



Outdoor Learning Centre, Year 2
Final Report



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A. Goals & Objectives

The goal of the Outdoor Learning Centre is to enhance the breadth of environmental education at the elementary school level within the Cape Breton Victoria Regional School Board. With a focus on environmental stewardship for wildlife habitat, this project is the basis to a “living curriculum” – one where observation, investigation, and celebration are integral to the learning structure.

We hope to act as a catalyst to create a shift in the teaching protocol by offering teachers a sense of security and comfort with the Outdoor Learning concept. With the assistance of our program, teachers should feel equally at ease outside the school as they would inside. Our intent is to help those involved create a “sense of place”, and in turn, gain a newfound respect and understanding of the ecosystems around them. The correlated activities will allow for augmentation of the students’ environmental orienteering and stewardship skills. We will implement a curriculum-based program that provides awareness and appreciation of wildlife habitat. In achieving these goals, our Outdoor Learning Centre will offer a template for all elementary schools within Cape Breton Victoria Regional School Board.

B. Project Outline

During 2008-2009, the Outdoor Learning Centre (OLC) project continued its elementary school integration. The Outdoor Learning Centre encompasses the following topics:

- Climate
- Living Near Water
- Water Conservation & Protection
- Ecosystems
- Wildlife Habitat Stewardship
- Active Living & Learning

A variety of educational activities, lessons & experiences were offered through the OLC, such as:

- Recognizing “environmentally sensitive areas”
- Continued learning of basic taxonomy of the Plant, Animal and Fungi Kingdoms documented in an 86 page Guidebook (created in Year 1) available to staff, volunteers and students for class outdoor activities
- Educational materials based on current elementary curriculum (Lesson Plans, Activities, Projects, In-services) were created/purchased and

disseminated amongst teachers

- Awareness of soil composition and the related concepts of ecological amplitude
- Forest condition and composition, which includes the origination of the species (native/non-native), disturbance (natural/unnatural) and the effects of these on ecosystems
- Ecological restoration initiatives which apply appropriate techniques to assist natural habitat and ecosystems (nesting areas, pollinator gardens, etc)
- Implementation of organic gardens on school grounds
- Voluntary group was created to provide guidance/assistance to outdoor learning events.

C. Results

The results of the project proved to be quite useful to the success of the OLC concept with classroom teachers and with interested parties who wanted involvement in our activities.

- Creating connections with local educators of native species & local habitat including the Department of Natural Resources Nova Scotia, Cape Breton University, the Membertou Community, the Cape Breton Naturalist Club, & other local environmentalists
- Winter Lesson Plans created for specific Learning Stations, distributed in electronic and paper copy format to each teacher, assistant, and volunteer associated with the OLC
- Performed scientific tests and ecological sampling with classes
- Established a safe trail on school property to lead teachers/students along the easiest route to Wentworth Creek.
- Riparian planting of coniferous trees, planting in gardens
- Tree Tagging for student/teacher awareness of local botanical/forestry terms
- With regards to the parental/community stakeholder involvement, a Nature Elder group was assembled to yield knowledge and assistance for Outdoor Classes. This voluntary group was created to provide

guidance/assistance to outdoor learning workshops and events. The broad range of their backgrounds offered the OLC new perspectives on environmental issues. This was a very useful resource for those involved.

D. Assessment of Achievements

- The school has created a mandate to have teachers use the Outdoor Learning Centre on a weekly basis. This adds not only to the extended practical nature-based learning for the students, but also increases their physical activity levels thereby initiating a healthier classroom.
- The school holds 4 Eco-Days throughout the year hosting multiple speakers from a broad range of backgrounds which include ecological Native history (ethnobotany), forestry, organic gardening, heritage seeds, stream ecology, and ornithology etc. ACAP Cape Breton assists with the creation and implementation of these events.
- The Cape Breton Victoria Regional School Board openly encourages this project and offers their in-kind support for space and time and equipment.
- ACAP Cape Breton holds Outdoor Learning Workshops for teachers and interested community members throughout the year to encourage the growth of this program on both a personal and career-based level.

E. Recommendations

Continuation of this project has already been established. We hope to maintain the OLC Program through the growing support of the Cape Breton Victoria Regional School Board and other funding agencies. With the acquired knowledge and assistance gained through the volunteers (Nature Elders) and the experienced speakers, we will ensure that the confidence and knowledge of ecology will increase with young learners.

This is an excellent opportunity for students to experience the “outdoor classroom”; to experience nature at a variety of study levels and for students to have curriculum-based knowledge delivered to them in a new, fun, whilst still pragmatic format. The opportunities that can arise from new learning experiences such as these can be brought back to the classroom and extend to the home as well. With children having environmental stewardship immersed into their everyday studies, we hope to offer them a new perspective of the world around them.

F. Images from the Shipyard Elementary Outdoor Learning Centre



