



NATURE PLAY

Do Experiences With Nature Promote Learning? *A Brief Research Summary*

WHAT IS NATURE PLAY?

Nature play is freely-chosen and self-directed play involving active engagement with natural materials.

Connections with nature through activities such as nature play are proven to improve both educational and health outcomes, as well as build empathy and executive functioning skills.

WHAT DOES SCIENCE TELL US ABOUT CONNECTIONS TO NATURE?

“(C)onverging evidence strongly suggests that experiences in nature boost academic learning, personal development, and environmental stewardship (p. 1).”

“It is time to take nature seriously as a resource for learning—particularly for students not effectively reached by traditional instruction (p.1).”

Nature promotes learning

There is strong support for a cause-effect relationship between exposure to nature and learning outcomes. This is true “across topics, learners, intuitions, pedagogies, places, and measures of learning (p. 3).” Documented positive impacts on learners are seen in increased attention, decreased stress, increased self-discipline (delay of gratification), increased learner engagement and interest, and increased physical fitness. Nature also appears to provide a calmer, quieter, safer, warmer, and more cooperative context for learning. This type of combination of “loose parts” and autonomy fosters developmentally beneficial forms of play.

Nature supports healthy relationships

Learning in greener settings has been consistently tied to the bridging of both socio-cultural differences and interpersonal barriers that can interfere with group functioning in the classroom. “Learning in nature facilitates cooperation and comfort between students and teachers, perhaps by providing a more level playing-field wherein the teacher is seen as a partner in learning (p. 5).”

Nature relieves stress

“Nature has been related to lower levels of both self-reported and physiological measures of stress in children (p. 2).”

Nature promotes conservation

As spending time in nature fosters an emotional connection to nature and, in turn, conservation attitudes and behavior, direct contact with nature may be the most effective way to grow environmental stewards.

CITATION:

Kuo M, Barnes M and Jordan C (2019) Do Experiences With Nature Promote Learning? Converging Evidence of a Cause-and-Effect Relationship. *Front. Psychol.* 10:305. doi: 10.3389/fpsyg.2019.00305
<https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2019.00305>