



Physical and Health Education: Winter Resource

Please note, this resource is meant to support - not replace - the recommendations of public health, school boards and teacher unions.

Latest update: August 20th, 2021

LETTER FROM PHE CANADA

Dear Educators,

It's hard to believe that we are coming up on half way through the 2021-2022 school year - a year like no other. PHE Canada continues to be amazed by the dedication, resilience, compassion and creativity of teachers. You have risen to the occasion, exceeded expectations, and continued to put the interests of your students first. We see the extra hours that you are putting in, the late nights and weekend work, and for that, we thank you.

As snow and ice become daily occurrences, we know that winter weather will present new challenges and obstacles that will require continued agility and flexibility by all. We've heard that many of you are teaching exclusively outside with no change coming as the cold sets in. PHE Canada wants to stress, again, that quality physical and health education is very much still possible in any environment, and continues to be a critical part of a whole-child education. PHE Canada has created this resource in hopes of supporting you through this next chapter, and reminding you that you have the skills, abilities, knowledge and resources to overcome any challenge that is sent your way.

We have also heard, and seen, that teachers are feeling more overwhelmed and overworked than ever before. Please be sure to take care of yourselves, and your well-being. Check in with yourself often, take breaks, close your email and set boundaries. As physical and health educators, this is the time when we can lead by example, and focus on our own social and emotional well-being, healthy lifestyles and physical activity levels.

We hope that this resource inspires you to try something new, see a challenge as an opportunity, and continue to do the amazing things that you do daily. We are here for you.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Melanie Davis".

Melanie Davis

INTRODUCTION

Teaching outdoors has become the “new normal” for many PHE teachers. In fact, more than 80 percent of our members shared that they are teaching exclusively outdoors. This was likely an easy transition when the sun was shining and birds chirping, but as the weather gets colder and less predictable, teachers, students and administrators need to be prepared to adapt on the fly to whatever comes their way. Administration should work with their teachers to ensure both are working from the same plan, and that teachers are equipped with the equipment needed to teach in any environment.

Regardless of where you may be teaching, PHE Canada recommends that you continue to focus on the big ideas and skills found within your curriculum. The goal of your Physical Education program should be to **inspire a love of movement** and show the links between physical activity, and personal and social well-being.



CLOTHING CONSIDERATIONS

Winter weather brings many more layers of clothing for both students and teachers. Be sure to create safe transition spaces for students to get dressed and undressed from outdoor gear in a physically distant way. Additional spaces for proper storage may be required, be sure to assess the spaces within your school that may be able to be repurposed for this use.

For students, encourage them to bring an extra change of clothes to leave in their backpack or desk in case the weather takes a turn for the worse. If possible, talk to your administration about creating a clothing bank (both in and outdoor clothing) for students who may not have access to appropriate gear. Think about reaching out to stores in your area for donations of new or used clothing that can be housed at your school.

When you are preparing for your day, layer. You will want to ensure that you have options and changes available to you and that you are always able to keep yourself - and especially your feet - dry and warm. If you have been holding off on investing in a new pair of winter boots, this might be the time to dive in. Depending on where you are located, you may also want to look for hand and feet warmers or coats with heating pads included. You can check out the [“How to Dress for the Weather Guide” infographic](#) developed by Be Fit for Life Centres and Get Outside and Play.

If students are cold their motor abilities may also be affected, so be sure to consider this when assessing skill development in your outdoor space.

Keep your health and safety top of mind, now more than ever, teachers need to stay physically and mentally healthy.

TEACHING ENVIRONMENTS

Although teaching outdoors is usually possible, and creates amazing learning experiences, it may not always be practical or safe to do so. For times like this, work with your school leadership to conduct another audit of your indoor spaces to see if you are able to re-configure and create new opportunities. Review the [Alternative Learning Environments resources](#) for additional ideas of how to adapt in your school.

