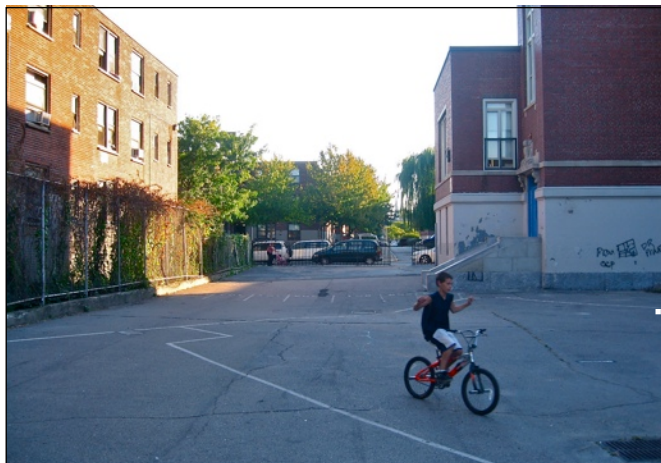


What is an Outdoor Classroom ?



before



after

The Boston Schoolyard Initiative was established to transform neglected schoolyards into public spaces for active recreation, education, and neighborhood improvement.

BSI Schoolyard renovations now include an outdoor classroom - designed with plantings, natural materials, educational tools and class management features within a protected area - dedicated to hands-on teaching and learning.

Traditionally in schoolyards an outdoor amphitheater was thought of as an Outdoor Classroom. The BSI has developed a new model that is an interactive place of discovery providing the opportunity to engage with all curriculum areas - including science, math, language arts, history and art. The Outdoor Classroom provides a living laboratory for year-round full class and small

group instruction. Afterschool education programs, service learning and stewardship projects extend the use of the outdoor classroom.

Through professional development programs and the adaptation of traditional educational materials for use in the outdoors, the BSI supports the Boston Public Schools curriculum. These resources include: Science in the Schoolyard: a Guide to Taking the Kits Outdoors, developed in partnership with Boston Public Schools Science Department; and Outdoor Writers' Workshop, developed in partnership with Boston Public Schools English Language Arts Department.

The Outdoor Classroom add a whole new dimension to public education. In our urbanized world, the outdoor classroom is a needed resource bringing the natural world into the student's daily lives.



Supporting different learning styles

The outdoor classroom has a powerful impact on students of all learning abilities. There is a worry that if kids come out of the element of a traditional classroom they won't be focused. If you give kids a clear objective of what you want them to do, you are going to see incredible learning taking place outdoors.

Erica Herman, Elementary School Principal

Outdoor Classroom Design

Imagine a classroom with the sky for a ceiling and the earth as a floor. This classroom without walls is bustling with activity as young scientists explore the world of bugs and leaves, mathematicians measure rainfall, count seeds and graph their garden's growth, dramatists rehearse their play on a windy stage, artists sketch shadows and light, and linguists name the landscape with a thousand words. The schoolyard is just a hop, skip, and jump away.

- Kirk Meyer, Founding Director, BSI

Teaching and learning are served best when an outdoor classroom is uniquely designed for the site and needs of a particular school. Details of material and form will vary with location. A set of design concepts developed in practice, and documented in the BSI Design Workbook, provide a framework. A partial list:

Areas & identifying features

- **Gate and perimeter fence** - safely defines the place
- **Gathering and meeting area** - (for standing or sitting)
- **Individual & small group seating** - logs, stone or wood
- **Pathways** - primary and secondary circulation
- **Urban Meadow** - model annual and perennial habitat
- **Sample Woodland** - trees, shrubs and herbaceous plants
- **Work and experiment area** - messy work, dirt, gravel
- **landscape forms** - a small hill, berm, or rain garden
- **Armature** - structure to support teaching tools

Elements & teaching tools

- **Natural materials to investigate** - pebbles, sand, soil
- **Processed materials** - plastic, synthetics, concrete, metals
- **Scientific Tools** - wind instruments, temperature and rain gauges, rulers, sundials, levels, pulleys, etc.
- **Fallen logs** - habitat & demonstrate decomposition
- **Signage** - site map, plant ID labels, student displays
- **Student planting beds** - edible & experimental gardens
- **Bulletin boards white board** - sharing work & instruction
- **Water source** - maintenance & experiment use
- **Work surfaces** - tables, rocks, stumps
- **Compost bin & leaf cage**
- **Rain barrel, water feature**

Designing for Maintenance & Sustainability

Actively used outdoor spaces require maintenance - just as indoor spaces do. **Planning for maintenance is essential at the beginning of the design process.** Some daily tasks can be taken on by students as part of the educational process and become a way to learn about stewardship. Other maintenance resources include baseline maintenance by the custodian, seasonal landscape maintenance by the BSI horticultural crew, the schoolyard friends group, volunteers, and trained summer youth work crews.

Selection of building and plant materials is critical. Materials must meet multiple criteria: high educational value, low maintenance, suitability for site, sustainability, and implementation of green practices.



students enter outdoor classroom through a seedpod shaped gateway, carrying clipboards to make notes for outdoor science

