

THE VALUE OF NATURE-BASED LEARNING

Why does nature-based learning matter?

Nature-based learning provides children with boundless opportunities for mindfulness and self-centering. By organically inspiring children to stop, listen, and look around, immersion in nature fine-tunes children's observation and self-soothing skills, allowing them to check in with the world around them, as well as themselves.

In addition to fostering stewardship for the environment and respect for other living creatures, strengthening immune systems, cultivating executive function and socialization skills, and setting up patterns for an active lifestyle, research shows us that outdoor learning supports a broad spectrum of healthy child development. According to a study by the American Institutes of Research, outdoor classrooms and other nature-based learning experiences significantly boost academic performance. They found that students in outdoor science programs improved their testing scores by 27 percent.

Whereas the traditional classroom can be concurrently overstimulating and limiting, learning with, in, and through nature offers children the opportunity to engage all of their senses in vibrant ways, touching and experimenting with the world in a way that the pages of a textbook in a classroom could never do. Additionally, as children are naturally inclined to play when outdoors, nature-based learning supports play-based-learning, a powerful tool in emotionally imprinting learning on the human psyche.

Finally, nature-based learning fosters empathy- As children get up close and personal with other living organisms that are different from them, from plants and fungi to insects and mammals, they begin to notice the shared experiences of all living creatures on earth. As they observe such things as spiders caring for their nests, flowers wrapping themselves up in the cold, and root systems sharing nutrients with malnourished neighboring plants, incredible Social-Emotional Learning ("SEL") begins to take place.

Nature-based learning provides children with the opportunity to reap all these benefits while simultaneously bonding with peers and family.

Brooke Applegate

Director of Education

Los Angeles County Arboretum & Botanic Garden