

OUTDOOR EDUCATION METHODS

TIPS AND TECHNIQUES FOR STRUCTURING YOUR PROGRAM

- Arrive early - no less than 10 min. before program
- Get to know your participants - this will help personalize the program while you are conducting it. You need to use the participants names and build on their past experiences.
- If necessary, collect fees from participants.
- Start on time - this is a tough one because there will always be stragglers. You owe it to the ones who do show up on time to begin no later than 5 min. after the posted start time.
- Explain who you are and your background. Go through participant names again if necessary. Begin by saying "On behalf of the _____ (name of agency), I would like to welcome you to _____ (name of program). My name is _____ and I will be your leader today..."
- Set expectations. What the group will be doing, where going, how far, how long, clarify rules if necessary. "Any questions?"
- make sure everyone has necessary equipment

THE PROGRAM ITSELF - A FEW TIPS

- Stay in control of the group.
- Keep participants comfortable - be aware of wind, sun, and other distractions
- Use teachable moments effectively.
- Be conservatively safe in all situations. Do not risk participant safety....ever!
- Speak so everyone can hear.
- Involve the entire group - bring everyone into discussions and activities.
- Use a variety of techniques which address differing learning styles.
- Summarize/conclude the major points of what the group learned.
- Return on time ! This is a cardinal rule unless *everyone* in the group agrees on a later return time.
- Evaluate the program with the participants. You may use a written form or go through a verbal process. Be sure to allow adequate time for evaluation.
- Remind participants about upcoming programs. This sparks interest and maintains word of mouth publicity.
- Return all equipment so it is ready for the next program.

INCORPORATING TEACHING INTO TRIPS & TRAIL OUTINGS

- Prepare
 - have a lesson plan written down (use the Lesson Plan Format)
 - always have back-up plans
 - use resources, such as people and publications
- Be Deliberate
 - know what you want to accomplish and how each of your activities fits in with your goals

- deliberately model attitudes and behavior that are ethical and safe (both physically and emotionally)
- know your topic and teaching strategies
- tell your audience who you are and why you are qualified to teach your topic
- dress appropriately and neatly. Outdoor educators are professionals too!
- Set the Expectation to Learn
 - program information and marketing should show that learning is a goal
 - use your attitude, body language, and spoken language to send the message that learning is enjoyable and worthwhile
 - have the group list their expectations and give ideas of how both you and they can meet those expectations. Get them to be specific, identify the following as a group:
 - "How will the group recognize potential learning situations?"
 - "How will participants share their knowledge and ask questions?"
 - "What can the group expect to see on the trail?"
 - tell the group your expectations, "I expect that we'll be safe, have fun, and learn...."
 - if your program will not meet a person's expectations, tell that person in advance
- Know Your Audience
 - ask about their experience and knowledge so you can "start where they are, not where you want them to be"
 - verbally acknowledge that they already have some knowledge and encourage them to share it, some learn best when they can teach others
- Teach Appropriate Topics at Appropriate Times
 - people learn best when their basic needs are met, make sure people are not feeling threatened or unsafe (physically or emotionally) or un-sure of what will happen. That is, use "perceived risk" properly.
 - choose or alter the "classroom" environment to support learning
- Make sure the group can see and hear you well
- Clearly explain what will happen over the course of the program
- Make sure the group is not too hot, cold, tired, distracted, or hungry
- Move the group if needed
- Give the group time for bathroom breaks or just breaks to move around a bit if needed
- Review and Reflect
 - have people share what they've learned
 - remind them what they've learned - "Today we learned..."
 - make sure you emphasize broad concepts and relationships over details
 - address people's emotional reactions and feelings if appropriate
 - tell people where they can get more information if they wish to learn more
 - give ideas for activities they can do on their own
 - thank your participants

OTHER CONCEPTS OF EFFECTIVE LEARNING

- All learning must build upon past learning which the student has acquired. It also must relate to past experience. Find out what the students' current understanding is, then you can progress from there. This can be done through questioning, introductions, etc.
- The language used within the instructional setting must be at the level of the student. In addition, students need to be provided the opportunities to communicate (oral, written, etc.) among themselves to formulate understandable definitions and understand concepts in their own way.
- Learning through experience is most effective.
- Emphasize concepts rather than factual information. (reduce memorization)
- The application and connection to the life of the students must be evident.
- The incorporation of the "sense of wonder" (cool, neat, wow, etc) into lessons is important in helping motivate students.
- Instruction must not follow just one style of learning, but address all learning styles (whole brain learning). ie. incorporate lecture, labs, group work, readings, discussion, etc.
- The instructional environment must be supportive while providing effective, immediate feedback.
- There needs to be a high expectation of success. Though, this success must be attainable.
- Curriculum needs to be flexible and base upon quality rather than quantity.
- Note: If what is being taught is not more "intelligible, plausible, or fruitful," than what the student currently believes, then they will not change their beliefs.
- Explain the creative, imaginative, and artistic side to gaining an understanding of the environment
- Coursework needs to incorporate the social implications of the topic being studied.
- Students must be taught how to learn and realize that they are responsible for their own learning.
- Concept maps are effective visual tools in helping understand concepts and how they interact.
- Begin concept instruction with a problem which must be solved.