



RWL Case-Study - Wilderness Awareness

A one-year programme with schools (once a month 1 day outdoors) in a nearby forest based on ancient knowledge and teaching skills. It aims on connecting children with nature, the group and themselves.

Country

Germany

Name of the programme?

Wilderness Awareness - Classroom Nature ("Klassenzimmer Natur"), implemented by the Wilderness School „WildnisWissen“.

Age of the children involved?

In this programme they mainly work with primary school children, but other programmes of Wilderness Awareness are open for everyone, children and adults.

What is the frame?

Restoring nature connection and therefore health and happiness in our communities.

What are the goals of the programme?

The aim is to inspire children for nature, to get to know nature better and make connections to themselves, to their environment and to other people. Evolving from the experiences outside the aim is to reflect on the own lifestyle (e.g. do I want to eat meat or not, what happens with the garbage we produce etc). The underlying idea is that students are discovering (outside) nature and through that form their own (inner) nature and develop within the frame of their community/ classroom their own personality, aiming for a more sustainable life. A goal connected with all this is that the teacher and the students have fun and enjoy their time outside.



Which values are promoted in the programme?

a) according to the hand model (self-transcending values)

- respect for nature and care for the state of our planet
- respect for future generations



b) according to PIRC/ Schwartz' values map

Unity with nature – Pleasure - Sense of belonging - Honouring of elders – Humble – Daring - A world of beauty – Wisdom – Curious - Inner harmony - A spiritual life

Which competencies are developed that empower learners to shape a sustainable future?

Critical Thinking	Interpretation, Thinking	Students will be able to identify connections and relationships (they will determine and report links and relationships between phenomena, events and concepts of different disciplines. They will understand the systemic nature, identifying similarities and differences, consistencies and inconsistencies, causes and effects).
Dealing with change	Flexibility	Students will be able to use their sustainability linked skills and knowledge in everyday situations.
You & Me & All the World around us	World Problems, Relationship	Students will be able to recognize their relationship to nature. Having nature experiences of different kinds will encourage them to reflect on their relationship to nature.

Which of the specific science concepts does the programme relate to?

All of the four science concepts chosen in the Real World Learning project appear in the programme: **Cycles, Change, Stability** and **Energy flow**. But it deals also with basic concepts like system thinking and balance. For example in the sit spot, one of the core routines of the programme, the **change** happening just on one spot throughout the year can be experienced by the students in a very direct way. The complex, interconnected ecology can teach an immense amount of facts, connections of processes, insights and skills and enhances the connections inside the brain through its natural variability.



These connections are the basis for learning to behave and act more flexible, creative and conscious, therefore also more sustainable. The programme lays the foundations for students to find out what they are exactly interested in and to deepen their knowledge by their own.

Which ecological problems are involved, if any, and how?

It relates to all the issues, but does not have one of the problems in focus.



Transferability: Which different areas of life are included and how?

Generally speaking, all different areas of life are included in the programme as a whole: the global society, the learners community, the natural and the non-natural environment as well as the learners themselves. As an example, let's look at the activity of making fire without matches. The ability to make a fire was essential and elementary for people's lives until not so long ago. Through fire making, learning can occur immediately in two areas of life: in **the natural environment** through learning about basic physical concepts, and about **themselves** through experiencing their physical body and their emotions and attitudes from being in a natural setting away from non-natural distractions. The aspect of **the non-natural environment** can be explored further on through the change that the invention of lighters and matches brought to our lifestyles, or the topic of heating with coal and the effect it has on global warming. This connects last but not least to issues of global justice and environmental problems (**the global society**), which can be discussed over a hot tea around the fire they've just made.



What educational strategies (learning models, methods, etc.) are used in your programme?

The Wilderness Awareness, or Art of Mentoring, is the underlying concept of this programme. The educational methods of Wilderness Awareness are based on the facts that children are naturally curious: for animals, connections, using materials for own ideas etc. and that they love to do self-responsible activities connected to their own life. This curiosity is raised, focussed or supported through mentoring which helps the students to find to their questions and their own answers in a creative and self-directed way. This happens in the group, but also individually. Curiosity is the key for learning and a catalysator for acting. The experiences are always reflected in the group to integrate the information. When the students discovers gaps of knowledge, it is again a new catalysator for learning and the cycle of learning begins again. Through that a sustainable system is created: questions are asked, information are researched, solutions are experimented and answers are formulated and realized. The process is accompanied by experienced mentors – adults and Youth Scouts who are role models for the younger kids.