If no indoor spaces are available, have a back-up plan prepared to ensure that time allotted for PE is not cancelled. This may include health education lessons, community outreach opportunities or modified indoor activities. Refer to [PHE Canada’s Learning Centre](#) for ideas for small spaces and no-equipment options.

If your board allows it, research community spaces, parks, and recreational facilities as alternate spaces to deliver PHE. City run skating rinks, cross-country skiing and snowshoe trails or winter-maintained

hiking trails can all provide excellent learning environments all winter long.

If your school is located next to natural spaces, now is the time to explore! This can be a great year to help students get more comfortable in their environment, take risks, invent new games, and get creative with “equipment”.

EQUIPMENT

PHE Canada reached out to teachers across the country to learn what they are using to deliver physical education outside this winter. Below is a summary of what we learned. Look to programs such as [JumpStart](#) or government websites for grants that your school may be eligible for to support the purchase of new equipment.

	To mark boundaries:
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Food colouring or environmentally friendly paint on snow • Driveway markers to outline a field • Caution tape or ropes attached to wooden or plastic stakes • Building barriers out of snow - Have students design a map of your outdoor space to denote different areas and types of play that can happen within each
	Equipment and activity ideas:
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Innertube soccer • Pool noodle broomball • Snowball target practice • Snow obstacle courses

The next several pages contain the words, experience and advice of six PHE champions from across the country. They have shared the strategies and ways that they teach outdoors and how to incorporate new learning skills that you may not have thought of before.

Eugene Contreras (Quebec)



KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Encourage creative play outside for all ages
- Have a designated area within your school yard for PHE classes, and consider using alternative spaces off school grounds
- Ensure you and all your students have access to appropriate clothing
- Promote appreciation and adaptation to the weather rather than apprehension towards it

OUTDOOR PHYSICAL AND HEALTH EDUCATION

Getting students moving outside is key to developing physical literacy. There is a direct correlation between time spent outside and higher levels of physical activity, as well as an inverse relationship to time spent on screens. Increased exposure to nature has also been shown to improve sleep, help children manage stress, increase resiliency, and even improve social interaction and provide a sense of connectedness to the environment we live in. All that being the case, it seems obvious that as physical educators we need to encourage students to get outside, although many of us are still more comfortable teaching in the gym.

COVID-19 restrictions have led to new approaches in many fields, and physical education is no exception. Sanitation protocols, limited use of equipment, virtual learning, and the closure of common areas such as the gym can all be seen as limitations. Outdoor spaces, where the risk of transmission is extremely low, are now recommended by public health authorities as the preferred venue for physical activities, so let's turn those limitations into an opportunity - to get kids outside and inspire creative play.

Of course, teaching outside presents different challenges depending on the space you have to work with. In the schoolyard, it's helpful to have a designated area for PHE classes, where many traditional activities that you might do in the gym (tag games, movements skills, team games...) can be done outdoors. A common meeting area and routines for beginning and ending classes, as well as managing transitions, are all important for keeping students on-task with the myriad of distractions in any outdoor setting. At the same time, be open to those teachable moments that might present themselves; encourage students to observe the fitness skills of the squirrel running along the hydro

line, to cheer on the dog chasing the flying disc in the park next to the yard, to notice how a tree trunk has grown around the chain-link fence, or to run around catching as many snowflakes as they can during that first snowfall.

Ideally, your schoolyard has a variety of terrain options, including green space and trees, but of course that's not always the case. Take the time to explore parks and natural areas within walking distance of your school, and get support from your administration and parents to take students on neighbourhood hikes and activities. Playing target games with sticks and stones, using natural or urban infrastructure like trees or benches for balancing, jumping and climbing, skipping stones in the river, building structures or sculptures with rocks and dead branches, playing hide-and-go-seek, digging in the snow and sliding on the ice, all help students realize that they can get out and play in so many ways, and give them an appreciation of the natural spaces within their community. Keeping in mind that PHE classes do not fulfill the requirements of daily physical activity for students, these kinds of outings can help inspire them to explore their own neighbourhoods and find creative ways to enjoy the outdoors beyond the school day.

