe

Claire Latane, Schools that Heal

Inspire Awe

— Design for wonder, beauty and awe



Inspire Awe

- Design for wonder, beauty and awe



Inspire Awe

- Design for wonder, beauty and awe



Inspire Awe

- Design for wonder, beauty and awe



Inspire Awe

- Design for wonder, beauty and awe



Bringing it all together



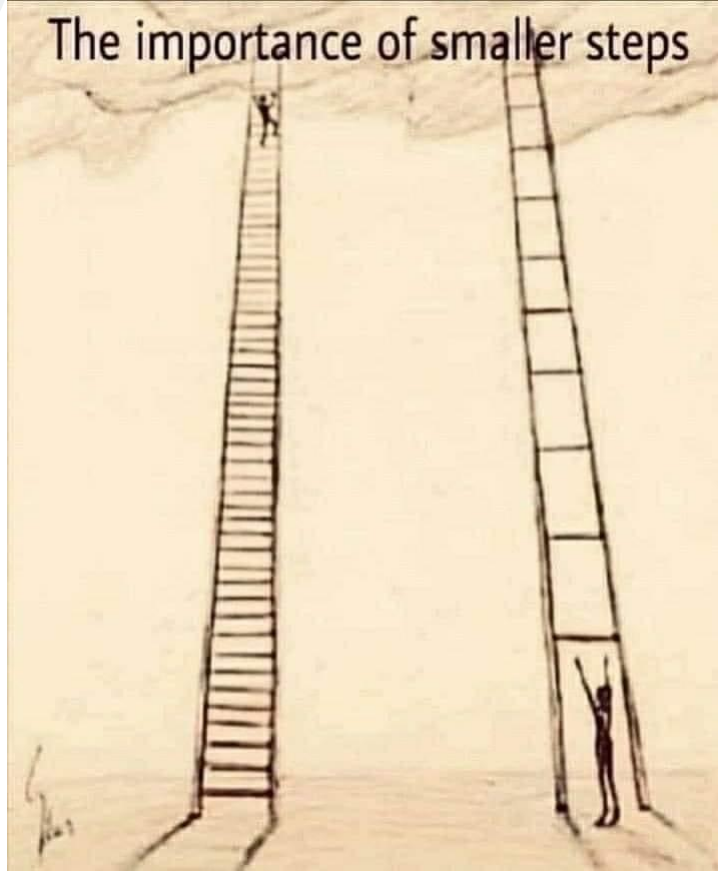
Low Floor & High Ceiling

- What designs can be considered “low floor” - simple to implement?
- Can you build on the “low floor” designs to arrive at “high ceiling” designs?

Bringing it all together



The importance of smaller steps



Bringing it all together

— Low floor



Add:

- Movable stools & tables
- Display Spaces
- Trees & Landscaping
- Cover
- Storage



Bringing it all together

Low floor



Add:

- Movable stools & tables
- Display Spaces
- Trees & Landscaping
- Cover
- Storage

Bringing it all together

— Low floor



Bringing it all together

— Low floor – High ceiling



Bringing it all together

— High Ceiling



A decorative graphic on the left side of the slide. It features a large, teardrop-shaped leaf filled with a dense pattern of small green leaves. Below this are two smaller, solid green leaves. The background is white with several light blue circles of varying sizes.

Group Work

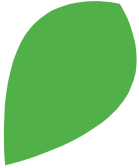
The lens for our work today

Outdoor areas

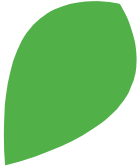
Elementary schools

preK-5th grade *teachers & staff*

Group Work – Gallery Walk



Closing Thoughts



References & Valuable Resources

Slide References

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<https://www.pca.state.mn.us/sites/default/files/p-ee5-04.pdf>

Byrdseed. (2009). *Aim for High Ceilings and Low Floors*.
<https://www.byrdseed.com/to-differentiate-lower-floors-and-raise-ceilings/>

Resources by Topic

Outdoor Learning for Formal Education

Nair, P. (2021). *Outdoor Learning Leave the Classroom Behind Special COVID-19 Issue*. Association for Learning Environments. <https://media.a4le.org/COVID/Outdoor%20Learning.pdf>

Prekindergarten Outdoor Learning Design and Certification

[OLÉ! Texas Outdoor Learning Environments Deisgner Network](#) through Texas Tech

[Texas Nursery & Landscape Association Best of Texas Plant Database: searchable online database by native, child-firendly, and region](#)

Children and Community Experiental Nature Activities

Louv, R. (2016). *The Essential Guide to a Nature-Rich Life Vitamin N 500 Ways to Enrich the Health & Happiness of Your Family & Community* and combat Nature-Deficit Disorder**. Algonquin Books.

Sharing Nature Worldwide. 2022. *Sound-mapping Activity*: <https://www.sharingnature.com/https://youtu.be/JQjHwewNUt0>



Thank you for joining us!



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