

Flow Learning

Guide to choosing activities, games and lessons for varying levels of attention and energy

Sharing Nature with Children introduces Joseph's unique approach to education called **Flow Learning**. This teaching approach has proven extremely useful when teaching groups of varying ages and energy levels outdoors and can be transferred into any other topic as well.

The goal of Flow Learning is to help teachers tune into a group's level of enthusiasm (or boredom!) and sensitively lead them into being energized and focused students. As Joseph writes: "Through years of trial and error, I developed a set of insights into teaching that now play a central role in my work. You may already be using these principles, yourself. Perhaps you, too, stumbled across them intuitively, as I did, and perhaps you know them by another name. In any case, they can make your nature classes more dynamic, fun and deeply inspiring. Since becoming aware of these principles, I've been able to accomplish my highest goals as a nature educator with amazing consistency. In clarifying the principles for myself and others, I found that they fit together in a wonderfully systematic, flexible way. I call this collection of methods Flow Learning because it describes a way to use nature awareness activities in a flowingly purposeful, directional way. The beauty of Flow Learning is that it shows you how to begin where your students are, then rouse their enthusiastic participation and guide them, step by step, through increasingly sensitive activities and deep experiences."

Flow Learning has four stages: 1. Awaken Enthusiasm 2. Focus Attention 3. Direct Experience 4. Share Inspiration

Stage 1 - Awaken Enthusiasm

Begins with games and activities that are fun or silly. They are designed to help the whole group relax and open their hearts to the event. "When you lead nature outings, it's extremely important to get off to a good start, because people generally decide within the first few minutes whether they are going to have a good time. By starting with lively games, you're far more likely to get the group's full participation."

Stage 2 - Focus Attention

Helps develop calm and receptivity. It creates a bridge between the excitement and fun of the activities used in stage 1 and the quiet focused attention needed in stage 3. These activities focus our attention on one of our senses and challenge the participants to attend carefully to what they are encountering. Scavenger hunts,

micro hikes or going for a barefoot walk are good examples of activities that work well here. “Now you can begin to bring that energy to a fine focus, with games that help people become calmly, enthusiastically attentive.”

Stage 3 - Direct Experience

Expands upon the attentiveness that has been fostered and now immerses the participants in the world around them. For me, this is the moment when a Learning Language comes into full swing. It is the moment on a hike when you have taught your students to “splush” and have a mixed flock of birds fly in. It is the moment when children are free to put their skills of observation to full use and begin making discoveries. However, it does not need to be focused on intentional teaching. One of my favourite Direct Experience activities is called Stalker, which involves children moving silently through the forest. “Direct Experience activities are designed to intensify one or more sense-elements of the nature experience... They help us discover a deep, inner sense of belonging and understanding.”

Stage 4 - Sharing Inspiration

Takes the power of what has been encountered and learned and provides the opportunity for students to share their experiences and thoughts. This could be through, art, writing, creating a play, or making a craft. It can also be as simple as sharing a conversation. It is also the springboard for positive action. Maybe after a hike your class would like to clean up garbage along a trail or organize a planting of native species. “Now is a good time, to let people talk about their earlier experiences... Sharing reinforces a sense of wonder and draws a group together.”

To review, Flow Learning starts with fun games, which lead to activities that challenge the participants to focus their senses with intention, enabling exploration and direct encounters with nature, and that inspire reflection and action. Genius!

Resources:

Sharing Nature with Children - Second Edition, by Joseph Cornell (Dawn Publications, 1998). **Sharing Nature with Children II**, by Joseph Cornell (Dawn Publications, 1989)