Many educators and parents have reflected on the important role being outdoors in nature has had on their lives. Some adults lament the fact that today’s children (for many and various reasons) can be micro-managed and rushed, and miss the opportunity to spend extended periods of time playing outdoors.

I often dreamt of teaching in the Australian bush. In 2011 I got to live my teaching dream. Bush Kinder had begun.

Bush Kinder allows children the freedom to be children, including:

Opportunities to explore
Opportunities to play freely
Opportunities to reflect

This session is an introduction to Bush Kinder and how personal and collective passion and belief can energise, excite and inspire teachers to be the educators we want to be.

Outdoor learning spaces offer a vast array of possibilities not available indoors. These spaces invite open-ended interactions, spontaneity, risk taking, exploration, discovery and connection with nature (EYLF).

Teaching outdoors in nature is not new in Australia.

Long before white settlement, the aboriginal people of Australia taught with and learnt from the land.

At Westgarth Kindergarten the outdoor space is the primary learning space. Children are supported in their choices to use resources from nature in their play. Water, twigs, leaves, flowers, sand and dirt are the favoured play materials.

Natural open-ended materials are great learning resources

Bush Kinder was a natural and welcomed step for our kindergarten.
Each Wednesday rain or shine the Bush Kinder kids get dropped off by parents, grandparents and friends at the bush kinder site [- our little patch of bush within the Darebin Parklands on Wurundjuri land [2.5 kms from our home kinder].

They have 3 hours of play in a patch of bush using only what nature has provided.

There are no toys, no art supplies, no play equipment.

Research has found that children who spend more time outside in nature are:

- More imaginative,
- More creative,
- less stressed,
- healthier,
- improved cognitive development
- better at collaborating,
- more observant,
- more agile
- more coordinated
- have better balance
- have more positive feelings nature
- And more positive feelings about each other

**Children Outdoors in nature are happier, healthier, stronger, nicer and smarter**

Children don’t spend as much time outdoors as a generation ago. Today’s children are missing out.

When asked why their children are not outside? Crime and safety concerns and lack of time are the reasons given.

90% of parents believe that outdoor time in nature is very important.

**Parents know that being outdoors in nature is good for their children**

Today’s parents are more aware of danger, and parent in that way.

The REAL RISK IS that we are not giving the children the opportunity for real challenge.

Bush kinder children learn to assess risk, challenge themselves and make wise decisions.

**The national regulations don’t say you can’t climb trees or adventure in nature, [they do say do it for a good reason and plan to keep your children safe]**
“Great to see risks managed effectively not removed so that children can effectively learn” Belinda Simms DEECD Victoria

**Spend more time out in nature with your children [even in the rain]**

As the educators of children I hope you will be inspired to increase the use of natural elements in your services.

**References**


Robertson, J. (2008) I Ur Och Skur “Rain or Shine”.


**Links to a selection of articles**


Westgarth Kindergarten web page


Bush Kinder blog


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I acknowledge the Wurundjeri People of the Kulin Nations as the traditional custodians of the land upon which I live, work and learn.