Introduction

This document is aimed at rangers, site managers, land owners and others who would like to know more about Teaching in Nature and how they might use the approach in their own context.

What is Teaching in Nature?

Teaching in Nature is a structured approach to professional development in outdoor learning for teachers, which can be adapted for others that work with young people. It supports groups of teachers to work together to use a nearby place that is special for nature to plan, implement and evaluate challenging and fun outdoor learning experiences for their pupils. It combines collaborative, practical and online approaches to support teachers through the next stage in their outdoor learning journey. It matches the experts on the curriculum (e.g. teachers) with the experts on the natural heritage (you!).

Why should I consider Teaching in Nature?

You do not need convinced of the benefits of Outdoor Learning – and, these days, few teachers do either. However, many teachers do lack confidence in their ability to take learning outdoors and Teaching in Nature supports them to face the challenges and push their boundaries.

Teaching in Nature works! In a recent evaluation, all but 3 respondents said their confidence in taking learning outdoors had increased (with the other 3, already fairly confident, remaining the same). In addition, in the year following their involvement in the project, 80% of respondents had continued to take their pupils outdoors for learning and 73% had supported a colleague to do so.

Teaching in Nature can enable more teachers and pupils to use your site, with minimal input from yourself, leaving you free to concentrate on your other work – or other teachers that still need that extra support. You may also learn a lot from the teachers involved, which may influence your own work with young people.

Ok, so how do I do Teaching in Nature?

Unfortunately we do not have the resources to support all teachers or all sites through Teaching in Nature. However, the approach is very flexible and there are things that you can do yourselves.

Our research shows that the three key elements to a successful Teaching in Nature project are: give teachers time; get teachers together to collaborate; and introduce teachers to the people who know and love a place. The approaches that you use will depend on your aims and the resources you have available.

“It was good to see teachers making use of the centre; teaching subjects that are not normally taught here. I was a little concerned that [the project] was seen as a replacement for the Rangers’ educational role, however I think it is more of an addition to what the site can be used for.”

(Ranger Manager)
You could:

- offer a group of local teachers a guided tour of your site. You could make a flyer to email/post to schools highlighting the opportunity;
- during the tour, treat them like any other interest group and avoid demonstrating activities they might do with pupils or recommending activities for specific places;
- resist the temptation, at this point, to hand out teachers’ packs (if available). Giving too much of this sort of support can mean teachers rely too much on it, affirming their view that they cannot offer outdoor learning without an ‘expert’. It is also easier for them to be creative and come up with inspirational, new ideas for pupil activities to do on the site when they have a ‘blank canvas’;
- facilitate collaboration and sharing by offering a room/space for the group of teachers to begin planning how they will use the site with pupils;
- make it as straightforward as possible for teachers to come with their pupils – but don’t be tempted to help them too much!

You may also like to:

- facilitate further collaboration and sharing by instigating an email, Facebook or Glow group, or other form of online communication suited to the group;
- encourage use of the online forum for sharing and collaboration by posing simple questions, sharing things that have happened on site or highlighting relevant research, projects or resources;
- encourage teachers to keep you informed throughout their professional development journey. As well as being useful to know who is on site, you may learn a lot from what the teachers are doing that you can build in to your own work with young people (if applicable);
- consider offering a travel grant to support teachers to come back to your site with their pupils, if possible. The biggest barrier to off-site outdoor learning is often cited as travel. Again, it will be useful for you to gather relevant information on who comes, what they do etc.

Is there anyone I can chat to about setting up a Teaching in Nature project?

Our Teaching in Nature project manager is Sharon Cunningham: sharon.cunningham@snh.gov.uk. Sharon may be able to put you in touch with a site manager or ranger who has taken part in Teaching in Nature before and will be able to draw on her experiences of supporting others through the programme.

“Teaching in Nature allowed teachers access to and experience of the site without being a huge draw on our time - something that is desperately valuable during the busy summer months.”

(NNR Manager)