

TAKE ME OUTSIDE *for learning*

SCHOOL YEAR
CHALLENGE
2019/2020

IMPACT REPORT
JULY 2020



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A Note of Gratitude

The 2019 - 2020 Take Me Outside (TMO) Learning Challenge would not have been as successful without the diverse environments surrounding the many schools across the country that participated in this challenge. It is important we begin by acknowledging that the success of this challenge is a direct benefit of access to the natural world that has been stewarded since time in memorial by the many Indigenous, First Nations and Métis peoples who have walked and continue to walk and steward these places. We begin with gratitude and the utmost respect for the Lands that supported such wonderful outdoor learning experiences throughout this challenge. We thank the guardians to these spaces as well as the educators fluent in the languages of connection to these places.

Further thanks and appreciation need to be expressed to the many partners and supporters of the 2019 – 2020 TMO Learning Challenge. We raise our hands to our educational partners implementing and participating in this challenge, as well as our organizational partners: Mountain Equipment Co-op (MEC), Canadian Network for Environmental Education and Communication (EECOM), and Columbia Basin Environmental Education Network (CBEEN). Thank you! This challenge has made an impact and will continue to ripple out and effect change into the next school year.



Nuts & Bolts of the 2019/20 TMO Learning Challenge

The 2019/20 school year brought with it the launching of the Take Me Outside for Learning Challenge that encouraged educators across Canada to implement outdoor learning with their students once per week from September to June. There were four key steps that assisted in facilitating the TMO Learning Challenge.

- 1) **Getting outside every week:** participants committed to spending at least 1hr/week outside with their classes through the school year. This outside time took many forms such as class time, extended recess, picnic lunches, field trips, or all the above. Educators implemented strategies that best worked in response to their students' needs.
- 2) **Joining the challenge:** educators confirmed their participation through completing an online form on the TMO website. This allowed participants to receive a monthly newsletter that included tips for outdoor learning.
- 3) **Sharing stories and experiences:** a Facebook group further connected participants where they were able to share ideas and experiences with the Learning Challenge community. There were also opportunities to participate in a monthly Twitter chat that assisted in building community. The goal of connecting via social media was to promote resources and best practices in an easy shareable format.
- 4) **Spreading the word:** educators were encouraged to promote the Learning Challenge in their learning communities. This was primarily encouraged through the downloading and circulation of the Learning Challenge poster, available in both English & French.

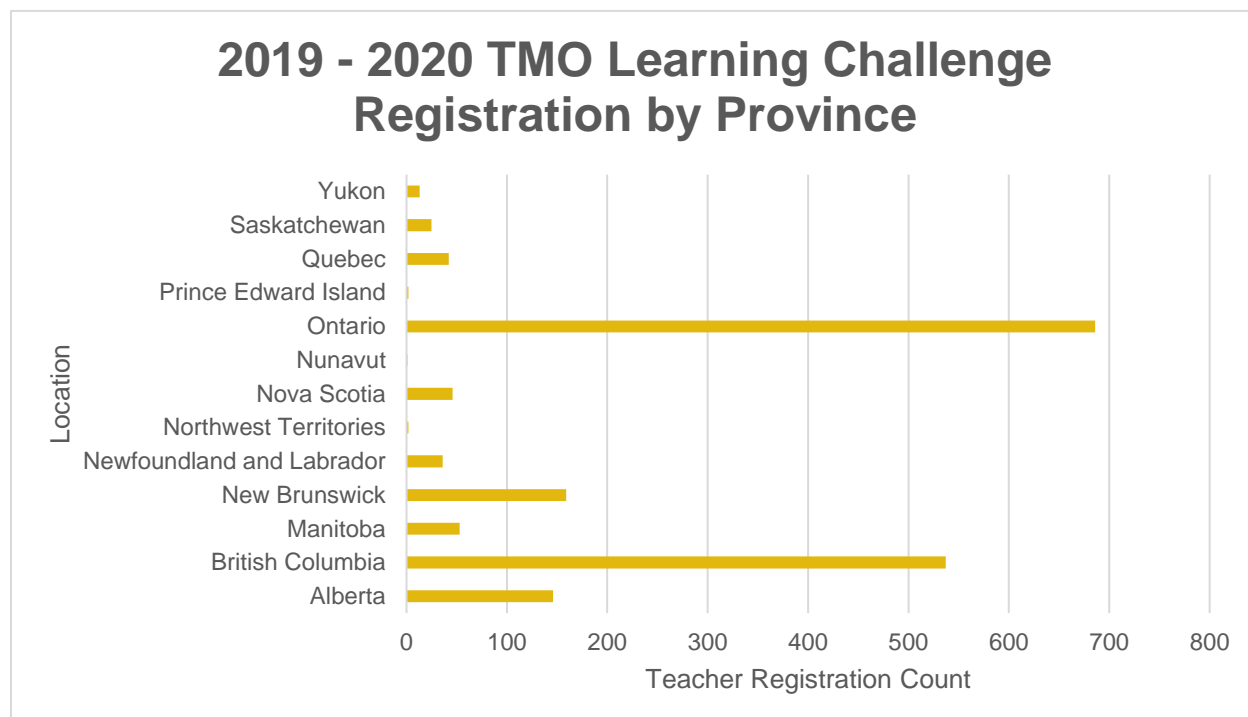
Ultimately the Learning Challenge worked to extend the impact of Take Me Outside Day by offering tools & resources for building a community of educators committed to taking their classroom beyond four walls and relishing in the positive impacts of outdoor learning.



