BEYOND WALLS:  
A STUDY OF NATURE BASED ART EDUCATION

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CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION

Topic of Study

The goal of this study is to examine the effectiveness and impact of Nature-Based Art Education. A school is a place to go for learning, but learning can and must occur beyond built walls as well. Through the traditional establishment of the school building and classroom setting, the educational system has isolated students from the natural world and their immediate surroundings. With this isolation students are provided less opportunity for direct connection to and appreciation for the realm beyond the walls. In a world where the environment is in great jeopardy, technology has encroached on almost every facet of life, consumer and material culture abound, and more children know how to text message than how to climb a tree, it is imperative to not lose sight of the importance of providing children with the opportunity to form a positive relationship with the natural world. It could be argued that the best art curriculum should provide a bridge between inner and outer worlds, simultaneously honoring the development of a child’s love of the earth while developing academic and social competence.

It is believed by some, such as Suzi Gablik (1991) that art and the artist should be on the forefront of the reawakening of a reverence for life and the interrelationships between humans and the natural world. Life is no longer thought of as sacred by some. The earth and its raw materials are destroyed and devoured by the power and money hungry human population. Moving from an art world dominated by individual achievement where the artist is often isolated and seen as a loner, to an art world in which union with community and environment is central is a necessity. An active and practical
dialogue with the natural world needs to replace the currently dominant artistic stance of
distanced observation and passive reflection. If art is created purely as a product of our
current materialistic consumer culture, it is unlikely to reorient our society in any way. A
new way of thinking about and creating art is needed. The issue in the field of art should
no longer be style or context. It should be environmental responsibility (Gablik, 1991).
The art curriculum is a good place to start.

Definitions of Terms

Environmental, Ecological, Place Based, and Community Based Art Education
are all related and come close to being the ideal label for what I am choosing to call
Nature Based Art Education. For my purposes in this study I have chosen to use *Nature
Based Art Education* because it is most suited to my focus on nature as a key part of the
art curriculum. What exactly do I mean by *nature*? According to Merriam Webster
(1999) nature is: 1) the material world, esp. as surrounding humankind and existing
independently of human activities. 2) the natural world as it exists without human beings
or civilization. 3) the elements of the natural world, as mountains, trees, animals, or
rivers. Put simply, Nature-Based Art Education is Art Education involving direct
interaction with some aspect of the natural world. For example, a lesson using Nature
Based Art learning would put children into direct contact with the natural outdoor world
and involve some sort of meaningful interaction with the natural outdoor world. The goal
should not always be to learn *about* the outdoor natural world; instead, the focus should
be on involvement with, awareness of, and forming a personal relationship with and
connection to the outdoor natural environment.
While aspects of Environmental, Ecological, Place Based, and Community Based Art Education fit into my definition of Nature Based Art Education, none of them have a core focus of direct experience with the natural environment. Environmental and Ecological Art Education both focus on curricular ties between art and science with emphasis on environmental activism. While these concerns can be integrated into Nature-Based Art Education, the main difference lies in the necessity to be out of the classroom amongst some form of natural life. Ecological or Environmental Art Education could easily be taught through having the students bring their science texts to art class with them and relating an art lesson to a science lesson on pollution, or having students design t-shirts or posters advocating recycling. Neither of these involves direct hands-on sensory experience with the outdoors. Place Based and Community Based Art Education encourage students to become more aware and active in their immediate surroundings and to draw inspiration from their experiences. This also can fit within the realm of Nature Based Art Education, as the environment is a part of the community and the environment is certainly a place in which the students reside. Neither, however, specifically emphasizes the natural world. People and the built environment fit within Place Based and Community Based Art Education, while in Nature Based Art Education the direct contact with the natural environment is central.

A lesson that would be considered a Nature Based Art lesson (see Appendix A and B for examples) might involve a focus on the relationship humans have with nature as well as the students’ personal relationships with nature. Students may be asked to think critically about and discuss how and why we change nature, how nature changes us, as well as about their personal relationship with nature. Through looking at the work of
Giuseppe Penone, Andy Goldsworthy, Micheal Heizer, Robert Smithson, and Richard Long for example, students could learn about the context of artwork and how and why these artists utilized natural materials and images to create meaningful art expressing a relationship between humans and the natural world. The studio may involve creating an artwork that represents their personal relationship with nature. Possible ways that this could be achieved include alternating nature in a way that is personally meaningful, creating a ‘portrait’ out of natural materials, or finding some way of leaving their mark in nature. The students could utilize whatever materials they would like as long as they incorporate at least some form of natural material they personally have collected from the outdoor environment. In all Nature Based Art lessons, the preservation and health of the environment should be accounted for. There should be no cutting down of forests, spraying toxic chemicals on flowers, or anything that could be harmful to life or the planet.

Rationale

While recently there has been a great deal of literature made available concerning Nature Based learning in general education, very little research exists in the area of Nature Based Art Education. It is my goal to provide awareness of the research that already exists and at the same time bring the ideas from the field of general education into focus enabling their usefulness for art educators today. Within the realm of visual culture receiving heavy attention as an issue in Art Education presently and throughout the past ten years, it is my intention to expand this and veer our direction a bit in order to include the complete sensory experience of the natural environment in the K-12 art curriculum. It is very much ingrained in the minds of teachers and students that school is
an indoor event. It is my goal to advance knowledge and provide inspiration that will lead educators to expand their curricular choices in order to adopt the outdoors; to provide that inner to outer bridge. With this curriculum expansion there also is great potential to increase interdisciplinary relationships. The outdoor environment lends itself well to writing, science, biology, ecology, history… the possible connections are limitless.

There is a movement occurring to reconnect children with nature. This movement, sometimes referred to as the ‘Leave No Child Inside’ movement, has been occurring for decades and involves educational pursuits to help children form a positive relationship with the outdoors and the rethinking of development for the preservation of natural areas (Louv, 2007). Experts in the field of education are certainly contributing to this movement. Howard Gardner (2006) revised his seven intelligences to include an eighth intelligence, the naturalist intelligence. Gardner emphasizes that children may have all or some of the intelligences to different degrees. The naturalist intelligence pertains to heightened senses and ability to see natural connections. Richard Louv (2005) coined the phrase Nature-Deficit Disorder to describe the human costs of alienation from nature. Symptoms of this include diminished use of the senses, attention difficulties, and higher rates of physical and emotional illnesses, indicating that direct exposure to nature is essential for healthy childhood development. David Sobel (2008) advocates for a curriculum that is grounded in the natural landscape, proclaiming that with the testing frenzy caused by NCLB, education has become life dulling and disconnecting. Sobel proposes a reunion of Mother Nature and school, “divorced” since the early 20th century and the Nature Study Movement of the same time. Lowel Monke (2007) advocates for education that is focused not on technology and media, but on social relations,
community and the outdoor environment. David Orr (2004) questions the purposes of education and what society defines as success. He proposes that it is not education that will save us, but a certain kind of education; an education focused on integrity, care, thoughtfulness, reverence, and wisdom. He believes taking learning outdoors is one step that will move education closer to this goal.

“If our concern is for the future, we cannot help but develop a socially responsible environmental art education curriculum in which values and aesthetics are combined in an instrumental manner for the benefit of all” (Ulbricht, 1998. p.34). Art should be made as though the world matters. Art should also be taught as though the world matters. Our environment is in great jeopardy and although many of us would like to ignore this fact it is imperative that something change. Art and education are both powerful tools. Through art education it is possible to regain some of the connectedness with our immediate natural environment we have somehow lost or disregarded.

This chapter has presented a brief introduction to the topic of study, including definitions of terms, a summary of research in the field, as well as a rationale for why this study is meaningful. The following chapter will provide a more in depth and complete overview of the literature addressing this research.
CHAPTER TWO
REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Overview

The rules and standards that education has been built upon have become conventions virtually impossible to alter without ridicule or scorn. In view of the “traditional” school and classroom, classes are broken down into disciplines, the teacher stands at the front of the class, students sit at their desks and listen, and assignments from books or handouts are given out. These are ideas and practices that were formulated long ago, and their history gives us a sense that they are too important to question or alter resulting in a hegemonic hold on our thinking. Doubting and questioning, however, are necessary aspects of growing and improving. Why does the teacher stand at the front of the class? Is it best to have areas of study so separated from one another? Would students gain more by having freedom to move around? …Why do we immediately associate the word learning with a school building and classrooms with four walls? Why the walls? Why the building? Churches and temples are places of worship, but worshiping can occur beyond walls. A school is a place to go for learning, but learning can occur beyond walls. So why has the educational system continued to isolate students from the natural world and their immediate surroundings?