The biggest impediment people often see to getting outside is the weather. Schools call for indoor recesses when the slightest sprinkle of rain appears, when the ground is wet or icy, or when it is deemed too cold to be outside. As a result, students don't learn to dress appropriately for the weather and come to believe that inside is better than out. Particularly as the weather gets colder, we spend more of our time inside, and despite the Canadian image being people of the North, we are losing our winter outdoor culture to a certain degree. We complain about the cold as we hustle from our heated seat in the car to our warm house or place of work. Our weather forecasters routinely describe below-zero temperatures or a snowstorm in negative terms and advise us to stay indoors for our safety and comfort. What used to be considered a cold day outside is now cause for a "winter weather watch" and a respectable snowfall now calls for a "snowfall warning". The wind chill is commonly referred to as the temperature itself, without understanding that the effects of the wind are variable and usually easy to mitigate. This approach to winter as something we just need to endure and avoid until the weather "gets better" results in more indoor, sedentary behaviour over the winter season. As physical and health education teachers, we have an opportunity to counteract that message by showing students that the weather is not something to be afraid of, but rather something to be prepared for and adapt to.

Children generally don't mind what adults call inclement weather. Give a kid a raincoat and rubber boots and see how much fun they have splashing in the puddles, not to mention working on their jumping and dodging skills. Bundle them up and send them outside with a shovel and they can spend hours digging out a snow drift, staying warm while building their muscular strength and cardiovascular endurance. Playing soccer in a downpour or hockey in a snowstorm is an invigorating experience. **As PHE teachers, we should look beyond our own comfort level and foster that openness and adaptability to our environment rather than see it as a limitation.** Of course, we

need to ensure that students learn to dress appropriately, model and teach them to layer up and keep an extra pair of socks and mitts at school. Be empathetic and understanding about what students may or may not have at home, and have extra gear available if necessary, for students that are unprepared. Create open lines of communications with parents/guardians to work together and ensure that all students can participate.

COVID-19 has introduced so many restrictions and limitations on what we can do in our personal and professional lives, but it could also be an opportunity to do more of what we should already have been doing all along – promoting the outdoors as the easiest and best place to get active and develop healthy habits for life. Physical literacy is about gaining confidence and competence in a variety of contexts; our changeable climate provides so many environments to experience throughout the year, so let's use them all!

Justin Oliver (Nova Scotia)



KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Doing something outside is better than doing nothing
- Use this opportunity to teach students how to dress appropriately with layers
- Be creative with equipment - reuse household and nature items to keep costs low

TEACHING OUTDOORS IN NOVA SCOTIA

Teaching outdoors in one way or another has been a mainstay in my 13-year teaching career. If I think back to when I was a student, it was always a highlight when our teacher took us outside. Often, it didn't seem like school work as we were connecting with nature in one way or another.

Traditionally, my Physical Education classes will spend four of our 10 months learning outdoors. Spending all 10 months outside learning is possible, however, a few factors will contribute to the success of your program and the enjoyment of learning by your students.

No-one learns well if they are too hot or too cold. Always explain to your students how to use layers of clothing to their advantage to make their learning experience enjoyable. Understanding thermoregulation and incorporating that principle into your program is important for both safety and learning.

Be resourceful and collect everyday items to repurpose and use in your program. Items such as empty tuna and soup cans, cardboard, some old candles, and dryer lint will allow you to create burners that can be used for cooking in your outdoor education class. Don't feel like you need the latest and greatest gear to take students outside to learn.

Always remember, **doing something is better than doing nothing**. You might not feel you have the expertise, the equipment, or the outdoor space, but if you have some knowledge, some repurposed items, and some outdoor space, you can take your students outside for practically any course your school offers and some learning will occur. Each time you take your students outside, you, and they, will have more confidence being outdoors and the opportunities for learning will increase in more ways than one.

