

CVC fights 'nature deficit disorder' with outdoor education programs

Children are spending less time outdoors, a trend many educators are trying to change.

To supplement the countless indoor education opportunities, educators at Credit Valley Conservation (CVC) are bringing their leading-edge environmental science to the outdoor classroom with curriculum-based programs for Grade 1 through 8 students. 'We hear from a lot of teachers looking for fun and interactive outdoor programs for their students,' said CVC Manager of Education Andrew Kett. 'We're opening the door and giving students an opportunity to get outside and learn about their local environment first-hand.'

Richard Louv, in his 2005 book *Last Child in the Woods*, coined the phrase 'nature deficit disorder,' describing how people, especially children, spend less time outdoors. He described how this can lead to behavioural problems in children, noting that children have an instinctive love for nature but their access is increasingly limited due to parental fears over safety, less access to natural areas and the ever present lure of the screen.

'I'm always amazed to see kids completely awestruck when they're out in nature. It's a whole new world to them and the experience can be quite transformative,' Kett commented. 'We're excited about what our new outdoor programs will offer students.'

CVC's programs encourage hands-on learning, linking science and technology, health and physical education, arts and language and social studies. All programs link with the Ontario curriculum. Teachers can connect their outdoor experiences with pre and post in-class lessons designed to extend the experience.

One of CVC's programs, geared at teaching Grade 7 students about biodiversity and new technology, is called Eco Map Quest. Students learn how to use a GPS device and then take to the trails for a biodiversity scavenger hunt. Another program, Soundscape Safari, teaches Grade 6 students how local animals use sound to communicate.

All programs take place at Terra Cotta Conservation Area, in the newly renovated Watershed Learning Centre, surrounded by 485 acres of unique natural environment on the Niagara Escarpment.

Educators are encouraged to register now for fall, winter and spring outdoor education programs. CVC is partnering with Switzer-Carty Transportation to offer educators a daily rate of \$178 (dependent on location). As an introductory offer, the first 10 educators to register will receive 50 per cent off bussing costs.

To learn more about CVC's new outdoor education programs, educators can also invite CVC staff to host a free lunch-and-learn at their school. This short, interactive presentation includes a question and answer session and is perfect for the staff room. In appreciation, participating educators receive a free family day pass to Terra Cotta Conservation Area and free teacher resources. Educators can register by email at education@creditvalleyca.ca or by calling (905) 670-1615, ext. 221. For more detailed information on CVC's outdoor education programs, visit the website at www.creditvalleyca.ca/education