

Welcome to *The Living Classroom Manual!*

Taking children out of doors and walls and into woods and gardens is the equivalent of breathing life into our education system. When young people have the opportunity to learn in the outdoors, education becomes applicable (and messy!) and engaging.

The garden, whose primary intention is to feed, is an ideal setting from which we can feed the minds of our students. Here, the core subjects grow senses. Language arts grows a taste, as the chomping of the spiciest mustard green or the sourest sorrel is translated into poetry and descriptive writing. Mathematics grows a smell - the potent, saccharine fragrance of sweet peas vines measured everyday for a month, as growth is charted on a student-constructed graph. Science grows a sound, the buzzing of pollinating insects in fall or the crunch of snow underfoot as a snow pit is laboriously dug and gleefully examined for evidence of winter animal activity in the garden.

Undoubtedly, teaching in the outdoors is full of unknowns. Taking young people outside is risky and messy and, often, full of inherent complications: foul (or extremely cold!) weather, the need for appropriate layers, behavior problems, sunflowers that don't grow at the rate expected (or insisted on by some book!). But the truth is, we see children visit Calypso Farm and Ecology Center everyday who are *lit up* from the inside with the possibilities of exploring their world outside of the confines of walls and ceilings. Often, it is the children with the most trouble learning in a traditional setting who are *most* engaged and *most* transformed by the opportunity to *live* their education. With a school garden, the potential for illuminating young minds and faces is only a few steps outside your classroom.

This manual seeks to inspire teachers and students to learn experientially in the school garden and natural world through the process of active participation and direct observation. In essence, *The Living Classroom Manual* seeks to provide teachers with the information and resources to take children outside and to be academically productive at the same time. Many of the activities in this manual could be done just as easily indoors as out. We encourage you to embrace the challenge and the potential in taking your students outside to dig, experiment, read, write, plant, and measure in the garden. Enjoy!

Calypso Farm and Ecology Center compiled *The Living Classroom Manual* to compliment The Schoolyard Garden Initiative in the Fairbanks North Star Borough School District. Please see pages 99-100 for more information on Calypso Farm and Ecology Center and the history of The Schoolyard Garden Initiative.

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