

Knowledge Base: The top 5 features of quality school outdoor education programs

Bornhoffen is the Police-Citizens Youth Clubs (PCYC) Leadership Development Centre in the Gold Coast hinterland. We have been fortunate to work in partnership with many different schools and teachers over more than twenty years.

Some schools place enormous value on their outdoor education program and are able to clearly articulate the benefits that they see for their students. Other schools less so.

We've been reflecting about why this might be. So here are our top 5 features of what makes a quality school outdoor education program...

1

Someone has overall responsibility for the big picture.

The Principal and school leadership have a big picture vision of the role that they want outdoor education to play within their school. This may be as part of a larger student welfare, leadership or pastoral care program. Someone within the school has overall responsibility for developing a sequence of different experiences that build logically as students move through year levels.

2

Everyone is really clear on what the important learning outcomes are.

The programs that get the best outcomes for students are those that clearly define them in the first place. Outdoor education can contribute to a broad range of learning about self-awareness, social skills, community and the natural world. Quality programs narrow their focus on specific learning goals appropriate for the age and stage of the students' development.

3

There is sufficient time, money and resources committed.

Like any aspect of education, achieving quality outcomes for students requires a realistic financial budget and allocation of staff time to plan, prepare, deliver and evaluate. Schools need to be realistic about what they can do with the competing priorities and resources available. Quality programs are seen as vital and important parts of the school year and not as a distraction or inconvenience from the business of learning.



4

There is a focus on facilitation.

Outdoor education theory is built on the experiential learning cycle which is 'experience - reflect - apply.' Quality programs are not simply moving through as many activities as possible in a day. The most effective programs are not rigidly timetabled. They allow adequate time for students to learn and for staff to facilitate rather than just instruct. Importantly, they include time to reflect and apply learning back to school and everyday life.

5

Teaching staff support and are engaged in the program .

Everyone who works in education knows that the teaching team at a school need to be on-board if there is going to be success. This means that teaching staff need to have genuine engagement in the school's outdoor education program. They see the benefits for the students and have choice about how they are involved and what their role is.

That's our top five features of quality school outdoor education programs. We have come up with these based on discussion with teachers, our own observations working with many different schools over more than two decades as well as consultation with our peers across the sector.

A whole of school approach to outdoor education that is well thought out, sequenced and facilitated can positively influence the culture and relationships within a school over time. It will ensure that the significant time, money and resources invested provides the strongest possible contribution to educational outcomes for your students.

Bornhoffen PCYC Leadership Development Centre partners with schools and community organisations to build young people's self-awareness and social skills.

If you would like to find out more about how we can work with you, visit our website or contact our experienced Leadership Development Coordinator Mike Coker to discuss your needs.