Executive Summary

“I love it because it is a space where all can succeed, regardless of ability, language or experience.”

– 2019/20 TMO Learning Challenge Participant.



The 2019 – 2020 TMO Learning Challenge saw widespread interest and participation a huge impact. Enrollment in the challenge totaled 1,748 teachers from across Canada. There was representation in each province as well as the Northwest Territories. Overall, teacher registration was by far the highest in Ontario and British Columbia.

Had we ended the school year under normal circumstances we would have seen almost 1.4 million hours of outdoor learning time logged across Canada as a result of our program. Accounting for school ending mid-March we still achieved an estimated 874,000 hours that students and teachers spent outside during the 2019 – 2020 school year.

To better inform subsequent Learning Challenges – we hope the next one can happen this fall - participants were sent a five-question survey that targeted areas of strength as well as areas of growth. Of the 1,748 educators participating in this challenge 100 educators responded to our Learning Challenge survey, below is a brief overview of the survey results. The survey was conducted in June 2020.

Overall, 81% succeeded in obtaining their weekly outside learning goal, while 19% experienced challenges in obtaining their goal. The primary barrier to getting student learning outdoors was weather – primarily extremely cold conditions (temperatures below -20°C), as well as the schools’ proximity to appropriate outdoor spaces. Each month educators participating in the challenge received an email containing resources and

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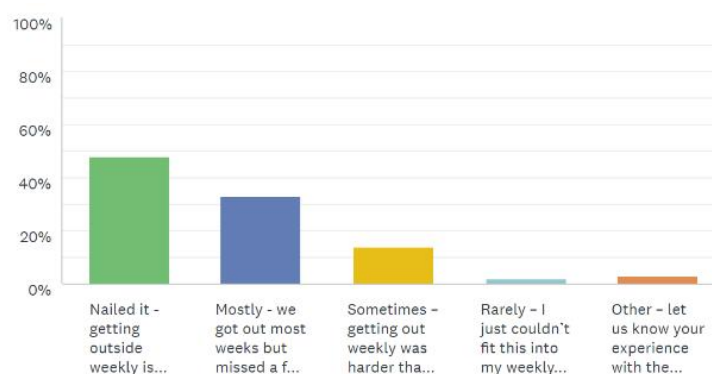
communications, 87% of respondents found this communication to be very useful and looked forward to receiving it. The remaining 13% of respondents primarily just skimmed the email or read them occasionally due to time constraints in their schedules. 74% of survey respondents commented on what types of resources and communications they would like to receive, the primary resources requested fall into three wide ranging categories: curriculum (32%), place-consciousness (25%), and ready-made activities (14%). All the survey respondents shared a story of success, these stories weave a beautiful narrative of the profound impact that outdoor learning had on their learners. Finally, 79% of respondents provided helpful feedback for next years' learning challenge. Most of this feedback falls into four categories: increasing accessibility & reducing barriers (25%), networking (24%), physical distancing from four walls (20%), and communications/ social media (8%). Overwhelmingly, 97% of respondents intend to participate in the 2020 – 2021 Learning Challenge, while the 3% abstaining are retiring this year. The following pages will look more in-depth at the responses to each question posed on the survey, and this report will conclude with a summary statement intended to illuminate a path forward for the 2020 – 2021 TMO Learning Challenge.

“A relationship developed between the students and the land we learn in.”

– 2019/20 TMO Learning Challenge Participant.

Question One:

How did the Learning Challenge go for you? Were you able to get out consistently before schools were closed? Which statement is most true for you in that regard?