Aron Knudsen (Saskatchewan)



KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Have 10 or so warm up activities ready in your back pocket that can be played anywhere
- An element of risk can be beneficial for students' development - find the right level
- Explore your environment and learn from the land

TEACHING OUT ONTO THE LAND

Welcome educators to a short, but useful resource, to help you take your teaching out onto the Land. "Where is the best place for teaching and learning?" This is the question at the heart of our Land-Based Learning (LBL) concept. This question emphasizes that teaching and learning cannot be accomplished entirely within the school building. LBL is grounded in current educational literature, research and best practice ideas. Knowing that you are reading this, and searching for ways to

transform your teaching to a LBL approach is a strong start for you as a lifelong learner.

As an outdoor educator and a strong advocate for Healthy Active Living and Physical Education, I try to center my LBL classes within the Physical, Emotional, Spiritual and Intellectual realms of health, all the while (re)developing a love for the natural world. In the book “Last Child in the Woods - Saving our Children from Nature Deficit Disorder”, Richard Louv describes a desperate need to reconnect children back to nature in a healthy and fun way. “Within the span of a few decades, the way children understand and experience nature has changed radically. The polarity of the relationship has reversed. Today, youth are globally aware of the threats to the environment - but their physical contact, their intimacy with nature, is fading.” (Louv, 2008). There is so much to learn from the Land, on the Land and about the Land.

Now that you've spent some time thinking about LBL, your next step is to think about all the low organizational and fun warm-up activities that you currently really enjoy teaching. For example, I have acquired about 10-15 really good warm-up games and low-organizational games thus far that I can explain and demonstrate effortlessly; the participants are challenged, engaged, active and having fun. When I first started out on this journey to LBL, I relied on the games that I was the most comfortable teaching. So I began to take all these activities outside - at a park, in a bluff of trees, on a sandbar during our canoe trips, everywhere. This is one technique to allow yourself to feel comfortable organizing, in large open areas, where noise or weather may feel like a barrier to teaching. It allows you to take some risks, but knowing that you and the students are comfortable with these activities alleviates some of the stress.

Now, think of modifying your activities in any way to incorporate natural items as your equipment? For example, I teach an invasion game called “The Farmer, the Fox and the Chicken.” I set a rubber chicken onto an orange cone. The objective is for one team to invade and steal the chicken without getting caught. One day we were down by the river exploring some different hiking paths, when we came to an open field and one of the students said he wished we could play that Farmer, Fox and Chicken game out here. We didn't have any equipment, so instead of placing a rubber chicken on a cone, I found a “Y” shaped stick, stuck it into the ground and balanced a small stone into the crook of the stick. Voila! We played the game for about 45 minutes. It started to rain, which added such a fun, but difficult component to our agility and our struggle to accelerate.

One of the best pieces of information I can share with you as you take on the role as a new learner, is the feeling of risk and ambiguity. As an educator, as you are looking to shift your teaching to a LBL approach, there will be a lot of risks and unknown. Remember this, **some of the best learning occurs when there is an element of risk involved, and when there is ambiguity, an unclear result or outcome of what might happen.** Embrace these two concepts as learning opportunities with your students. Mistakes may happen and failures will be evident, the Land is a natural teacher, and she provides immediate feedback. Remember as a child when you would hop from rock to rock, working on your balance, coordination, power, and agility, a small misstep resulted in a bruised shin.....that

was Land-Based Learning.

Julie Andrews (Fond Du Lac Denesųłn  First Nation, Saskatchewan)



KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Teaching outdoors is a great opportunity to introduce land based learning
- Start small and build upon your knowledge each lesson
- Connect with local Elders and Knowledge Keepers

INCORPORATING INDIGENOUS PERSPECTIVES INTO YOUR CLASSES

With the release of the *Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada: Calls to Action* in 2015, educators across the land known as Canada, have the obligation and responsibility to incorporate Indigenous Ways of Knowing and content into their courses. The current situation has now afforded teachers the unique opportunity to engage in land-based learning. For many teachers, who are used to teaching in a gymnasium, this will mean stepping out of your comfort zone and for other teachers, this will mean an opportunity for you to authentically incorporate Indigenous perspectives into your classes.

