



TDSB/OISE Action Research Team Research Summary

Introducing the Teacher-Researcher, Students & School: Nancy Gillis, Cresthaven Public School

This action research was initially conducted with my Grade 3/4 class in the 2024-2025 school year. It focused on the school's Nature Study Area. The area is approximately 200 square metres and is filled with over 100 native trees and shrubs planted in 2023. In the fall of 2024, a number of broken trees within the space were observed. Addressing this issue became the basis for this action research. The Nature Study Area continued to be an action research area of focus in the 2025-2026 school year. Students from the initial cohort were invited to continue with their work this time through participation in a Nature Study Leadership Club.

Research Question(s):

Year 1: *How can I help develop students' sense of care and understanding for the school's nature study area?*

Year 2: *How can opportunities for leadership and action deepen students' understanding and care for the Nature Study Area?*

Circular Implementation:

YEAR 1 - Phase 1: The first phase involved making observations in the Nature Study Area. First using a notice/wonder format, next sorting observations into positives and negatives and last beginning to think about what we might do to solve identified problems.

Phase 2: As students began to identify problems, more background knowledge was identified as an area of need. Students began to build their knowledge by learning about the importance of trees and the benefits of urban mini forests.

Phase 3: Comparing our Nature Study Area to an urban mini forest was part of the next phase. We also looked at local examples of reforestation attempts (through photographs and in person) to observe strategies used to protect young trees and shrubs.

Phase 4: The first 3 stages left us with a final question in the 2024-2025 school year. *What actions will we take to help the school (and community) grow their understanding and care for the Nature Study Area?* Students determined their action projects and worked on them until the end of the year.

YEAR 2: Outreach projects intended for classrooms and the schoolyard were completed in the 2024-25 school year but not implemented/installed. Students who were involved in the Year 1 Action Research were invited to continue with implementing this work in Year 2 through their involvement in a Nature Study Leadership Club in 2026. Students worked in small groups to prepare a short program for Grade 1-5 classrooms where they would identify the location of the Nature Study area, its importance and some of the ways students can help care for it. Leaders then led classes in a BINGO game focused on trees and shrubs in the Nature Study area. Outdoor interactive projects were

installed. Club members supported teachers in exploring the Nature Study Area and interactive projects in the space with their classes.



Data Collection Strategies:

Data collection included a number of work samples, surveys, summary of learning tasks, notes from class discussions and photographs documenting student work, especially when doing collaborative work, such as on wipe boards or post-it notes that are more difficult to collect/save.

Insights from this Action Research Study

Throughout this process, students shifted from wanting to create a list of rules of “what not to do” and cordon off the trees and shrubs to learning more deeply about the value of the space and how it can be both protected and enjoyed. Each phase in this process helped inform the next “big question” that we explored. At the end of Year 1, students worked in small groups on a variety of action projects intended to help share their knowledge of the space with other classes and the community so they in turn would build their care and understanding of our school’s nature study area. In Year 2, students focused on building leadership skills as they implemented the action projects. They were also filled with new ideas for further ways to teach others about this special place in the schoolyard that could be implemented at a later date.

Other Notes:

Working with staff is also an area of interest for this researcher. Year 3 may look at teachers’ use of the Nature Study Area with their classes and how to build their capacity with this.

Info about the TDSB/OISE Action Research Team can be found on the [TDSB](#) and [OISE](#) websites