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
▼ Nailed it - getting outside weekly is easy and totally doable for me.	48.00% 48
▼ Mostly - we got out most weeks but missed a few due to extenuating circumstances.	33.00% 33
▼ Sometimes - getting out weekly was harder than I expected	14.00% 14
▼ Rarely - I just couldn't fit this into my weekly schedule	2.00% 2
▼ Other - let us know your experience with the weekly commitment in the comment box	3.00% 3
TOTAL	100

Figure 1.0: Graph demonstrating participant achievement of their Learning Challenge goals 2019 – 2020.

Of the responses to the first question, 81% of respondents achieved their weekly goal of taking their class outdoors for learning for a minimum of one hour per week. There were two primary barriers for the 19% of respondents who did not achieve their goal of getting outside each week, these barriers were extremely cold conditions (temperatures below -20°C), as well as the schools' proximity to appropriate outdoor spaces. In order to combat these barriers, in the next TMO Learning Challenge, having activities and resources that support bringing the outside in as well as activities and resources for supporting outdoor learning in urban and semi-urban environments is critical to moving forward. Through identifying these primary barriers and providing tools to empower educators to engage in outdoor learning in a multitude of ways, we can shift our focus from a deficit based narrative to an asset based approach that celebrates the uniqueness of each educational context and creates multiple pathways for outdoor learning that reduces barriers and pressure on educators.

Question Two:

We would love your feedback on the resources and communications we sent around each month. Which statement best reflects your experience and attitude?

Of the 100 survey responses, 87% of respondents found this communication to be very useful and looked forward to receiving it. The remaining 13% of respondents

primarily just skimmed the email or read them occasionally due to time constraints in their schedules. Figure 2.0 illustrates these findings.

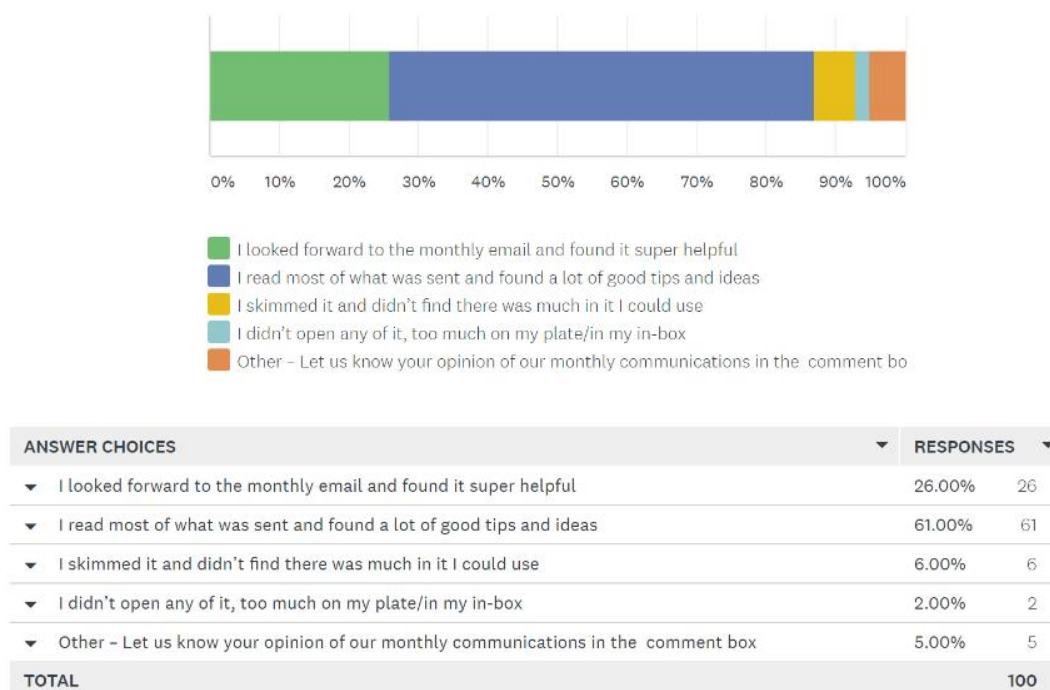


Figure 2.0: Reflections on email communications for the 2019 – 2020 Learning Challenge.

The primary feedback provided on the email communications for moving forward into the 2020 – 2021 Learning Challenge is to keep the email communications short and sweet. Many educators responded that they would prefer lists with hyperlinks to support deeper learning and discovery when needed but prefer short and to the point email bodies. Further, many educators are on Twitter and have found the TMO Twitter communications throughout the school year to provide a lot of great resources and communications in an easy to digest and accessible way. Another great suggestion emerged from these comments – to provide a regular highlight of what educators participating in the challenge are doing with their classes. The hope behind this would be to share resources, collaborate, and to celebrate success stories as they unfold in the Learning Challenge.

