



Tips and Strategies for Teaching Outdoors

Compiled by Meredith Rivlin of Oxbow Farm & Conservation Center, 2016

1. Designate a gathering area and a signal to gather so that students know where to go, and when.
2. Set up clear boundaries. In a classroom, boundaries are very obvious; once the walls are removed, it is necessary to specify the boundaries and ensure they are clear to students.
3. When addressing your group of students, place yourself facing the sun so that the group doesn't have to.
4. Create semi-structured learning opportunities: have a game plan but allow for adjustments and stretch or shrink your plan based on time and group interest.
5. Keep your end goal for the lesson/activity in mind; the path may change, but you can still arrive at the same destination.
6. Follow curiosity! Engaged students will learn more.
7. Value the teachable moments. If student attention is drawn elsewhere, don't ignore it! From the tiny lady bug on a leaf to an impressive hawk flying above, utilize these as teachable moments.
8. Model engaged behavior. If necessary, step out of your comfort zone by getting dirty and staying present.
9. Allow space for students to answer questions, even if they (or you) don't know the answers. Ask engaging open-ended questions such as: "What makes you think that?" "What do you know about ____?" "What do you notice?"
10. Orient yourselves and students to the space using all five of your senses. Use map-making, scavenger hunts, and free time for exploration to help students feel comfortable and connected in the space in order to get prepared for learning and focus.
11. Empower students to do any physical task that they are capable of.
12. Use fantasies, make-believe and storytelling as these are inherently child-driven ways of interacting with the natural world. Through creative play, stories, "magic," and anthropomorphism of plants and animals, children develop the ability to understand concepts and develop an emotional concern for the natural world.
13. Have fun!

Resources:

1. Life Lab, Outdoor Management. <http://www.lifelab.org/wp-content/uploads/2003/04/OutdoorClassroomManagement.pdf>
2. Childhood and Nature: Design Principles for Educators. David Sobel. Stenhouse Publishers. 2008.
3. Coyote's Guide to Connecting with Nature. Jon Young, Ellen Haas and Evan McGown. Owl Link Media Corporation, 2010.
4. The Growing Classroom: Garden-Based Science and Nutrition Activity Guide. 4th edition. Robert Jaffe, Gary Appel, and Whitney Cohen. Developed by Life Lab. National Gardening Association, 2014.