A main concept of learning is to learn on natural rhythms, e.g. the natural cycles, seasons, energy flows. The Medicine Wheel or "8 Shields" is the underlying concept. They are on the one hand applied to the direct experiences which the students make outdoors, but also on a meta-level how the learning process is structured: starting with inspiration, then activating, focussing, making a break/digesting the information, gathering and sharing, reflecting, integrating, opening for the new. This includes different levels: knowledge of nature/ecology, social competencies, personal skills and sensory awareness, cultural and community aspects, questions of using, protecting and natural resources.

Several core routines are part of the programme, some of them are:

- sit spot (= a place on which you sit and discover nature from various perspectives and learn to



enlarge your attention)

- thanking (in the group or alone to raise awareness for what we can be thankful for)
- nature-diary (to remember your experiences through writing/drawing)
- circle and storytelling (to share and reflect in the group)



How is the programme evaluated? How do you know the programme achieved its educational goals?

The programme "Classroom Nature" itself has not been scientifically evaluated, but the concept of Wilderness Awareness has been focus of a diploma study¹.

The feedback from students and teachers gives many hints, that the programme achieves its goals: The class collective works much better together! They are more focussed, interested and form a community.

The Art of Mentoring derives from the teachings of indigenous people all over the world. The fact alone that this has been kept until today gives a good hint that it achieves its educational goals.

Does the programme drive a behavioural change? How do you know that?

The programme is run during a whole year, once a month for one day with the same class/school. Such a long learning process necessarily triggers some changes. The main aim is that through making connections with nature, other people and yourself, your behaviour and awareness is changed to a more sustainable one. The impacts of this natural, original way of learning of making connections is also supported by neurobiology and environmental psychology research.² To what we are emotionally connected to (=what we love) is also what we protect. Through the awareness which is raised for the outside nature, also the awareness for the inside is raised – this brings

¹Erleben, Anja (2008), *Einheimisch werden in der Natur*, Diploma thesis at the University of Applied Science Eberswalde

²Hüther, Gerald (2006), *Bedienungsanleitung für ein menschliches Gehirn*. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht.



human beings to the inner decision to make decisions about their lifestyle and life standard which are more sustainable.³

The feedback of parents and teachers who saw their kids before and after the year show that the participation in the programme changed the children. Many of them who took part in the programme also become mentors themselves (through taking part in another programme, the Young Scouts Camp) and share their knowledge further – another sustainable way of learning.

Describe the programme.

During one year, mentors accompany a class for one day per month outdoors. The content is adjusted to the needs of the school and the curricula of the region, related to the subjects of natural sciences, local studies and history. The programme is run in different schools in Germany and also in Poland. The programme is paid by the school, the parents or through external funding.

The classroom is a natural forest close to the school, where the self-directed and group-oriented learning takes place. It enhances connections to the environment, its inhabitants and their interactions. This happens through sensual perception and different creative and intuitive processes. The participants, students and teachers, become aware of their own pictures of nature, they experience nature as the basis of life and themselves as part of the natural network. On the side of practical knowledge, the students deal with the behaviour of animals, their rhythms, plants and their medicinal use, materials for fire, shelters or boats, regenerational times of nature, wheater, reading traces – and also form an inner knowledge how these things are in a connection with each other. The wisdom and knowledges of the indigenous people are combined with modern scientific findings in the programme. This happens through the above mentioned core routines, through sensory awareness games, research in books etc. Thereby, the 50:50 principle is applied: Though the day is planned the mentor in advance, only 50% of the time should be used as it was planned. This ensures to follow the curiosity of the children and give space for discoveries and unexpected teachings and activities as they happen in nature.

As a result, the students are more balanced and able to deal with challenges through a positive attitude. The programme motivates them to reflect on their own experiences and background upon questions like: How do we want to live? How much is enough?

“The children come home, and when they before wanted to play inside, because inside are all the electricity plugs, now they tell: Mama, can we go into the forest?” Joscha Grolms, Classroom-Nature facilitator, Wilderness School WildnisWissen

Included resources / materials / tools.

- Jon Young: 8 Shields <http://www.8shields.org/node/38>
- Wildnisschule WildnisWissen: <http://www.wildniswissen.de/schulklassen/479-begleitung-einer-klasse>
- Here you can watch a video (in german) about “Classroom Nature” <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RAeLoltOBdE&feature=youtu.be>

³ Young, Jon (2008): Nature Connection. <http://www.8shields.org/node/38>



Photos or videos

Pictures from wildniswissen.de and Anne Wiebelitz