Friends and family members of mine have asked me about my thesis topic. When I tell them I am proposing an Art Education curriculum that is focused on teaching and learning outdoors, most of them look at me as if I have suddenly become an alien speaking a foreign language. They don’t all say it, but I can tell they are thinking it. ‘Outside? How strange. Why would you want to do that?’ Even some of the Art Education faculty I’ve been working under have made comments of me being a ‘girl scout hippie.’ Is it so strange to feel as though people are becoming further and further removed from the natural world and their surroundings? Is it strange to think that in this technology and media obsessed society we live in that maybe it would be beneficial to take a step back
and look somewhere other than into the ‘magical boxes’ we call computers and TVs? Is there not magic beyond the walls of school buildings and beyond the screens of the World Wide Web? Magic that if we continue to see as secondary will be in danger of dying? –personal reflection, April, 2008

There are multiple benefits of an art curriculum based on the outdoors. Natural light is a nutrient humans need to live, when we do not get enough, it can be detrimental to our ability to function and learn. Being outdoors provides children with a personal connection to nature and their surroundings; with this connection comes not only a sense of home and place, but also a renewed interest in the preservation of that place. A movement does exist to get more children outdoors, connect them with nature and teach them about ecology and the environment. Many children are already aware of and understand the environmental factors affecting our world and feel they have a role in helping. Teachers can give them the opportunity to help and can further instill in them a devotion to making the planet a healthy place to live. With the increase in attention to technology and media children are getting consumed and blinded by the artificial light. An art curriculum based on learning outdoors can give children a much needed rest from the bombardment of visual culture. The following areas will be addressed throughout the rest of this chapter: the benefits of being outside, ecological and environmental factors, technology versus nature in education, as well implications for art education.

The Benefits of Being Outside

I’m a painter. I often take walks or go hiking before I paint, and if the weather permits I set up my easel on my back porch. I feel I do my best work when outside, breathing fresh air and immersed in natural light. There is a peace and freedom outside that I don’t feel when painting inside. –person reflection, April, 2008
Lighting

Lighting in schools is often taken for granted and seen as having virtually no impact on learning. The fluorescent lights used and the lack of natural light in most classrooms have a profound affect on students. “Energy- and money-saving concerns have created classroom lighting conditions that foster the ‘sunlight starvation syndrome.’ The light distribution in our schools tends to be so deficient in most parts of the natural spectrum that we may just be fighting an uphill battle, attempting to teach students in ‘the twilight zone.’ It’s time we acknowledge that light is a cooperating teacher in every classroom” (Wilkenfeld, 1995, p. 197). Light affects virtually every function of the body. The imbalance or absence of natural lighting can cause reduction in physiological, emotional and intellectual functioning, such as stress, fatigue, irritability, eyestrain, headaches, hyperactivity, inability to concentrate, vision problems, changes in heart rate and blood pressure, changes in brain wave patterns, depression, weight gain, insomnia, and anxiety. All of these certainly do not make life, let alone, learning easier. The effectiveness of a teacher’s best intentions may, therefore, be diminished by something so simple and often overlooked (Wilkenfeld, 1995).

Life has become an indoor event. Throughout most of history people worked outdoors. Though it seems to us that it is normal to be inside for the majority of our lives, this is actually a relatively new change in lifestyle, having a subtle but significant effect on our health and ability to learn. Many studies have been done proving the benefits of natural versus artificial light. For example, in a study done by Richard J. Wurtman M.D. it was found that one hour of exposure to natural lighting provides more physical and emotional benefit than sixteen hours of exposure to artificial light. John Ott has also done
numerous research studies proving that light is a vital nutrient and as necessary for a human’s survival as it is for a plant’s survival (Wilkenfeld, 2005). Why then is education focused indoors? So much research has been done on improving artificial lighting. Some schools have spent the extra money to get better fluorescent lighting, but the best solution is free, and exists just beyond the doors of the school.

_A Sense of Place_

_There were woods at the far end of my backyard as a child. There was a path through the woods that led to my elementary school. There was an old falling apart tree house, a dirt pit my older brothers dug in an ‘archeological investigation’ (they actually found some old glass bottles), a tree with a huge hole in the side of it (that I always quickly passed by as I believed it to be the home of a scary monster), a field where I would sometimes see deer on my way to school, an old man with a gun who liked to shoot at kids (or so we believed), and so much mystery, adventure, and memory. When I was in high school the woods were destroyed and more houses were built. I still remember seeing the new view from the back porch and feeling worse than I ever imagined I would in response to such an occurrence. That land had been a part of me. With the destruction of those trees also came the destruction of my sense of place and home._

-personal reflection, April, 2009

According to Richard Louv (2007), in an average week only 6% of children ages 9-13 play outside and there has been a 31% decline in outdoor activities like bike riding. The disappearance of natural areas, technology, traffic, homework, and the fear of strangers are all reasons parents give for their children not being outdoors. The average adult today is too busy and caught up in high tech consumerist society to think much about the fact that their home has no yard, their community does not have a park, or that their child spends 95% of his/her time indoors. Yet if asked about his/her childhood, the average adult would most likely have many stories involving the woods behind their house, riding bikes, or finding worms and spiders in the yard. More importantly though, they would be able to share how much of an impact those outdoor explorations and
experiences had on them as a child. After taking a moment and thinking about it, most adults would agree that they want similar experiences for their children.

Being outdoors provides children with a personal connection to nature and their surroundings. With this connection comes not only a sense of belonging and place, but also a renewed interest in the preservation of that place. Children need the opportunity to form a personal and positive relationship with and connection to the earth… or at least some small portion of the natural world. Through this relationship they will gain an appreciation for their small piece of the natural world, whether it is the tree in their backyard, the ditch they dug in a pretend archeological excavation, or the sound of the frogs by the pond at a nearby park. This will eventually transfer to a greater appreciation, an appreciation for the earth as a whole. Simply stated, “…talking to trees and hiding in trees precedes saving trees” (Sobel, 2008, p.19).

There is a disconnect occurring. David Orr (2004) proposes that the educational system be restructured to include a focus on teaching all children that they are a part of nature. With so much education occurring involving multiculturalism and world history and issues, it is easy for students to forget the importance and wonder of the here and now. “Getting to know home is the most human and necessary of occupations” (Zwinger, 1999, p. vii). In teaching outdoors, children are reminded not only that the natural world does exist, but that it exists right at their fingertips.

Direct Experience

Speaking of fingertips, there is something to be said for being able to touch and see with one’s own hands and eyes. “A picture may be worth a thousand words, but to a second grader who has held a squiggly nightcrawler in her hand, even the printed symbol
‘worm’ resonates with far deeper meaning than a thousand pictures or a dozen Discovery Channel videos” (Monke, 2007, p. 3). Linking the hands-on experience of art making with the direct experience of the environment allows the subject matter to become more relevant and applicable to the lives of students.

I worked at a camp in the field of Outdoor Education for two years. Our main focus was outdoor experiential learning. I will never forget how grateful many of the children were to be learning outside, to be able to touch moss growing on a tree, to see strange fungus, to go through a cave, to catch and hold salamanders and crayfish in the creek, to see stars in the sky, to hold the animals at the nature center, and so forth. Some students thanked me repeatedly and enthusiastically for giving them these experiences. Many of them had never been given opportunities to learn through direct experience and because they were so excited and caught up in the experiences, often they were not even consciously aware of how much they were learning. –personal reflection, April, 2008

Artists require direct access to the world. The classroom is a secondhand world where students often learn about what others have said, thought, done, and experienced instead of saying, thinking, doing and experiencing things for themselves. Existing directly outside of the classroom is a more grand, compelling, and instructive arena for teaching and learning. This is why something that sounds so simple… stepping outside, is a necessary component of a successful art curriculum. “Art programs based primarily on vicarious experience constrict vital intellectual and sensorial activities by providing predigested motivation and predetermined problem setting and problem solving procedures” (London, 1994, p. 14). First hand experiences tend to be much more meaningful and emotionally rich than secondhand or vicarious experiences. Art created in response to this richness is often more evocative than art created from hearsay. Much art based on secondhand experience and inspiration has a “…certain predictability and staleness, a vagueness, a lackluster aura” (London, 1994, p. 19).
The real natural environment can not be transported or recreated… all that is required is that we step outside and feel it, see it, hear it, smell it, …experience it and allow it to invigorate our senses, the creative process, and art making. Through bringing students into direct contact with their environment they are provided with the engagement of all senses as well as raw experience and material for artistic inspiration and motivation. Life is an experience from which we learn. Schooling should attempt to make learning more like life; an experience and not just a passive act (London, 1994).

Instrumental Factors: Environmental and Ecological

With reconnection to nature and immediate surroundings, comes an awareness of the environment, but perhaps not an awareness of the dire state of the environment. Considering this dire state, it is a necessity that the younger generation not only become aware but also be instilled with a sense of caring and wisdom, so that solutions for the future may lead us closer to a healthy and sustainable planet. According to David Orr (2004), in an average day, 116 square miles of rainforest are lost, 40-250 species become extinct, the human population increases by 250,000, 2,700 tons of chlorofluorocarbons and 15 million tons of carbon dioxide are added to the atmosphere. Orr believes all of this not to be the work of ignorant people, but the most educated. The problem lies in our educational system and its emphasis on answers, efficiency, success, and concepts instead of questions, conscience, decency and wisdom. With knowledge should also come the responsibility of using it to benefit the good of all (Orr, 2004).

*The Existing Movement*

As mentioned in Chapter One, there is a movement occurring to reconnect children with nature. The ‘Leave No Child Inside’ movement, has been occurring for
decades and involves the rethinking of development for the preservation of backyards and natural areas, schools connecting with nature centers and outdoor education programs, a resurgence of nature-themed schools, national parks increasing programming for children, campaigns by organizations like the National Wildlife Foundation to persuade parents to get their children outside, and continued research on the health benefits of spending time outdoors (Louv, 2007). Many schools have already adapted environment-based curriculums. Environment-based education is defined as education that uses the environment as a thematic focus for interdisciplinary hands-on learning. The National Environmental Education and Training Foundation (NEETF) has done case studies on schools implementing this type of education. After just a year of environment-based education, the studies show that academic performance across the boards increased. Despite geographical location and socioeconomic status, environment-based education improved not only achievement, but also motivation and behavior. The hands-on opportunities incorporated in environment-based learning were found to be successful in engaging those students who normally struggled (Wakefield, 2000). This is only the beginning. The movement exists and seems to be growing. If it is to become substantial in the field of art education or education in general, more awareness is needed.

