

Outside Learning—Soothing To All the Senses By Suzanne Buchauer



One hundred years ago, children were being taught outside in both Germany and the United States. In Germany, responding to the rise of the dreaded Tuberculosis disease in the early 1900s, so called Forest Schools were developed, in which children were taught in outdoor settings, in all types of weather. In New York City, to combat the spread of a deadly respiratory infection, Tuberculosis, children, mainly from crowded poverty stricken areas, were taught on rooftops and on ferry barges. The result of both outside teaching methods was that the children not only avoided contracting the disease, but their overall health was invigorated and boosted. With no vaccine or medicine to combat the disease, changing the way of learning meant saving lives. Looking at the New York Times article below, you can see the pictures of the outdoor learning environment.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/07/17/nyregion/coronavirus-nyc-schools-reopening-outdoors.html>

Now over 100 years later, we are in the midst of another respiratory infection and pandemic, with no vaccine, to date. Davis Dyslexia Correction Facilitators have become inventive in finding ways to continue providing participants with life-changing programs, and it is working. On-line pilot programs are on offer and many facilitators have been provided with extra training and ongoing support to help navigate this novel approach.

What about the participants who wish to do in person programs; how can we provide programs and be safe?

In New York, the pandemic became very extreme, quickly, with a lockdown of businesses for three months, starting in late March and ending in June. Slowly and surely, our state provided us with guidelines and benchmarks for successful reopening, as the dire situation improved.

After three months of lockdown in New York State, we were reaching the end of June and New York State began the opening process, in cautious stages. During New York States opening phases, businesses and schools were required to have an opening plan, to provide safety for everybody involved. My comfort level to work with people in person and indoors was low; living right next to the hospital, with the tent outside and the sound of endless ambulances still ringing in my ears, and, at the same time, I had people who had signed up for programs and were waiting for their in-person programs.

Working Outside

It was my son who mentioned that I could set up a work and learning environment outside, in the garage, on the driveway, retaining wall, porch, hammock and tree-filled yard! The idea seemed pretty interesting, however, it was so hot at that time, in June, I remember. I went out at different times of day to feel the temperature and outside area and tried to envision how and when I could start working outside. Then, I decided that I could get used to working outside and find ways to cool down, including buying a huge fan from Home Depot! I was ready to start working again, in person, after three months of lock down and I felt invigorated with a new plan to keep everybody safe and happy!



I went outside often, wrote my detailed business opening plan; the outside area did seem like a nice

space, yet it took a few weeks to really embrace the idea and try it in earnest. In the garage, there are windows, it is North-sided, quiet, and the previous owners had painted the garage blue—even the floor was painted. I went through all the procedures, thinking of how to do them at a distance, or safely, measured my table for social distancing purposes, and thought through every possible step of the program, to decide how to do each step as safely as possible. Once the opening plan was made, I moved outside, with my table and all my supplies. I took pictures of the outside space, that was furnished by then and ready to go, and sent the pictures and opening plan out to participants and their families to show them the new location, while describing all the safety aspects and guidelines we were going to follow. I tested it out how it felt to work in the outside space, during a few initial consultations, which were really fun for everybody and felt safe. And, it worked! People liked the outside learning idea and the participants who had already signed up were ready to get started. Fortunately, the weather in New York was pretty reasonable and on the real hot days, we started super early, to avoid the worst heat. One of my first participants was an adult who wanted to start at 7:00 in the morning. That was ideal for the temperatures and we finished the day, just as the temperature outside was heating up.



Even the participants who were working on Attention Mastery seemed to be in their element, in the great outdoors. As one participant noted, “Being outside is soothing for all the senses.” Breaks were easy; we went on walks, explored nature in the little forest patch and on the garden terraces. During one of the recent storms, a tree fell down to provide for a natural balance beam. The hammock was inviting for some, or people could sit on the porch or at a small table, for one, that I set up outside, for them to eat--socially distanced. The hand washing station was a plastic sink-like basin, on the retaining wall, filled with warm sudsy water, a soap dispenser next to it and a towel, hanging in the butterfly bush (to be used only by the participant). When people arrived with cell phones and water bottles, they were given a wipe, after washing their hands at the hand washing

station, to clean frequently held items that they touched with their hands. Fortunately, the bathroom is just inside the garage door, so they would wash their hands in the basin, remove their shoes at the door, and go in.



Yes, there were the sounds of nature, such as: birds, trees and leaves swaying and tussling in the breeze, or cicadas, in high summer; we saw herons, eagles, deer, chipmunks, foxes, groundhogs, squirrels and lots of insects. Every participant had their preference for breaks. One girl always wanted to be on the hammock or on a picnic blanket to eat, under the hammock tree. Another participant preferred the porch area, with a big pillow behind her, yet another liked to sit near the natural tree balance beam. We took walks, ran up the hill and had races, ran through the sprinkler sometimes, or for the adults, they just sat in their car to make phone calls to loved ones during the break, or went to get some take out food for lunch. Yes, there were landscapers, so when they converged on a property, we took a break and a walk, usually, and found that they would be in and out in 15 minutes. I began to know the landscapers cycle after a few months and felt at one with the flow of the neighborhood. I felt so happy being outside all day, every day and nobody complained!



It was fun for everybody! “Why haven't we done this before?”, I thought. What a novel concept! During the TB pandemic of the early 1900s, school outside became the norm for some, on several continents, both in Europe and in the US. Today, during the Coronavirus pandemic, it is being done again in many places, at least during the warmer months. In New York we were really blessed with weather that was conducive to outside learning and doing the Davis Dyslexia Correction Programs. And, it has been and still is truly, soothing to all the senses.

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