Question Three:

If you have any comments about the kinds of resources that would best support your efforts with outdoor teaching going forward, please share them with us here. All suggestions welcome.

74% of survey respondents commented on what types of resources and communications they would like to receive, the primary resources requested fall into three wide ranging categories:

- Curriculum (32%)
- Place-consciousness (25%)
- Ready-made activities (14%)

Approximately 32% of respondents indicated that they would like to receive communications and resources that have direct links to either curriculum or educational pedagogy that supports outdoor learning. The respondents primary demand for curricular resources were largely to support cross-curricular learning opportunities. For example, many educators wanted to apply literacy and numeracy lessons in an outdoor learning context but lacked the resources to do so. Further, many educators highlighted a desire to have language specific resources and offerings in English, French & Spanish. TMO has recently begun the process of making resources bilingual and this request further demonstrates the demand for outdoor learning resources for a French immersion, or Francophone audience. Another area of request for curricular based resources was to draw direct links between outdoor learning activities and each provinces' curricular outcomes at each grade level in each subject. More specific to BC was a suggestion for resources linking the Core Competencies and outdoor learning, as well as the First People's Principles of Learning to outdoor learning. Further suggestions targeted a demand for resources that supported the benefits of outdoor learning through contemporary educational pedagogy, David Sobel was one suggested example. This leads nicely into the next category, place-consciousness.

Approximately 25% of respondents suggested resources centered on place-conscious ideology. These demands largely spoke to a need for outdoor learning resources to be made available for specific geographic regions and for specific constructs of place. To address this desire in future, collaboration, and networking with local outdoor learning providers across Canada to obtain access to region specific resources or to connect Learning Challenge participants with locally created outdoor learning resources is needed.

The final category at approximately 14% is ready made activities. Many educators surveyed suggested a desire to have lists of ready-to-go activities, the primary demand was activities that are easy to implement with very little supplies in the average school yard. There was an additional request for ideas and resources on winter specific outdoor learning activities.

Question Four:

We love to hear success stories and the impact on students. Please share a few highlights from your Learning Challenging experience. What did you do and what reaction/ effect did you see among students?

A high number of the impacts on student learning throughout the learning challenge speak to the benefits of using outdoor learning as a vehicle to increase student engagement through exploration. Many educators wrote in their reflections that regular outdoor learning engaged their students in asking questions, that led into student

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centered learning and inquiry. For example, one educator and their learners “adopted a tree that [they] studied and observed throughout the year”, while another had students “explore how to use snow to break ice” during a winter walk.

Many respondents noted that students became better self-regulators, more engaged in their learning, and more immersed in the school community. As one educator writes:

“students benefited so much! Here are the ways: self-regulation and understanding how nature can be calming, sense of wonder and connection to big ideas, movement and understanding concept of space, loving nature in its patterns of weather and seasons, observation and awakening all the senses, sharing the experience with others!”.

Another educator witnessed “students that might typically have had to be pulled out or receive alternative programming were able to have a positive fully immersed and productive school year”. Finally, another educator reflected that their “winter camping trips for both Middle and Senior school to Espanola were full and the students really enjoyed the [winter camping] challenge”.

Many educators found ways to integrate the curriculum into their outdoor learning. Most notably are educators who engaged their learners in cross-curricular learning opportunities through their outdoor learning. One educator engaged students in a science, math, and language project that “explor[ed] the elements. Diverting water flows from the snow melt” while another educator engaged their class in “observing a tree throughout the seasons [combining] math, science and art in each session”.

During the pandemic and transition to remote learning, many educators who had developed routines with their classes surrounding outdoor learning had high engagement in outdoor learning lessons throughout remote delivery. One educator reflects:

“I think the work has paid off during this time at home. I have students who are regularly emailing me about the outside adventures they are having and even have some kiddos sending me videos of the birds in their backyards. In reflection on the year, many kids wrote that being outside and visiting our local park was their favorite part of grade 5.”

When students chose to integrate outdoor learning into their home life, this is a significant indicator of success.

In summation many educators reflected on the increased happiness, community building, and increased engagement that outdoor learning had on their classes. Many educators highlighted in their reflections that families readily and excitedly took up outdoor learning activities during remote delivery, many families understood the benefit this had not only for their children but for the entire family unit.

Question Five:

We are keen to grow participation in the Learning Challenge specifically and in outdoor learning generally. What suggestions do you have for expanding our reach to more educators/teachers, schools, school boards, etc.