Specifically, in regard to art education, a great deal of the related research is based on teacher training programs and workshops that have been held with the goal of discussing curriculum possibilities combining art and ecology. Teachers attending these programs are often given the opportunity to spend time outdoors, to create artwork themselves, to discuss pedagogical concerns and teaching strategies, and to journal and reflect. The coordinators of these programs believe that it is through the connection of art
and ecology that students will become informed and involved in working to preserve and protect the planet. There is a need for art and the environment to be related not simply in the latter being the subject of art or the earth being the materials used in the creation of art, but as the two combined becoming a tool through which students can connect with the natural world and be inspired to create meaningful art (Neperud, 1997).

*Children and Their Role in Environmental Action*

Contrary to the belief of many adults, most children do not feel burdened or overwhelmed by the environmental state of the planet. Instead, most are willing and ready to take part in making the world a better place. Some adults believe environmental concerns to be too heavy for children; to be too difficult to understand. However, many children hear about environmental issues just by living in today’s world and do have concern. Children are bombarded by ‘adult’ issues of pollution, global warming, nuclear warfare, etc. whether in the news, on TV, at school, or just through hearing adults talk. Children are capable of and often *do* understand what is happening. The state of their environment is certainly relevant to them and thus should not be ignored. In the integration of art and environmental awareness students can talk about these “adult” issues without having to say a word. It should be the goal of educators to provide children with the opportunity to think about, question, and take action in the preservation of their school communities and neighborhoods, thereby taking part in saving the planet (King, 1995).

*Technology Versus Nature in Education*

There is no denying that technology has had a profound impact on our way of life. The internet, instant messaging, texting, ipods, video games, Myspace, Youtube; all of it
has changed the way we exist, the way we communicate with each other, and the activities that shape our day-to-day experiences. Technology is not going anywhere. It is not in danger of extinction. We often feel we need it to survive. We rely on it. If it were in danger of disappearing, if we had to be smart and careful in order to find ways of preserving it, the human population would be rioting and desperately acting in an effort to save it. People would be standing on corners with signs saying things like “46 million computers die a day!” “stop the destruction of our websites!” or “help save the ipods!” It all sounds a bit ridiculous, but the average American today hungers for more technology and would be lost and angry in the world without it. It is an obsession and it is carrying us away from more important matters; matters that are actually in jeopardy and in need of our care and attention for preservation; matters such as our natural surroundings and the environment.

Over-Saturation

Children are bombarded with visual culture and technology in excessive amounts. Instead of focusing more on this in education, schools should be a welcomed break from media’s ceaseless assault on the eyes and ears of children. Instead of intensifying society’s excesses, schools need to compensate for them. If society is obsessed with competition, schools should emphasize cooperation, if the poor are going hungry, schools provide a free lunch plan, if society is unhealthily infatuated with technology, schools should instill in students concern for those they live with and the earth they live on.

Media and technology should of course not be rejected or ignored. As is the case with visual culture in Art Education, students should be thinking about and questioning how media and technology shape their appetites, relationships, and their conceptions of
the world in which they live. This though, should not be the overwhelming focus of the curriculum. Though it is certainly a part of their lives, it should not be the only part. Children spend a tremendous amount of time playing video games, chatting online, watching television, and surfing the internet. If they go to school and all of these activities are the focus of their learning, they will become even more consumed by it and will know nothing else (Monke, 2007). Children need to learn that there is a world out there beyond Myspace, Youtube and MTV; a world worthy of their attention and respect.

**Communication**

Actual face-to-face human interactions have dwindled as technology has been on the rise. Young people prefer to go to the ATM versus talking to a cashier, they have begun to treat each other much more mechanically, and have had 1/3 fewer face-to-face conversations than their parents did at the same age. The youth are more attracted to, feel safer with, and more comfortable with machines than they do humans. Lowell Monke, in his experience as a teacher states that his high school gifted class “… preferred discussing cultural diversity with students on the other side of the world through the internet rather than conversing with the school’s own ESL students, many of whom came from the very same parts of the world as the online correspondents…” (2007, p. 5). It should be the goal of schools to stress the kind of deeply caring, fully present and wholly human interaction that once was an everyday occurrence. Today people can go through an entire day of running errands without speaking to or looking into the eyes of a single human being. By getting outside, children will be forced out of their technological comfort zones. They will no longer have a screen to hide behind or to rest their eyes on, so perhaps their eyes will rest on the eyes of a friend instead, and through direct interactions
with one another they will gain necessary interpersonal skills as well as an appreciation for life. Education should establish life, not machines, as the measure of value (Monke, 2007).

**Students as Consumers**

Surprisingly, it could be argued that technology has not played a large role thus far in Art Education specifically. However, beyond the world of Art Education, the influence of technology on art has been profound. For many years it has been a goal of art educators to find meaningful ways of connecting the art world with the world at large. Art involving digital media, generally referred to as interactive arts, has accomplished this by allowing artists to create art in which viewers are given the opportunity to participate more fully, or even add to, the aesthetic environment created with digital means. With the possible increase in use of technology in art education and the decrease in public funding for arts, comes an agenda of which many teachers are unaware. The goal involves turning students into art consumers instead of art makers. With this agenda, it is possible that other goals may slip through the cracks unknowingly, creating an education determined by the market economy and consumerist and corporate goals (Gigliotti, 2001).

The line between interactive digital arts and visual culture has become blurred. This is where the connection between the art world and the world at-large exists. Thanks to technology, art is no longer so removed from the lives of everyday people. Therefore it certainly cannot be ignored in schools. However, by focusing so much on technology, the education system could be creating more and more people who are seemingly obsessed with technology and consumption, people who forget that the grass is green (or even
what grass is), people who have never been in a forest, seen a starry sky, heard birds chirping, people who think technology is the answer and the solution to all problems. Technology is not going to solve all of the world’s woes. The incorrect assumption exists that with enough facts, figures and scientific studies we will find solutions and cures for every problem that exists on the planet.

Implications

What is Success?

Success in our culture means fitting into society, being a consumer, finding a stable, well-paying job, buying a house, getting married, having money... “living the dream.” We gain “knowledge” by going to school in an attempt to be successful in life. The focus of education is rarely on humility, decency, wisdom, reverence, learning how to use what we know for the good of all, understanding oneself, moral courage, how to be peacemakers, healers, restorers, storytellers, lovers of our land and or of each other (Orr, 2004). While the entire restructuring of the educational system to this end may be only the dream of a few, personal decisions made by individual teachers can make a difference. There is a common belief that a gap, unable to be crossed, exists between ideals and reality. Teachers should not continue to increase this gap, but should attempt to close it by bringing their own ideals into fruition, and instilling a sense of decency, prudence, and wisdom in young people. A good place to start is by taking learning beyond the four walls that isolate it from “the real world.”

Interdisciplinary Art Education

Education need not be isolated, and disciplines need not be isolated either. With moving the teaching of art outdoors comes an immediate interest in environmental issues,
which of course involves other subject areas such as biology, history, social studies, and sociology. Through teaching outside, tying art into other areas of study becomes easier. Just as students should not be isolated from their natural surroundings by the walls of a classroom, neither should art education be isolated from other disciplines.

*Purpose and Nature Based Art Education*

We do not know everything about the planet. We never will. There is a mystery to life that humans either ignore or try to destroy with the discovery of knowledge, facts and data. We have an incessant need to understand, to take control, and to dominate. We get caught up in our own existence to the point where it is possible for us to forget we do not know everything and that we will never comprehend the world in its entirety. As Orr (2004) reiterates, our educational system does not always help debilitate this arrogance, instead, it sometimes focuses on that which often fuels arrogance: the notion of “success.” What is education for? What sort of people do we want in control of our world in twenty years? In the words of Aldo Leopold (as cited in Orr, 2004, p. 15): “Does the graduate know that he is only a cog in an ecological mechanism? That if he will work with that mechanism his mental wealth and his material wealth can expand indefinitely? But that if he refuses to work with it, it will ultimately grind him to dust? If education does not teach us these things, then what is education for?”

**Summary**

Life should not be an indoor event. Teaching art outdoors exposes children to natural light, a vital nutrient they need for healthy living. It allows children to form a connection to and personal relationship with their surroundings, to gain a sense of place and attachment. Teaching art outdoors allows children to learn through experience; to use
all of their senses as they are fully engaged in nature. Teaching art outdoors allows environmental issues to be easily integrated into the curriculum and gives children the opportunity to express their concern for the planet and to take action in an effort to help. With the overwhelming amount of technology and media that society is beating into the brains, eyes and ears of children, learning outdoors gives them a break from the chaos and a chance to breathe fresh air and see that a world exists beyond the “magical boxes” that house technology. Teaching art outdoors, gives students more of an opportunity to not only interact with their surroundings, but with each other. Technology has become so consuming that inter-personal relationships and commitment and care for one another have all diminished. Learning outdoors will provide students with a renewed interest in life, as opposed to machines. Teaching art outdoors will allow children to see that there is more to life than the consumerist, money-hungry, and success-driven society in which we exist. It is not education that will save us, but a certain kind of education; an education focused on integrity, care, thoughtfulness, reverence, decency, prudence and wisdom. Taking learning outdoors is one step that will move education closer to this goal.

