

Types of Outdoor Education



Curricular Lessons

Curricular lessons are regular classes held outdoors. Curricular outdoor lessons have been implemented in various ways and still fall under the umbrella of outdoor education. Curricular lessons can be as simple as moving your regular class outdoors under the trees or in the garden and teaching exactly as you would inside the classroom. It can be more complex than that, too. These lessons can also include hands-on activities that utilize the natural world within lessons designed specifically for the outdoors. It can include inquiry-based lessons or other project-focused activities that combine nature with your lesson planning. Curricular lessons may be the easiest for you to implement in your outdoor education plan because you can choose to utilize the exact same lesson outdoors or modify it based on your lesson purpose and goals.

For example: Conduct a chalkboard lecture outside. Allow students to sit among the trees, garden, or another natural place on your school campus and simply conduct a lesson and student discussions outside, for minimal preparation time for you but more engagement for your students!



Adventure Education

Adventure education involves structured activities that mentally and physically challenge individuals. These activities have a wide range, including rock climbing, hiking, obstacle courses, geocaching, survival training, and orienteering, among many others. These kinds of adventure-focused activities allow for self-reliance, personal growth, and problem-solving and involve many skills and activities that are becoming less common with the growth of urbanization and less need for making use of the outdoors. Adventure education aims to build confidence, resilience, and a sense of accomplishment through overcoming outdoor challenges. While an activity like rock climbing or hiking may not be an easy implementation into your regular classroom plan, the spirit of adventure education lies in challenges that promote personal growth. Teaching navigation through orienteering can be implemented easily on school grounds. Obstacle courses can be easily designed on-site. Even activities like camping, hiking, or rock climbing, while not easily implemented on school grounds, can be organized via field trips.

For example: Build a natural scavenger hunt to help students learn complex vocabulary in your content area lessons. Require students to complete a short vocabulary lesson at each “station” before selecting a clue for their next location.

Types of Outdoor Education



Environmental Education

This is an outdoor learning approach specific to helping foster a connection to nature and a sense of responsibility for preserving the environment. This type of outdoor education focuses primarily on learning about the environment, like understanding natural ecosystems, biodiversity, water cycles, or conservation efforts. Activities vary from conducting field investigations or conservation projects. They can be integrated as part of a larger project combining many content areas or as a standalone lesson specific to environmentalism.

For example: Conduct a writing assignment outside, where the writing prompt is to write a persuasive essay about saving an ecosystem in their community. Allow students to spend time outdoors and reflect on how they can describe nature accurately and persuasively in their essays.



School Gardens

While seemingly unfocused on the term education or lessons itself, school gardens are commonly cited as a type of outdoor education with many benefits. School gardens are spaces designed by the school and cared for and maintained by students- growing fruits and vegetables or other plants. School gardens, while not explicitly aligned with the curriculum, can be integrated into a project-based learning plan, merging science, math, and reading and writing concepts. The design, building, care, and maintenance of a school garden have many benefits, including fostering teamwork and responsibility, environmental stewardship, and hands-on learning of where food comes from.

For example: Use the school garden to study plant biology, learn about photosynthesis, the parts of a plant, and more.



Field Trips

Field trips that encompass most of an outdoor learning experience can also be considered outdoor learning. Of course, it may not be possible for you to choose your own field trips within your school. But if you can, you could consider an outdoor learning experience for a potential future field trip. These field trips can and should still be tied in some way to your classroom or curriculum, and to be considered outdoor education, they must utilize nature or the majority of the activities outdoors. You could even combine some other outdoor education types, like adventure education, as the specific focus for your field trips.

For example: Plan a field trip to a state, national, or local park to study the ecosystems, wildlife, or geological rock formations. Align it with a history, science, or other lesson.

For more information about these types of outdoor education, including how to implement outdoor education in your classroom and dozens of ideas to implement outdoor education with your class, please take our online professional development course:

Outdoor Education: Learning Beyond the Classroom Walls