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PERMACULTURE WITH CHILDREN

Introductory

Over just two generations, children's lifestyles have changed drastically, from playing in the woods, roaming without supervision and being in the sun, rain, wind or snow, to using electronic devices as their main entertainment. 11-15 year olds in Britain now spend on average half their waking day in front of a screen (Monbiot, 2012). Their relationship to nature has change profoundly. Nature has become an abstract rather than a reality. Reciting facts about forests and Amazons is easy, but relaying the last time they were in a wood is not.

Today, children are pressured to be using their time constructively. Improving after-school activities, tutors for their numerous subjects at school and the need to be productive with their time are all expected of children, instead of playing and hanging out. However, playtime that is unstructured, imaginative and exploratory is an essential component for a wholesome child (Louve, 2016).

Richard Louv in *Last Child In The Woods* (2016) stated that an indoor (or backseat) childhood produces "risk to physical and physiological health, risk to children's concept and perception of community, risk to self-confidence and the ability to discern true danger." This is why it's so important to move children out into the open again. Children who spend time in nature have clear improvements in "attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, learning ability, creativity and mental, physiological and spiritual health" (Henley, 2010).

There is a real need for an environment-based movement and a cultural change within schools and children's lifestyles, where teachers embrace the concept of taking learning outdoors and parents create spaces for children to be imaginative, curious and responsible outside.



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Goals of permaculture with children

Short Term

- Support school garden-based activities that promote health and well-being and provide the potential to improve academic achievement

Long Term

- Collaborate with the city, school district, and individual schools to help develop community supported school gardens that are sustainable
- Create the "reflective and deep thinker, the autonomous learner, the ethical and responsible citizen, and the relevant and connected learner" (Education for a Sustainable Future, Australian Government, 2005).

Benefits of doing permaculture with children

Children can:

- get to understand the planet's problems through child-friendly activities led in an interesting, engaging and informative way
- gain knowledge and respect for the environment
- develop awareness for the environment and where their food comes from
- are more likely to eat fresh fruits and vegetables, which has a positive impact on nutrition and health
- who have previously disengaged from learning show improved social well-being indicators, and an increase in self esteem and achievement
- participate in physical activity, resulting in reduced risk of depression and obesity
- develop leadership skills and teamwork
- learn responsibility by caring for plants and animals

Teachers can:

- gain another teaching space – using the garden as a space for a range of subject areas (art, mathematics, reading), bringing subjects to life
- provide group work and cooperative learning activities
- use the garden for a wealth of new teaching and learning opportunities
- enable children's creativity and resourcefulness to shine
- observe children in a different learning environment
- cater to all learning styles by using the garden space creatively
- ensure children's positive motivation for learning
- have an increase in pride for their local school
- develop awareness about the environment and how they can engage in it



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Who is doing permaculture with children?

- Teachers and parents are the main people doing permaculture with children, at home, in schools and in the wider community. There are also many after-school and home education groups (which often involve parents).

Top Tips for permaculture with children

- Offer training in basic gardening for adults, a great way to gain knowledge and spread it to the wider community
- Have more than one key adult involved, thus protecting the garden program from losing its only expert if a parent or teacher moves on
- Involve the school cook, as they can suggest vegetables to grow and cook highly nutritious meals for children with the organic vegetables grown



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Challenges and solutions

- Challenge: Difficulties gaining support from staff, parents and the community, as some believe that permaculture programs take time away from pressing academic concerns
 - Solution: see the garden as a way to make classroom learning experiential and useful – for example in calculating area or volume
- Challenge: Lack of long term support for the permaculture programme can lead to loss of funds, materials and other resources
 - Solution: A good permaculture design is a low maintenance system, so initial set-up would be more work (whilst there is motivation) but less work is required later. Ensure the design includes a maintenance plan, so everyone is clear what will be required in the future and you can budget for it
- Challenge: School gardens can suffer over the long summer holidays
 - Solution: get the community to care for the garden in the holidays, or design the garden not to require much maintenance in summer, for example through wicking beds or forest gardens
- Challenge: Teachers are not confident to lead gardening activities
 - Solutions: some teachers are probably already skilled gardeners. Ask other skilled members of the community to work with teachers in the garden. There is also a wealth of information online. Check out the RHS and Garden Organic websites.
- Challenge: Without the encouragement of the schools head, it's very hard to implement permaculture in schools.
 - Solution: involve the head from the start. Then start including teachers, janitors and external catering staff, this will increase cooperation and ownership.
- Challenge: Starting a non-formal education group for your child and others is daunting.
 - Solution: attending a permaculture design course once a month is an easy and affordable way to understand permaculture and its benefits. Find like-minded parents to share ideas, help create the group and educate on another is another great way to start. Get on the internet! – a variety of articles, research papers and case study's can help understand what's important and the principles needed to establish a group

READ MORE

Articles

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Teaching Resources

Setting Up And Running A School Garden. Rome: Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations, 2005. A Manual For Teachers, Parents And Communities

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