This chapter presented an overview of the available literature both in regard to nature in relationship to schooling in general as well in relationship to Art Education. In the following chapter the methods and methodologies I utilized in data collection are laid out.
CHAPTE R THRE E

METHODOLOGY AND METHODS

Overview

During my collection of data, the primary research question I investigated is “What is the effectiveness and impact of Nature-Based Art teaching?” A subsequent question is “What does Nature-Based Art Education look like?” These questions guided my inquiries and research.

Methodology

This study adheres to a qualitative paradigm. Fraenkel and Wallen (2003) define qualitative research studies as those that “...investigate the quality of relationships, activities, situations, or materials” (p.430). In his book, The Art of Case Study Research, Robert Stake (1995) focuses on key characteristics of qualitative research including emphasis on personal interpretation, use of thick description, and experiential understanding. Attention is given to how qualitative researchers perceive what is happening in key episodes or testimonies and represent happenings with their own direct interpretation and stories. Stake states that “the qualitative researcher concentrates on instance, trying to pull it apart and put it back together again more meaningfully” (p. 75). Of his qualitative research Stake claims, “I seek to make sense of certain observations of the case by watching as closely as I can and by thinking about it as deeply as I can. It is greatly subjective” (p. 77). My view as presented in my data analysis and interpretation is not the only or the best view. I offer readers the opportunity to make their own interpretations alongside my own. My goal was not to search for total explanation and control, or to attain any definitive answer, but rather to find understanding. It was not my
intention to explain why things were the way they were and what caused what, but rather to describe in depth how things were in a particular place at a particular time and through my own personal narratives, interviews, and case study descriptions establish an empathetic understanding for the reader.

Methods

As a part of my qualitative approach I utilized the method of the interview. These interviews proved to be my most useful source of information in my data analysis. According to Fraenkel and Wallen (2003) the interview is the most important data collection technique a qualitative researcher possesses. Kvale (1996) states that an interview is “…literally an inter view, an inter-change of views between two persons conversing about a theme of mutual interest” (p.14). Through my semi-structured/informal interviews it was my goal to find out how my participants felt and thought in regard to issues discussed and explored in my study on Nature Based Art Education. By semi-structured/informal interview I mean that I had a few questions to lead the conversations, but I did not force adherence to them. I used the questions as necessary to carry and guide the conversation. I interviewed three categories of people: camp instructors, accompanying school teachers, and students who attended the classes I taught. I also gathered some responses to my interview questions from past camp instructors via e-mail. A total of twenty six people were interviewed: five students, nine accompanying school teachers, and twelve camp instructors both past and present.

Though playing a bit less of an integral role than that of my interview content, the method of case study also informed my data analysis and interpretation. The case study method with dual focus, one being my own personal teaching and the other being a
fellow teacher working in the same environment, was employed. Stake (1995) emphasizes that the case study explores the particularities and uniqueness of the case itself as opposed to comparing it to others. During the first week of data collection I focused my attention on one particular camp instructor since his teaching seemed to me after informal assessment to be most telling. Throughout the entire two weeks I also took the time to be self-reflective. I often sat by the lake and wrote personal thoughts and feelings down. In addition to this, after each of the four classes I taught I took the time to immediately reflect and write, as well as the self study in the watching of the video tapes of the classes. All of this contributed to the data categories that emerged as well as to my interpretation of this data. The two case studies allowed me to paint a picture that is both reflective (self study) and observational (the fellow teacher).

Finally, in addition to the descriptive case studies and interviews, personal narratives as well as photographs were interspersed throughout my presentation of the data. All of the photographs that were added are images taken by me either during my time of employment at the camp or during the two weeks of data collection. Every photo was taken while standing on camp soil. These provide personal and visual representations of the data and allow the reader to more fully envision the camp. The narratives are all reflections on past experiences and were added in order to provide a more individualistic view and contribute to the holistic and reflective qualitative nature of my study.

Role of the Researcher

In order to create as holistic of a picture as possible, I flipped my role as the researcher from participant observer to complete observer. I was able to introduce myself to each group of children upon their arrival and explain what I was doing so they were
not constantly wondering ‘Who is that? Why is she here and always watching us and writing in that notebook?’ As a participant observer I was immersed in my own teaching and fully interacting with the children. While gathering information for the case study of the camp instructor, I also allowed myself to build rapport with the children. It was hard not to, as I was with the same small group of children for most of the four days that they were at camp. I sat with this group for all of their meals as well, engaging in friendly chatter. As my role changed to complete observer I attempted to fade into the background and be as unobtrusive as possible. At this point I was an outsider. I was not involved with and partaking in everything the camp instructors were. I was not assigned a specific group of students to work with for the entirety of their stay at camp. The students thus did not have as close a tie with me as they had with the regular staff members. I was worried that this distance would impact the children’s reactions to me when I moved back to my role as participant observer, but the flipping of roles seemed to work successfully.

In order to ensure ethical principles were followed I obtained consent from the parents of the students, from the students themselves, as well as from the camp and all of my participants. I ensured all participants that their names would not be used. The name of the camp has been kept anonymous, as has the name of the specific program that was studied.

Guba and Lincoln (1982) discuss how values are inevitably grounded in naturalistic (qualitative) research, stating that “values cannot be set aside, methodology controlled, or eliminated…it is more reasonable to acknowledge and take account of values insofar as one can, than to delude oneself about their importance or to hope that methodological hedges will compensate for their intrusion” (p. 321). My values, personal
interest and investment certainly played a role in this study. Being that I spent two years of my life as a staff member at this particular camp I do hold a certain amount of bias. I have preconceived notions about the positive impact that the program in general has on children. I have a deep love for the camp itself and the program. There is no escape from this. I did of course come into my research with as clear and open of a frame of mind as possible. This is not to say that a completely clean slate was possible, or even desirable. The camp and the program have had such a profound impact on me personally that I feel an attempt to eliminate the very intense heart strings that bind me so tightly together to this place and program would have been detrimental to this study. This is personal. And I am biased. Stake (1996) states that a case study requires such depth that it is impossible for researchers to step outside of their ordinary lives. A case study should be an advocacy for something we personally cherish.

Participants

The specific participants chosen for this study were comprised of a purposive sample. The one instructor out of the eight possible people on staff who was chosen for one half of the dual case study, was selected because of experience. His eleven years of experience working in the realm of outdoor education made it apparent that if anyone embodied the essence of a camp instructor it was him. I knew that I wanted to get as many perspectives as possible, so I made it a point to interview the entire current staff of instructors while I was there. In choosing which accompanying teachers to interview I allowed those who volunteered to participate, but also made sure that I spoke with anyone who had a background in art. For example, when I found out that one of the schools had brought their art teacher out to camp, I knew that, assuming they were
willing, I would interview them. I wanted to talk with the people who would have the most relevant thoughts in regard to my topic. In choosing the students to interview, I set up a few qualifications before I interviewed them. These qualifications included:
attendance in my Earth Art class, a signed consent form, and of course agreement to being interviewed. I was the final participant. I chose to get some camp dirt under my own nails and study myself as I taught in this environment. I immersed myself as much as possible in my teaching in order to provide in my study a different reality and view of Nature Based Art Education. This, along with my three tiers of interviews allowed more than one angle to be exposed and for different perspectives to be pitted against each other enabling a cross check of data.

Although this study is personal and particular, transferability should not be discounted. Stake (1996) reiterates that cases seldom stand alone. Where there is one there often are more. I of course have a specific interest in my study, but I also have a general interest in how this particular study can be relevant to Art Education and to the larger world. Stake claims that “mentally we perform some kinds of dissection to see the parts separately and how they relate to each other, perhaps to see how the parts help us relate this one to other species” (p. 72). Through my thick description I hope to engage in the reader a vicarious experience that will lead to empathetic understanding and seeing one context in a second similar context. Specifically, I hope that through my thick descriptions readers will be affected enough to impart similar teaching ideas in (or outside of) their art classes.
Setting

The camp setting was chosen very specifically as I find it to be a key example of Nature Based Education at its best. Located on the edge of a lake, in the middle of the rolling hills of rural North Eastern Ohio, the nearest town is a twenty minute drive away. The camp was founded in 1942 and serves an average of 15,000 people annually through its many diverse programs. The specific camp program being researched in this study is a year long camp with a constant flow of students coming and going in all kinds of weather. Throughout most of Ohio it is common for sixth grade students to go to camp as a field trip through their school. Generally, a school will come to camp with an average of 100-150 sixth grade students. The students will stay for three days and two nights. The average day is composed of a bustle of outdoor activities including classes, day hikes, team building and group games, a living history program, camp fires, talent shows, dances, as well as indoor activities such as a visit to the camp nature center. The school teachers who come with their students have very little part in what goes on during the day, acting instead as chaperones. The students are under the tutelage of the camp staff.

The camp’s philosophy and teaching strategies are based greatly on the *Sharing Nature with Children* series of books, dating back to 1979, by Joseph Cornell. Cornell, one of the most highly regarded nature educators in the world today, emphasizes gaining a deeper connection to and relationship with the natural world, and discusses flow learning, the teaching strategy used at the camp. The primary objectives of the camp and flow learning include increasing students’ enthusiasm for learning and discovery, enabling students’ to gain confidence and self-esteem, improving students’ communication and group social skills, and introducing students to the natural world. The
four core concepts emphasized are IALAC (I Am Loving And Caring), sensory awareness, environmental awareness and conservation, and group social skills. Although it is not primarily an arts based camp, sensory awareness is a core concept infused in nearly every lesson and activity. The richness of direct experience and the invigoration of the senses key in fueling artistic endeavors and creativity abounds. Students often leave camp having seen, felt, heard, and tasted new things. Because the students are engaged so fully in these new sensorial experiences the camp is the perfect venue for art. Art lessons are taught frequently by the staff.