Where to get started

1. **Go outside:** The Indigenous peoples of this land have a unique reciprocal relationship with the land. What relationship did the original inhabitants of your area have and currently have? How can you interact with the land in a meaningful way? How do you currently use the land? How can you demonstrate respect for the land? For those in an urban setting, getting out on the land authentically will require some real creativity, but it can be done.
2. **Form a meaningful relationship with a local Elder or Knowledge Keeper:** Do not always rely on your school or school division First Nation, M tis, and/or Inuit resource person/ consultant

to provide this relationship, seek it for yourself. If you do not know where to start, Friendships Centers, Métis locals, reserves, and urban programs for Indigenous peoples are good places to start building that relationship. Learn the local protocol for approaching and learning from an Elder and Knowledge Keeper. Many school divisions have an administrative procedure or policy for inviting Elders into your school.

Land Based Learning Activity Idea: Start small, then add layers of understanding as your comfort level and knowledge increases.

1. Take your students outside on a hike. Acknowledge the land you are on.
2. Help students learn the names of local, Indigenous plants. Cannot find any plants? ask your students why? What would have been there before urbanization?
3. Invite an Elder or Knowledge Keeper. Have them explain the medicinal uses of the local and Indigenous plants.
4. Learn about the protocol for sustainable harvesting from an Elder or Knowledge Keeper.
5. Have the students follow protocol, harvest and prepare a salve, tea, or infusion or other culturally relevant preparation.

Other Ideas:

- Fire - using matches, flint, bow drill. Discuss the importance of fire in daily activities and ceremony. If discussing matters that have spiritual significance, be sure to have an Elder or Knowledge Keeper lead the discussion, unless you have been gifted the story.
- Transportation - canoe, kayak, umiak, travois, dog team, snowshoeing. How are the modes of transportation traditionally made? What are the differences in equipment between nations? What makes these effective modes of transportation?
- Shelter - quinzhee, tarp shelters, using natural materials.
- Orienteering - map making, geographical landmarks (Inukshuk), compass, GPS
- Knife/ Saw Usage - safety considerations, harvesting (with protocol) and creating tools and equipment (i.e. wiener stick, double ball stick)
- Be prepared to make mistakes. Be willing to learn as you travel on this journey to reconciliation.

Daniel Stevens (Ontario)



KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Talk with students early in the year about being outside. They shouldn't be surprised by the idea
- Find the teachable moments in being uncomfortable
- Focus on the mental health benefits of taking your students outdoors - for you and them
- The importance of less structure and more resourcefulness

PHYSICAL EDUCATION, LEARNING TO PLAY OUTSIDE

The brilliance of fall has turned to that transitional grey of early winter. No longer are the days warm, and my students' attitudes get cold as they are yearning for the gym's warmth to play some more traditional sports. However, in Mr. Stevens's Physical Education class, we head outside. "Winter is coming, and has been since the first day of spring, so this shouldn't be a shocker" I remind them.

I remind myself that this was when my ancestors spent time preparing and acclimatizing to the new environment. Late fall is when I do some seasonal outdoor training. We speak about proper clothing and what is needed to stay warm outside in winter. A PE class can be an excellent opportunity to learn about our bodies' ability to adapt to this new reality, and our responsibility to stay safe. How to maintain body heat in cooling conditions, how to create shelters for colder climates and a means to bring in social justice. I realize that such things may seem complicated in urban settings, but there is a value in fort building. Being active and working as a group doesn't have to be about rules and regulations. Success doesn't have to be measured through strategy and techniques. Camaraderie and "childish fun" have long-standing psychological benefits and can help society as a whole when used appropriately.

