

Outdoor preschool aims to reconnect children with nature ^[1]

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EXCERPTS:

An unusual educational opportunity is available for children, with the province's first outdoor forest school bringing kids into the woods of Logy Bay for learning.

Cloudberry Forest School is a preschool that uses the natural environment as one teachable moment.

Laura Molyneux and Nora Trask are both early childhood educators who dreamed of running an outdoor learning program in Newfoundland and Labrador.

Molyneux said she met Trask at a conference, where they talked about the possibility of outdoor education.

"We both heard through different ways about the forest school movement, and when we met, it just came up in conversation and it clicked. And for two years now we've been working on starting our dream job, and it's finally here," she said.

"We follow the same type of curriculum, so we follow an immersion curriculum where we learn and we build on the children's interests. The only difference is that we do it outside, and we do obviously have a little more varied terrain, we do a lot of running and climbing and that kind of thing, so that is a bit different."

While outdoor learning can present certain challenges - in the way of the usual Newfoundland and Labrador weather woes - Trask said the kids, once properly dressed, don't seem to mind.

'No such thing as bad weather'

"We're very creative. There's no such thing as bad weather - there's only bad clothing. So, we make sure that the kids are dressed up very appropriately in different layers depending on the rain or the wind as it is, and we make sure that we're very active," said Trask.

The school takes on a maximum of eight students at a time, so Trask and Molyneux are assured they can keep an eye on each child at all times.

Trask said while the concept is a new one for the province, the idea itself has been around for a long time in other parts of the world, such as regions of Scandinavia and the U.K.

"Kids are basically losing touch with nature these days. There's very few opportunities for this kind of open play in a wooded area, and with the invention of subdivisions and parks with structured play equipment, these kinds of opportunities are being lost," said Trask.

"We're really happy to give groups of kids the opportunity to come out and just explore - and just be kids. This is a dream job, absolutely."

Trask said the pair will continue to operate the school until Christmas, and then see what happens from there. They're planning to operate in the winter, but possibly in a different location.

Region: Newfoundland ^[3]

Tags: physical environment ^[4]

curricula and pedagogy ^[5]

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