During the two week period of time in which I collected data there were two different districts of schools that came to camp. The first school stayed for four days and three nights, while the second district came in two separate groups, each staying 2 nights a piece. According to the Great Schools website, the districts are very similar in that 90% or more of the student population of each is composed of white students. Both of the districts are located in suburban areas where less than 30% of the student populations are economically disadvantaged. The students did have to pay to come to camp which meant that those who could not afford it had to stay back at school. According to the teachers, about one third of the students did not come to camp due to financial or other issues. The consensus among them was that those students were missing out and that coming to camp or having a similar experience should be a required part of their education.

Data Collection

My data was collected during a two week period of time stretching from May 5th – May 15th, 2009. During these two weeks I had the opportunity to teach the same sixty minute lesson to four different groups of sixth grade students (see Appendix A for the
lesson plan). On average the group of children attending each class consisted of 10-15 students. As I was immersed in teaching and unable to record field notes during this time I videotaped three of the classes in their entirety. Due to a lack of consent forms from a significant number of students however, I was unable to video tape the fourth and final lesson. I did get footage of the works of art created during the class though. Having the videos allowed me to go back and view the experience and record notes as I watched. I was able to take a step back and see my classes more objectively and from a different perspective. I closely watched the students’ behavior and reactions, listened to their comments and responses, and carefully observed myself. I also spent some time writing immediately following each lesson I taught. At that point, the experience was fresh in my mind and writing enabled me to record what was most obvious and immediate at that time.

This time spent focused on my own teaching composed the first half of the case study, the second half of the case study was the focus of the rest of my time at camp during the first week. I followed the instructor and his field group to every activity and took pages and pages of field notes that later contributed to my data analysis. While the initial intention was to focus on this one instructor for the duration of my two weeks, at the conclusion of the first week it became apparent that I had a thorough enough view of him and that more could be gained through veering off the planned path and observing other instructors. This is what I did during the second week. Instead of devoting my attention to one instructor and one group of children I moved around quite a bit, trying to observe each instructor for at least one activity or portion of the day. I tried to attend classes or activities that I knew would be most beneficial. I observed two different
instructors teaching art related classes for example. This allowed for a broader scope of
the experience to be taken in and accounted for in my data collection.

The final and most fruitful stage of data collection involved my interviewing. I let
the participants choose the setting of the interviews. Some took place on the fishing dock,
or during sunrise; a cup of coffee in hand, the sparkling lake as a backdrop, or sitting on a
truck tailgate near the staff house; one was a late night interview on a bench by
moonlight. The setting contributed to the comfort level of the interviewee and also
became imbedded in the words we spoke. As I interviewed I had at least two recording
devices running at all times to ensure I captured what was being said. Questions that
loosely guided the interviews are as follows:

For camp staff:
• Tell me about your experience working as an instructor for this program.
• What, if any, past experiences led you to an interest in working in the outdoor
  setting?
• What was your relationship with the natural world like as a child?
• How would you describe your current relationship with the natural world?
• How do you see the natural world fitting into children’s lives today?
• How do you see the natural world fitting in with the education of children today?
• In what ways (if any) do you utilize artistic ideas as an instructor here?
• What, in your mind, is the relationship like between art and nature?

For accompanying teachers/administrators:
• Share with me a little about your view of your students’ experiences here.
• What was your relationship with the natural world like as a child?
• How would you describe your current relationship with the natural world?
• How do you see the natural world fitting into children’s lives today?
• What role does the outdoors play in your school/classroom?
• How do you see the natural world fitting in with the education of children today?
• What, in your mind, is the relationship like between art and nature?
• (if an art teacher) In what ways do you (or might you) fuse art and the outdoors in
  your curriculum?
• What has been (or might be) the result of this?

For students:
• Tell me about your experience here at camp.
• What is it like for you to spend this much time outside?
• What parts of this experience do you think you’ll remember most 10 years from now?
• How much time do you spend outside when you are at home? What about at school?
• What has it been like creating art outdoors?
• In what ways (if any) have you made art outdoors or involving the outdoors before?

Data Analysis

Fraenkel and Wallen (2003) state that triangulation occurs when data is collected using multiple methods. This enhances validity and provides a more holistic picture. According to Stake (1996) there is no definable moment when data analysis begins. Meaning should be placed both on first impressions as well as final compilations. Analysis should be seen as part of an overall effort to make sense of things. As I collected my data I was continually making interpretations and trying to make sense of what was happening. The field notes I took during the process were continual and thorough. After I gathered my data from my dual case studies, transcribed my interviews, and compiled all of my field notes I sorted through it all looking for patterns and codes in an attempt to categorize and simplify the data so it could be related in an understandable manner. A few categories emerged through this process that created the basis and structure of my data analysis. I found that the multitude and variety of data that I collected made it difficult to choose what was most important to present as my findings. Certain repetitions and patterns of ideas however, made the chosen categories the most obvious choices of focal areas.

This chapter provided an explanation of my methods and methodologies used in data collection. The study is a qualitative, incorporating interviews, dual focus case study,
and personal reflections and photos. The next chapter includes a presentation of my findings as well as my personal interpretation of my data and implications for the field of Art Education. The following topics will be expounded upon: the art/nature connection, the validity of Nature Based Art Education curriculum, the benefits of Nature Based Art Education for students, the organic flow of instruction, and the Nature Based Art Education teacher disposition.
CHAPTER FOUR
DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

Introduction

Figure 1: The Road to Camp, Photograph courtesy of Beth Ciborek © 2009

I drove in to camp as the sun rose. The hills, valleys, and curves made the ride dizzying, but comforting: a bit like the rock of a boat out at sea. Nature was already carrying me. These roads weren’t like the ones forming the flat grid of the suburb from which I had come. These were guided by something else; something more raw. It had been at least a year since I made the drive but I knew the hills and turns like the back of my hand. The further I drove the more scenic it became. Cows and horses grazed in fields, deteriorating barns clad overgrown grassy patches of land, rows of hay bales and tractor trails created some amount of order amongst the abandon, and red winged black birds perched on old wooden fence posts lining the road. –personal journal, May 5th, 2009

For two weeks I lived and breathed camp. As I was there collecting data, I focused on one key question: *What is the effectiveness and impact of Nature Based Art Education?* Via interviews, personal reflections and observations, as well as through capturing and reviewing my own teaching in video recordings, I assembled a collection of documents and data that has shed light on the answers to the key question, building a case in defense of the benefits of Nature Based Art Education. As the information was compiled and reviewed, five primary categories emerged. These include: the art/nature connection, the validity of Nature Based Art Education curriculum, the benefits of Nature
Based Art Education for students, the organic flow of instruction, and the Nature Based Art Education teacher disposition. To allow for more cohesion and a better flow of ideas I have included my interpretation of the data as well as implications in this chapter.

Following, is a summary, explanation, and interpretation of each of the categorizations. The chapter ends with a discussion of both the implications for further research in the area of Nature Based Art Education, as well as the implications for pre-service Art Education programs.

The Art/Nature Connection

Figures 2-7: Examples of Student Work, Photographs courtesy of Beth Ciborek © 2006
Nature, when examined is so remarkable and awe-inspiring; it opens people’s creative side to new ideas. If something so amazing can happen naturally, imagine the possibilities when the human mind is involved. Nature is the springboard to artistic expression. –past staff member/camp director, May 14th, 2009

During the interview process, one of the questions I focused on involved the relationship between nature and art. Of those I spoke with, multiple people remarked that they see the two as interchangeable; nature as art and art itself being a reflection of nature. Though the majority of the people I interviewed do not have an art background, they agree that there is a tie, a relationship between the two. Some of the prominent connections and distinguishing factors between art and nature that surfaced include:

- inspiration taken from place,
- a reawakening and readjustment of senses,
- increased use of the imagination,
- a sense of freedom in both self and expression,
- creative thinking and seeing, and finally, exploration and discovery.

**Place as Inspiration**

![Figure 8: The Pond, Photograph courtesy of Beth Ciborek © 2009](image)

...if I know something is thought provoking or just generally pleasing such as the pond, I like to take kids there because for me it stirs up my imagination and my creative bone. Or maybe if there is one white flower in the middle of a bunch of purple ones I’ll be like ‘hey that’s cool.’ – current camp instructor, May 12th, 2009
Scientific studies have been done in the past involving brain functioning in a stimulating environment versus brain functioning in a dull and drab non-stimulating environment proving that a stimulating environment positively affects brain functioning (Jensen, 2001). Our surroundings certainly play a part in how we think, feel, and in whether we are creatively inspired. Working too long in the same place can make it difficult to focus and relax, whereas a change in location, can, in many cases, make one feel renewed and enable more clarity and creativity in thought. An enriched environment, or one that includes new information or experiences, allows for learning that is challenging. At times even the smallest of changes can help concentration, renew interest, prevent boredom from settling in too deep, and even provide a flood of new visual stimuli to inspire creativity (Jensen, 2001).

