

Hands-on Learning is the Best Learning

Research shows that children learn best when they are engaged in real-life, hands-on activities. The formal name is Experiential Education, and the Ganaraska Forest Centre's Outdoor Education program has been engaging children in this type of learning since 1978. Recognizing the value and positive impact of experiential education, the Ministry of Education has recently developed a policy framework called Community-Connected Experiential Learning, intending to offer every student more, outside-of-the-classroom opportunities, like those provided at the Ganaraska Forest Centre.

Experiential learning fosters student engagement by creating relevant experiences that spark student curiosity and inspire them to follow their passions. Child care providers have long understood that young children learn best through play and utilize a complex curriculum that is based on child-led interests. Play-based or immersed learning for students of all ages, leads to broader subject understanding and provides psychological and social benefits, including deeper engagement, increased self-esteem, higher motivation and the development of leadership skills. Students are more successful when they can connect what they are learning to real-life situations that they care about.

As an example, the Forest Centre recently participated in an experiential learning project that saw grade seven students actively engage in a simulated flood of the Ganaraska River. The students stood on the river bottom to measure flow rates, water depths and record and analyze shoreline impacts. The students were fully engaged in the activity and were excited that they were participating in a real-life experience that provided practical solutions to the Ganaraska Region Conservation Authority (GRCA) that might help prevent future flooding.

It is encouraging that the ministry is recognizing the value and authenticity of the type of quality programming that the GRCA has been providing for almost 40 years. The community is invited to help support these educational practices by attending the 27th annual Ganaraska Forest Centre fundraising dinner and auction scheduled for April 9, at the Cobourg Lions Centre. Please call 905-885-8173 for more information about the fundraiser, or how to support your local Conservation Authority and the Ganaraska Forest Centre.