79% of respondents provided helpful feedback for next years' Learning Challenge the majority of this feedback falls into four categories:

- Increasing accessibility & reducing barriers (25%)
- Networking (24%)
- Social distancing from four walls (20%)
- Communications/ social media (8%)

The 25% of feedback for increasing accessibility & reducing barriers spoke to increasing access to professional development opportunities either in person or online to equip educators with more tools and skills for outdoor learning. Another suggestion in this category was for greater support for linking the benefits of outdoor learning to the curriculum to garner more administrative support in school communities that may not be fully supportive of outdoor learning at present. The final suggestion in this category was a demand for greater resources that focused on outdoor learning in the school yard or urban environments. This request surrounding accessibility also spoke to a need to have further discussions with Learning Challenge participants to dismantle the harmful idea that outdoor learning must look a specific way. Instead we must replace this with a new narrative that celebrates all outdoor learning, no matter the venue that it occurs in.

Another suggestion for the 2020 – 2021 TMO Learning Challenge was to increase networking and community within the regions and schools that are participating in the challenge. Many educators suggested having regional delegates that assisted in coordinating outdoor learning activities within learning communities and school districts. These suggestions spoke to a desire among educators to connect with other liked minded individuals and to better support outdoor learning in their immediate school environment through collaboration and outdoor learning working teams.

20% of respondents suggested that TMO take action on many of the ideas put forward in Take Me Outside's *Physical Distancing from Four Walls* June blog post, this primarily being advocating for national implementation of outdoor education as a proactive response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Many educators felt that outdoor learning provides a safe way for learners, and educators to transition back to school come the fall. Many feel that the time to advocate and create better policy surrounding outdoor learning and its value to learners of all ages is now!

8% of respondents suggested that communications and social media be utilized as a tool for sharing resources and building community for educators participating in the Learning Challenge. Many educators indicated an interest in being a part of social media groups created for this challenge. There was also an interest expressed in having online based discussions throughout the Learning Challenge.

“The biggest thing I noticed was that students really looked forward to going outside. Students would, sometimes daily, ask when we were going outside next.”

– 2019/20 TMO Learning Challenge Participant.

Question Six:

Do you think you will participate in the Learning Challenge next year?

An overwhelming 97% of respondents intend to participate in the 2020 – 2021 TMO Learning Challenge. The 3% who are not going to participate are retiring in the 2019 – 2020 school year but hope to remain otherwise engaged in outdoor learning in whatever way they can! This indicates a 100% retention rate of educators who participated in this years’ Learning Challenge.

“Many teachers who would not have gone out normally decided to teach outside in creative ways.”

– 2019/20 TMO Learning Challenge Participant.

Moving Forward

Overall, the positive impact made by the 2019 – 2020 TMO Learning Challenge reverberated outwards overflowing into the daily life of many learners and their families throughout the transition to remote delivery of education across Canada in response to the Coronavirus pandemic. At a time when many wanted to engage their learners in continuing with their studies, outdoor learning was there ready to be implemented by those who had spent time earlier in the school year carefully immersing their learners in outdoor learning. As the TMO Learning Challenge enters its second year of implementation, it is important this passion carries forward, and that this moment to implement outdoor learning in a meaningful way is fully realized. The following list summarizes the key learnings from the 2019 – 2020 survey to assist in illuminating a path forward.

- Short, concise email communications.
- Social media-based discussions, communications & resources.
- Regularly featuring or high lighting the good work happening in the Learning Challenge as it is unfolding.
- Resources in French and English targeting both language learning & immersion classes.

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- Resources for cross-curricular learning opportunities – combining outdoor learning with developing numeracy and literacy skills.
- Explicit articles & texts linking the benefits of outdoor learning to contemporary educational pedagogy, example David Sobel.
- Integration of place-conscious pedagogy into resources specific for each place where outdoor learning is occurring. People want to interact and respond appropriately to their local context.
- Winter specific resources & activities.
- Ready-made outdoor learning activities that can occur in the typical school yard, low material requirements.
- Networking & community building opportunities locally and regionally.
- Diversity of resources for implementing outdoor learning that target curricular competencies.
- Connections of outdoor learning to BC's Core Competencies & First People's Principles of Learning.
- Increasing outreach & engagement in a secondary school setting.
- Professional development opportunities.
- Re-imaging Schools, developing national policies and protocols for outdoor learning in response to the pandemic.

“Students love being outside. I want to do it more.”

– 2019/20 TMO Learning Challenge Participant.