_I remember in elementary school how exciting it was when the teacher decided we should change the set-up of our desks. This meant a new view of the chalkboard, new people to sit with and generally just a whole new perspective of the classroom. Thinking back on it, it seems like something so minor, yet it really impacted my happiness in school. It felt as though my world got turned upside down and became new again._ –personal journal, June 12th, 2009

Children today are in similar predicaments. The majority of the average child’s day is spent ‘cooped’ up in a classroom, in the same seat for most of every day spent at school. How this is conducive to learning, I am not sure.

Many of the children who come to camp have spent so little time in places beyond the television or computer screen, XBOX, or their confining classroom walls that often they are shaken up, if not awed, by their new and novel surroundings. For those who have never stepped foot on the other side of the city or suburb sidewalks in which they reside, being somewhere so different from what they are accustomed to is likely to rattle their brain a bit; in a good way. At times the monotony of the everyday consumes us and it
becomes easy to forget that possibilities beyond the realm of what we know still exist. New environments and experiences allow the brain to expand and make room for these different possibilities, thoughts, and ideas. This can lead to artistic inspiration and creativity; to thinking beyond what was previously believed to be definitive. Times spent apart from the average moment in life tend to be more impacting, meaningful, and memorable.

*Of my days in elementary school I remember the time spent outdoors most clearly. Distinct details from field days, a walk on the bike trail to the police station and pizza shop, a fifth grade project where we made solar ovens out of tin foil and cooked marshmallows on them in the courtyard, learning about dinosaurs under the tree behind the school...times like these, where there was some deviation from the monotony, compose my most prevalent memories from that time.* –personal journal, June 12th, 2009

A lot of good can come from changing things up a bit and throwing some curveballs to reawaken students from their lethargy.

A lethargic state is far from an inspired state. Not only does the newness of a place contribute to artistic inspiration, but, being in a place of beauty can as well. Many of the adults I interviewed brought up the fact that a good deal of the art throughout history has been inspired by nature. Landscape painting, for example, has been a consistent artistic staple for centuries. Natural beauty has been a constant source of inspiration for many years. Why do artists continue to paint nature? Perhaps in an effort to allow others to see or feel the beauty they have seen or felt, they try to artistically record or document it. Perhaps natural beauty simply gets the creative juices flowing. Or perhaps the spirit of a certain place can strike a chord, similar to what this staff member remembers from her time in Scotland:
When I lived in Scotland, I went on a highland tour and traveled up around the mountains. The mountains were sooooo gorgeous…and it was raining…then it was sunny and there were rainbows. There were people there playing the bagpipes not for anybody else…just for themselves. The spirit and beauty of the place inspired them to be so artistic and so beautiful. –current camp instructor, May 11th, 2009

Though camp, or any similar outdoor setting, is most likely nothing compared to the mountains of Scotland, the spirit and beauty of the place can still inspire. One teacher I interviewed mentioned that she often paints outdoors, not because she is painting the landscape or the trees and leaves, but because she feels more relaxed and calm outdoors. If it is not the newness or stimulation of the outdoor setting, perhaps it is the potential feeling of serenity or awe one gets while being in a place of beauty that inspires artistic thought and expression.

Figure 9: Evening Program, Photograph courtesy of Beth Ciborek © 2007

Teachers often have interesting and engaging classrooms, and many teachers do change the décor in their classrooms at times, but despite any and all effort in this department, it does not compare to the magnitude of wonder and enrichment that exists just beyond the walls. Classrooms sometimes are environments of darkness and stagnation, much like caves (though far less interesting and exciting). I spoke with one teacher who said her classroom has no windows and referred to the experience as like
teaching inside a box. The lack of natural light negatively affects virtually every function of the body and can contribute to irritability, inability to concentrate, and hyperactivity among other things (Wilkinfeld, 1995). It seems as though the trend in school design today is focused more on modern architecture and technology as opposed to what will really impact the students most positively; an enriched, naturally lit, novel environment. Teachers have a choice; to stay in the safety of their dull dark caves where learning is lackluster, or to disrupt routine and lift the lives of their students beyond the familiar where learning is more memorable and meaningful. I heard the phrase ‘cooped up’ quite a bit coming from those with whom I spoke. Children are not chickens and should never be ‘cooped up.’ Chickens though, may have the advantage here. They are cooped up… but at least they are cooped up outside, where there is fresh air to breathe, natural light, and more to see and experience than in the average school classroom. Taking an art class out of the classroom can provide students with experiences that transcend the ordinary flow of life.

_Sensory Reawakening and Adjustment_

![Looking Up](Figure 10: Looking Up, Photo courtesy of Beth Ciborek © 2007)

Being surrounded by natural beauty or by new unexplored territory awakens the senses from the slumber of monotony. In the comfort of the average students’ life at
home and in school, certain senses are primary; at camp or in the outdoors, however, stimulation overload necessitates a different tuning in of senses. Instead of tuning out, the sensory quality of learning in an outdoor setting requires students to tune in and be more actively and wholly involved in their experiences. There are new sounds to hear, new sights to feed the visual sense, all sorts of new elements to touch, smells galore, and even new tastes to grace the taste buds.

Sensory awareness is one of the four key concepts emphasized by the camp program and staff. The majority of what is done at camp is focused, at least to some extent, around sensory engagement. Hanging in the dining hall is a poster size chart for students to record their sensory experiences. At the end of their time at camp this goes back to school with them so they have documentation of all the different ways they used their senses at camp. The staff encourages the students to continue being aware and to engage their senses as much as possible when they return to life beyond camp. The senses do not stay at camp.

Most of us are lucky enough to have use of all five of our senses, but when we are not working to engage them, it is easy to let them drift into dullness. The senses are always there, but often, the way we live our lives does not require that they be keen or perceptive. A few teachers who were interviewed mentioned that they like the slower pace of things at camp; not in that the kids take naps or watch movies, but in the way the kids are forced to slow down and be more aware and appreciative of what is around them; to really take time out to think about and experience nature and their surroundings.

Sensory perception and stimulation, in whatever form, are necessary parts of artistic thought and creation. Artists too, take time to experience and gather inspiration
and meaning from their surroundings and through the activation of the senses. Don Forrister, an art teacher from the mountains of North Carolina grew up with a fascination for nature. He often collected items from nature that later he would draw. He found that when he took the time and sat outdoors drawing as opposed to indoors he observed the items with increased intensity. Author, Tom Barone (2001) says of Forrister’s artistic growth, “His concentration became like a tight beam of light that revealed subtleties in his leaves, dead insects etc…there he felt a quiet dignity, a peacefulness, an orderliness; more control over his life and over his materials. With this control and this enhanced perceptivity, Don’s artistic talents grew enormously” (p. 107-8). With the enhanced perceptivity that naturally comes when working outdoors, artistic endeavors do excel.

A great deal of beauty can be completely skimmed over and lost when we hurry through life. It is easy to exist without active awareness. All of the amenities that life has to offer and the fast paced society we live in make it possible to just move along with blinders up. These blinders or shields begin to grow between sensorial signals and our receptors. In the natural environment amenities fade away, life is less urgent, the shields lower, and sensorial awareness becomes more prevalent. This changing of balance and increase in sensitivity allows children the opportunity to become cognizant of how much exists around them and what experiencing the world can entail if they take the time. Taking this time, being aware of the newly awakened and accessible senses inspires artistic thought and creativity. Meaning can never be rushed. The brain needs time to reflect and process. The receiving of sensorial stimuli can engage the mind in new manners and spawn artistic seedlings.
With the knowledge that all students learn differently and with the help of Howard Gardner’s principle of multiple intelligences, many educators try out different teaching styles in an effort to reach as many children as possible. Some children are visual learners, some are auditory and so forth. Gardner (2006) discusses an 8th intelligence, that of the Naturalist intelligence. Children who possess this intelligence are better able to perceive the natural world, are more in tune with it and have a better capacity for learning about it and for learning while immersed in it. Taking learning outdoors allows all senses and learning styles to be engaged at once and thus provides more children with the potential of learning. The outdoors are like one huge inspiring and ever changing visual, there is always more to see and to flood the eyes, there are new sounds that keep the ears alert and new smells to keep the nose curious. Teachers may not need to go through the extra effort of finding lessons that are hands-on and kinesthetic… the entire realm of the natural world is hands-on (with the exception, of course, of poison ivy, which is definitely hands-off). Teachers need only step outside to engage all learners and all senses. Art is so intertwined with the senses and with learning through alternative means that it makes sense for the art teacher to be the fore runner in the ambitious act of taking their classes outdoors and utilizing Nature Based Art Education.
The fingertips are feeling, the peepers are peeping, the snout is sniffing, the ears are standing at attention, and the palate is pleased. The senses are awakened and have begun heaving their sights, smells, tastes, touches, and auditory information towards the brain. With all of this information flooding the mind, it becomes activated and sets to work in processing all of the new material. This though, is not the brain’s only job. In the natural environment the brain is forced out of its “lazy boy” recliner and into the filming of a Richard Simmons-like work-out video. There is no rest. During an interview a teacher told me that she believes children are not spending enough time outdoors. I asked her what sort of impact she sees it having on them.

