

The NATURE BUS



Founder's Educational Philosophy

A reflection on the values, experiences, and integrated approach to learning that shaped The Nature Bus Microschool

By Suzanne Moss

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From my earliest memories, I knew I was different - not in a way that felt lonely or unsafe, but in a way that felt deeply supported and secure. I was raised in a home that celebrated individuality, optimism, and resilience. I never felt ashamed of this unique upbringing; I felt fortunate. That gift came from my mother, who fiercely and lovingly taught me to see difference as strength. She raised me with an unwavering belief that life is a gift meant to be lived fully and thoughtfully. That early foundation shaped not only who I am as a person, but how I understand children, learning, and what education should be.

I always knew I would become a teacher. As a child, I played school endlessly. As a teenager, I taught swimming, then led programs, supervising peers before I was even an adult myself. Teaching felt instinctive. In college, studying elementary education and educational psychology only deepened that calling. I immersed myself in the work of Maria Montessori, Rudolf Steiner, Jean Piaget, John Dewey, Lev Vygotsky, Benjamin Bloom, Howard Gardner, and many others - thinkers who dedicated their lives to understanding how children learn best. I was fascinated by their insights, and equally aware of their limitations. Even then, I was not interested in following one philosophy wholesale. I was interested in truth - what genuinely works for children.

For my senior capstone, I wrote *My Educational Philosophy*. I earned the highest possible marks, along with a comment from my professor that stayed with me: "You will never be happy being a classroom teacher. Your ideas are idealistic and will not work in the current school

system.” He was right about one thing - my ideas were different. But he was wrong about the rest.

I did become a classroom teacher. With an endorsement in Gifted and Talented Education, I taught a self-contained gifted classroom where students had already mastered grade-level content. I was given professional autonomy and I used it fully. We went beyond rote learning into analysis, synthesis, evaluation, and creation. We learned outdoors whenever possible. We went into the community for firsthand experiences instead of relying on outdated textbooks. I watched children thrive when learning felt real, challenging, and alive.

Then I became a mother, and everything sharpened.

When I observed what compulsory schooling would require of my own child, I felt a deep conflict. My son, already an advanced reader, would be required to move at a pace that ignored his readiness and curiosity. I worried about boredom, disengagement, and the quiet harm that occurs when children are forced to wait instead of allowed to grow.

Like my mother before me, I became a mother lion.

I joined the early homeschooling movement - at a time when it was controversial and legally uncertain. Alongside other highly educated parents, we advocated, organized, and built learning communities so our children could learn together, safely and legally. I served as the certified teacher overseeing progress and accountability. Those years reinforced what I already believed: children flourish when education is responsive, relational, and rooted in real life. Throughout my career - as a teacher, a mother, and an advocate, I have remained deeply committed to children who are not well served by one-size-fits-all schooling, especially bright, capable learners who need depth, challenge, and meaning. Teaching to the “middle” or the “bottom third” is common. Teaching children as individuals is rare - and essential.

My philosophy is simple, though not simplistic:

Every child deserves an education that is well-matched to who they are.

That belief is the foundation of The Nature Bus Microschool.

I do not reject established educational philosophies. On the contrary, I deeply respect them. Montessori offers unparalleled tools for concrete-to-abstract mastery, especially in mathematics. Waldorf reminds us of the power of beauty, rhythm, storytelling, and emotional safety. Reggio Emilia honors children’s questions and the value of long-term, integrated projects. Forest Schools affirm what I have always known - nature is essential to healthy physical, emotional, and academic development.

But no single philosophy is sufficient on its own.

I intentionally take the best parts of these approaches - and leave behind what does not serve children well. We use Montessori math materials, but outdoors. We embrace a Waldorf-like calm and reverence for childhood, without delaying academics. We follow children's interests through Reggio-inspired projects, while maintaining clear skill progression and academic responsibility. We are nature-based every day, like forest schools, while also providing strong literacy and numeracy instruction in many different nature settings, not just one place. What makes our model truly distinct is not rejection - it is integration, grounded in purpose. The Nature Bus Microschool is mobile by design. Learning is not confined to one building. Children move through forests, fields, farms, libraries, museums, trails, waterways, and community spaces. Nature is not an occasional supplement - it is part of the daily rhythm. And the community is not something children prepare for someday; it is something they participate in now.

Our days unfold gently and intentionally. Mornings begin with a peaceful nature hike—observational, mindful, and unhurried. Core academics follow: reading, writing, and mathematics taught with rigor, responsiveness, and respect for individual readiness. Children move ahead when they are ready, never rushed and never held back. Afternoons bring mixed-age, project-based learning rooted in children's genuine questions, integrating science, STEAM, social studies, art, music, and environmental stewardship. And on Wandering Wednesdays, learning expands even further into the community through meaningful, behind-the-scenes experiences that create lasting "core memories."

The emotional tone of the school matters deeply to me. Teachers are calm, soft-spoken, patient, and fully present. Childhood is honored. The environment is intentionally peaceful, predictable, and humane. Social skills, kindness, and cooperation are taught explicitly and gently. Wonder is protected.

This is not education as confinement. It is education as belonging.

I believe children struggle in many traditional settings not because they dislike learning, but because they sense - correctly - that real life is happening elsewhere. Locking children indoors for most of their waking hours, for years on end, disconnects them from the world they are meant to understand.

At The Nature Bus Microschool, children grow up as part of the world. They leave academically prepared, emotionally grounded, confident in their abilities, and deeply connected to nature and community. And, quietly, they come to understand what I learned as a child myself - that being different, when done with intention and care, is something to celebrate.