During this time of year, and more so during COVID, we must be inventive and spend a great deal of time outside. For many cultures, being outside is fundamental for resource gathering but, more importantly, healing and relaxing. In my classes, I design meaningful activities with my students and keep them active during the freeze, but that will teach them valuable knowledge about safety and challenges. We work on knot tying, binding techniques, and fort/shelter building. We deal with the importance of warmth and staying dry as well as the physiological reactions to the cold and how to counter and protect oneself.

This time of year is one of great opportunities, and one that often gets overlooked for more standard practices. But these days, when normalcy is craved by all, doing things the way they've always been done might not be the best way forward. It's time to look at a longer time frame of program development. Perhaps we should go back to doing something we have stopped doing for no other reason than the convenience of warmth.

Karen Natho (British Columbia)



KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Rely on your support network to develop plans and supports
- Ask your students what they need and what you can do to help them be involved
- Introduce noise cancelling headphones, sunglasses and small group challenges
- Deliver short instructions both visually and verbally

INCLUSION: SEEKING OUT WAYS TO INCLUDE ALL STUDENTS

Physical education teachers across the country are coming up with creative and new ways to include all students. Students with special needs can make the task of getting everyone moving and learning a bit more challenging. However, we must continue to seek out ways to include all students in our lessons in order to support their overall well-being.

There are many factors that should be considered to ensure the student's individual safety and needs remain paramount. Teachers should continue to use the village around them. You are not alone. Ask educational support staff, current and past teachers, parents and other students to find out what has worked. Better yet, communicate directly with the student with special needs and ask them the best ways to include and engage them in an upcoming Physical Education unit.

Indoor gymnasiums present challenges. Fluorescent lights and echoey loud noises can be over stimulating for some. Outdoor environments can also present sensitivities to bright sunshine, incremental weather and uneven surfaces. Woodchips, snow and sand make manoeuvring a walker or wheelchair difficult, and asphalt or concrete could make it dangerous for a student with dyspraxia or balance concerns. Consider working with your administration to have a portion of your

yard or field plowed to increase accessibility in the winter. Introduce noise cancelling headphones and sunglasses for those who are sensitive to loud noises or bright lights. Small group activities that incorporate peer to peer support help with creative thinking and social development. Circuit stations in small groups can be set up to support personalized development of fundamental movement skills which are the building blocks for students with special needs to gain confidence and competence before playing the formal game.

Teachers, whether having their class indoors or out, need to think about the way they are introducing concepts. Verbal instruction needs to be short, supported with demonstrations and visuals. Preparing the student picture schedules ahead of time or during class, can prepare the student for what is expected of them and what comes next.

Being creative and using those around you will open the doors to possibilities for all your students, no matter what their special need may be. Open those doors to the gymnasium or the outdoors and hang up the ALL ARE WELCOME sign!

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Free resources:

- Opeha - Outdoor Education Toolkit
https://teachingtools.ophea.net/sites/default/files/pdf/oet_toolkits_en_24my20.pdf
- Ever Active Schools - Cold Weather Recess Planning
<https://everactive.org/product/cold-weather-recess-planning/>
- Outdoor Council of Canada
<https://www.outdoorcouncil.ca>
- Take Me Outside
<https://takemeoutside.ca>
- PHE Learning Centre - Winter Activities
<https://phecanada.ca/programs/phe-learning-centre/physical-education-activities>

Free resources:

- The Get-Outside Guide to Winter Activities
https://canada.humankinetics.com/products/get-outside-guide-to-winter-activities-the?_pos=2&_sid=bf7c9be7c&_ss=r&variant=8120944623703
- Physical and Health Education in Canada - Chapter 18
https://canada.humankinetics.com/products/physical-and-health-education-in-canada-with-web-resource?_pos=11&_sid=bf7c9be7c&_ss=r



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With respectful acknowledgement that the land where PHE Canada's National Office is located is on the traditional unceded territory of the Algonquin Anishnaabeg People.