…their imagination isn’t as vivid, I don’t think. We encourage our son to go outside and play. He’s eleven and he’s into history, so he’s built a WWII contraption in the backyard. He has barb wire fences, you know, not real barb wire, but he has it all set up. And that’s using his imagination. I think our society has come to be about instant gratification…I don’t want to do anything, YOU entertain ME, turn on the TV, turn on the computer, text. It’s all right at their finger tips. They don’t have to work for anything anymore. –accompanying school teacher, May 7th, 2009
Without any hinting or guiding from me, this teacher directly connected the outdoors to the imagination. Many other adults that I interviewed made remarks about how children do not just go outside and play anymore, they do not entertain themselves, build things out of whatever is around, or make up games. When no artificial entertainment device is presented to them, they are forced to come up with their own ideas. The brain is brought into high gear and they are forced to use their imaginations. This way, when Richard inevitably passes out and no one is there to follow, the students will be ready to invent imaginative aerobic moves of their own.

The imagination is a key player in artistic thought and creation. Much of what happens at camp involves imagination. Not only are the children placed in a new surrounding, both where the senses are awakened and where they are forced to rethink what they know, but, just as artists do, the staff encourage and invoke mystery and pretence. Through story telling, play acting, games, or general silliness the children are constantly forced to be imaginative; to pretend the big wooden board is a boat in shark-infested water, that the camera tri-pod is a three-legged creature that will attack you if you get too close, that the pit of sand is really a pit of peanut butter, to imagine they are chickens, dinosaurs, moose, buzzards, fish, toilets, plumbers, aliens from the planets Alpha and Beta….or in a Richard Simmons workout video. The brain is forced out of its comfort zone, into an active role where not everything is predisposed, ready to go, and immediately accessible. Art is not always comfortable, and often requires one to think or act in ways beyond what is obvious or provided. Through play and fun the children are engaging their artistic imaginations and also freely expressing themselves.
Again, the art teacher here has an advantage. One student may leave art class and go tell the English teacher, “Today we were acting like chickens in art class!” without the English teacher (necessarily) thinking “What in the world is that crazy art teacher doing?” It may just be more accepted. “Art class? Of course you were acting like a chicken!” In art, often there is not one single right answer, so exercising the imagination may be more necessary than in other classes. The outdoor environment allows for more of a sense of freedom, and if inspired by the teacher to do so, the children may feel more of an openness of the imagination. Exiting the school building, in combination with a bit of fun and silliness may allow for the sun roof of the brain to open up, letting imaginative and artistic ideas to come flooding in like warm sunshine.

*Freedom in Self and Expression*

![Sandstone Painted Hand](image.png)

Figure 12: Sandstone Painted Hand, Photograph courtesy of Beth Ciborek © 2007

When the imagination is activated and the kids have begun to open their minds a sense of freedom overtakes them. More than one teacher mentioned that as they watched their students at camp, they saw a different side of them than what they were used to seeing at school. This could be attributed to the less rigid and restrictive atmosphere of camp and the outdoors. Also, the staff members are most likely not anything like the classroom teachers to whom the kids are accustomed. The camp instructors are not afraid to be authentic and childlike; removing restrictions for societal behavior expectations of
adulthood. The camp instructors are uninhibited, dressed in comfortable garb, and are just generally relaxed. This of course impacts the childrens’ reactions and attitudes. When they notice that the adults are uninhibited they feel a bit more at ease with letting their guard down and being the kid that they are.

At times though, children come down with TCFS, or The Too Cool For School syndrome. Society has presented children with new pressures to act as adults far before it is reasonable to do so. This is not to say that maturity should be thrown to the way side and misbehaviors allowed to erupt, but only that children be able and willing to live… like children. The students at camp are sometimes self conscious and fearful of what others will think if they let loose and allow the freedom to overtake them. Often these children will eventually realize that everyone else is being child-like and appear to be having fun so they decide it is worth it to try. The fun and silliness is contagious. The TCFS barrier is broken and they let go, allowing their inner self the opportunity to be exposed and expressed. This transfers to art in that it is a clear connection to artistic ways of behaving, thinking, and expressing. The children are less inhibited and more open and comfortable in outwardly putting forth themselves, their feelings, and thoughts. One staff member not only was aware of the children being their true selves, but also of his own layers being peeled back while at camp:

…I have noticed in myself that I am a completely different person when I’m here, when I’m doing this job, when I’m walking in the woods with kids. I find myself to be happier, more at ease, more in awe of being alive. And when I’m in the city, commuting to work for example, I find myself a little angrier, a little more narrowly focused and that focus is more on the negativity and the things that upset me. After being out here for a few days I feel those layers kind of falling away and it’s like I’m getting back to who I truly am as a person. The analogy I like to use is cotton candy. You have your stick, you put it in the cotton candy and all that stuff that wraps around you is your experiences. So coming here you’re
getting rid of all of that and getting back to your true nature and who you really are without all that extra stuff. I kind of see it in the kids in those brief moments.

– current camp instructor, May 13th, 2009

And you do see it. Often kids will be quiet and ‘cool’ upon their arrival, trying to act like they are five years older than they are, but it never lasts long. This transition that occurs can be compared to the ways in which artists reveal their true selves through visual means, providing glimpses of their identity not possible through other means. As Picasso states: “It took me four years to paint like Raphael, but a lifetime to paint like a child.”

Just like children tend to, the natural world apparently has a sweet tooth…the cotton candy gets devoured and the sticky pink layers unravel, allowing that sense of freedom to come forth; allowing expression to ignite.

Imagine a dog that has been home alone all day in a house by itself. Imagine its reaction when the owner comes home and says, ‘want to go for a walk?’ The word excitement does not do that reaction justice. The dog may bark, bounce up and down, appear to be smiling, and about to burst with excitement. The reason I mention this is that if any animal seems free and uninhibited, it would be a dog. And after a long day of being in a dark house, that dog is ready to explode with energy. This could be compared to a child who has been inside all day at school and is finally given the chance to leave the constraints of that environment and enter into one where they feel like they can breathe a bit easier and feel just a general sense of freedom. While still at school and with the knowledge of there still being rules, making the move from indoors to out can instill in children that sense of freedom. It is this freedom and openness that often guides artistic creativity and creation. The art room (or art teaching environment) lends itself to being
open and free, where children can be themselves and feel comfortable in the expression of that. The outdoors can enhance this.

**Creative Thinking and Seeing**

Figure 13: Branches Reflected on the Lake, Photograph courtesy of Beth Ciborek © 2007

…are they going to leave my classes knowing every single thing? No. But are they going to remember maybe one cool thing or fact? Sure… and it’s not all about teaching them facts… but maybe they are able to see something in a different way and they are having fun while doing it. I think that’s the most important thing that we do here. –current camp instructor, May 11th, 2009

“…maybe they are able to see something in a different way…” If that statement does not scream art, I am not sure what does. In nature there are more options. Not everything is as cut and dry as it is in a school or classroom setting. The outdoor world is full of randomness and unpredictability. You never know what you might find or what might change as you are out in nature working or experiencing it. Working with natural materials allows for more choice as well. It is not like being handed a set of water colors and told to paint a picture of the flowers. In this case, everything is laid out: “here are your paints, here is your brush, here is your paper, and here are the flowers you will paint.” There is not a lot of room there for surprise or change or anything too extraordinary. While working in nature however, since you never really know what you are going to get, it becomes more about improvisation, finding solutions, being creative
and allowing your mind to take something like a stick and allow it to become a writing utensil, part of a wall for a miniature log cabin, an antennae of a mud bug, a tiny palm tree, or anything your mind may conjure up. Working outdoors in nature allows for the brain to roam around some, to feel out different corners and areas of existence and then to decide what feels best and go from there.

The creative ability to think and to thus see things in new ways as brought on by the natural environment was apparent both in my own art classes and other classes I observed during my data collection. A popular activity used by camp instructors both on hikes and in classes is ‘micro parks.’ In this activity the students find a small area of nature and create a miniature park for bugs or imaginary small people or creatures. Not only are the children forced to slow down and really look at nature on an intimate and close level, but they are forced to see it in a different way. Tree roots become water slides or roller coasters, may apples become umbrella tables at the snack stand, small pebbles become bumper cars, and so forth. One past instructor who used this activity frequently on hikes said of it:

This gives them the opportunity to explore nature on a much smaller micro level instead of the typical macro level that they are used to and sometimes get overwhelmed by. It also helps them explore from an artistic standpoint, special relationships within the space they have chosen for their park, very important for 3D art. And of course it opens up their imaginations to limitless possibilities,
which is relevant to understanding both art and nature and their relationship to each other. –past camp instructor, May 15th, 2009

During my observations of a micro parks class being taught, I made the following reflection:

A group of boys were trying to make a plant stand up on a rock. They asked the instructor if he had any glue. Of course the instructor didn’t, so the kids were forced to think of a new solution; a non-traditional solution. One of them yelled MUUD!!! …they tried using mud… and it worked. They were so proud when they accomplished their goal. I think a lot of it had to do with the fact that they came up with the solution themselves as well how it was like a puzzle for them to solve.

In the outdoors, the solutions do not all exist at our fingertips. Participants in Nature Based Art Education have to be creative and resourceful. They have to seek out solutions and maybe change or broaden their concepts of what something is or can be used for in order to find answers.

The unpredictable nature of the outdoor setting can also encourage creative thinking and vision. A lot of what happens or what might be created or seen is often guided by the randomness of nature. During the earth art class that I taught, this was apparent quite often. Students would create artwork, but then either, depending on what else they discovered in the woods/surrounding area or on how nature or the elements changed as they were working, their initial ideas morphed into something entirely new and different. After I taught one of my classes, I made the following reflection:
When the group who wrote Save the Earth on the picnic table out of various natural materials decided they were finished, I suggested they add more, perhaps a border or something around the words. They set out with the intention of adding some decoration, some flowers around the words. But the next thing I know they call me over and I see that they have created a representation of the earth after finding leaves that resembled the shapes of continents. Later on they thought to fill in the ocean areas with pebbles for some texture and color contrast. Surprisingly, there was a worm amongst these pebbles. This started a whole new train of thought, involving the worm invading the earth and taking it over, etc. It inspired the two girls to seek out more worms to add to their worm-infested planet...and changed the meaning of the words Save the Earth that they began with. Now it was about saving the earth...from the worms! –personal journal, May 13th, 2009

It is inevitable that the unpredictability and randomness that comes with working outdoors in a natural setting is influential in guiding and inspiring creative thinking and seeing. Just as art does, nature inspires one to see things in a new way.

*Exploration and Discovery*

![Figure 17: Creek Exploration, Photograph courtesy of Beth Ciborek © 2007](image)

When I walk by myself I feel that wonderful innocence that we lose as we become adults, and not just that innocence, but the sense of wonderment in just stopping to look around. I return to the outdoors to get back that sense of wonderment I had as a child, not being naïve like a child, ...it’s more a sense of curiosity and awe. – current camp instructor, May 12th, 2009

The natural path is never straight and narrow. Neither is the artistic path. There is always something that throws you off balance or veers you off course. Curiosity always conquers. Wonder always wins. Similar to revisiting the same artwork and experiencing
it in new ways each time, in the outdoors, the same trail could be hiked a thousand times by the same person, but there are so many factors that could potentially make it feel new and different each time. There are limitless ends to seek out and discover. Everyday something changes.

It’s about seeing changes. No matter where you are there is always change in nature, or metamorphosis. I think that has a lot to do with art in general, because…you’re changing something into another thing; a blank canvas, a piece of mud, your clothing. It’s the same with nature, always changing, whether by seasons, by erosion, human means, animal means… everything is going through a process: water cycle, food cycle, compost… Everything is changing and art is very much the same thing. –current camp instructor May 12th, 2009

The addition of a single brushstroke changes the entire feeling of a painting, the molding of a clay ball turns it into a giraffe, the addition of bottle caps to a sculpture give it a sense of depth…just like the wind blows and carries a leaf away exposing some new critter never seen before, a deer comes along and leaves tracks in the wet dirt, a wild turkey decides to make its nest on a rock just to the side of the trail, a hawk swoops down to the ground for some dinner and unintentionally leaves behind a feather, the lake washes onto a shore some bones of a deceased fish, and the rain water washes away some earth uncovering another foundation stone from the old 1800s homestead. Change is interwoven into both art and nature. The endless possible discoveries allow fascination to take hold.

Artists often experience this sense of exploration and work through discovery. In working on one artwork, they may discover a new technique and decide to try it out, or explore it, through the creation of another artwork. In reviewing the tapes of my teaching I noticed that I often said, “This is about experimentation. You might not know if something is going to work until you try it.” Experimentation is a type of exploration.
Trying out different techniques and options allows for discovery in realizing what will or will not work or create the effect they are seeking out. In my own teaching I also encouraged the children to look around, to search and explore in an effort to find natural materials to work with that inspired them as opposed to choosing the first items they came across. The natural environment provides the exploring hands and brains of children with more adventure, more options, and more unpredictability. The myriad of possible routes of discovery enriches artistic endeavors. Ideally students are given a great deal of choice in school and learning. The ultimate set of choices exists beyond traditional media and in the unpredictable natural world.

**Summary**

The natural world is obviously connected to art. Inspiration, creativity, problem solving, sensorial engagement abound in the natural world. All of these are a necessary part of Art Education, all relate to artistic thought and creation, and all are a part of learning taken beyond the traditional walls of school. Place as inspiration does not have to involve somewhere far away and remote, the back lot of the school could suffice. The senses do not always need to be 100% overwhelmed by entering into a brand new place of wonder and beauty, but they do need the stimulation that occurs in experiencing newness of some variety. Children do not need to pretend they are chickens everyday, but they need to be engaged in ways that allow their imaginations to run rampant. Art class does not always need to be about being child-like or silly, but children do need to feel comfortable and free enough to express themselves. The world does not need to become full of lollipop trees and cotton candy clouds, but children do need to exercise their abilities to see things in new and different ways. And while every day can not be an
outdoor treasure hunt, children need some element of surprise and chance to seep into their learning. Utilizing the natural world in Art Education allows all of these to occur naturally.

The Validity of NBAE Curriculum

Why now? What about today’s society is signifying that a change in the direction of education toward Nature Based Art Education would be beneficial for children? Through the interview process, two key concepts emerged that indicate the validity of an NBAE curriculum. First of all, the amount of time children spend outdoors has been significantly decreasing (Louv 2005; Sobel 2008). Secondly, schools are reinforcing this decrease by following the trend and keeping children indoors even more than in the past (Orr 2004; Monke 2007). Both of these concepts equate inadequate time spent outdoors. Additional contributing factors to the validity of NBAE are either a direct cause of this limited time spent in nature or are contributors in the lack of time spent outdoors. Technology, fear, as well as social and physical health issues all fit into one of these categories.
Of the twenty six people that I interviewed, twenty five expressed, in one form or another, disconnect between today’s children and the natural world. When asked to describe the relationship children have with the outdoors today, all twenty one adults (accompanying teachers and camp instructors) mentioned that they believe children are not spending adequate time outside.

We just gave the Ohio Achievement Test in 8th grade and it was right after we had those 80/90 degree days. There were sixty some kids sitting in the cafeteria taking the test and I said to the guidance counselor …‘Look around. What was the weekend like?’ She said, ‘It was hot and it was beautiful.’ I said, ‘How many kids have sun burn here?’ There were only 3 kids that had sun burn. The others were as pale as ever. There was just no sign of them having been outdoors. And they’re not. That’s not their bag. It’s unfortunate. – accompanying school teacher, May 14th, 2009

It is possible that all of these children were slathered in sunscreen, but teachers tend to have good ears and pick up on what their students are up to. They all testify that the children are not outdoors. According to the teachers, the children talk about computers, video games, and technology more than anything else. When asked how much time they spend outside, of the five children I interviewed, three of them said that they are rarely outside. A fourth child mentioned that though she is outside often, her friends never are.
When asked how he sees nature fitting in with the lives of children today one current staff member said this:

I don’t see it fitting in, which is the big problem. Video games and things like that are too prevalent in kids’ minds. Nature doesn’t have a marketing team, you know? TV sucks them in. Video games suck them in and the next thing you know bugs are just creepy. Other things in the world talk too loudly for kids to hear nature. So I believe that’s why things like this are absolutely important.
–current camp instructor, May 14th, 2009

Everyone was in agreement. Whatever the reason, children today are not spending enough quality time outdoors.

How do we know this is any different than it ever was? Who is to say it really is a substantial decrease? Of the twenty one adults I spoke with, when asked to describe their own relationship to nature as a child, all but a few stated that they spent a considerable amount of time outside. Many of them shared specific personal stories, or mentioned that they have vivid and fond memories of being outdoors as a child.

I didn’t care so much about stuff like TV, but going down to the creek and building dams and racing boats and looking for crayfish; that was fascinating. It was an endless world full of exploration. It just seemed like where I wanted to be. I always felt kind of constricted inside. I never felt comfortable just sitting around. I had to be outside, fresh air, sunshine… it just seemed like where I was supposed to be. – current camp instructor, May 13th, 2009

There has been an obvious change in the past ten or twenty years. There is no denying it. According to Richard Louv (2007), there has been a 31% decline in outdoor activities, expanding the gap between the averages parent’s extensive experience outdoors and the average child’s limited experience outdoors. Adults growing up in the 1980s and early 1990s, even believe that they spent significant time outdoors playing, unlike the newer generation of children who are missing out on that time. Louv (2007) also mentions the disappearance of natural areas, technology, traffic, homework, and the fear of strangers as
reasons parents give for their children not being outdoors. As my data collection
confirmed, technology and fear are both listed. The disappearance of natural areas is
identified as well. This too was apparent in my data. A few of the students I interviewed
mentioned specific examples of natural areas disappearing in their immediate
surroundings. One student told me that he would be staying at his grandmother’s house
over the summer. When asked if she has a big yard to play in, this is what he said: “She
used to. Then they built this big humongous work station. She used to have this
big…from that wall to those chairs over (motioning)… ‘til they put in this station. I can’t
really explain what it is…” I asked if it was something his grandmother wanted there. He
said, “They just put it there. Me and my cousins used to always play right there. Now we
only have the sidewalk.” Another student mentioned that she rarely plays outside because
there is not enough room and the cars go too fast on the road. Another said her yard is
very small and there is nowhere to play. In addition to technology and fear, the decline of
natural areas is also a cause of the decrease in children’s time spent outdoors.

Technology

“…they are two inches away from a computer screen, but metaphorically miles
away from anything that’s real,” stated a current staff member during an interview. What
is keeping children cooped up inside when just a decade or two ago it was hard to keep
them inside? Every single adult I interviewed mentioned technology as a cause of children’s lack of interest and lack of time spent outside. Lowell Monke (2007) discusses the overwhelming amount of time children spend using technology and expresses his fear that schooling is too focused on improving and teaching technology that soon children will become so consumed by it that eventually they will know nothing else. One past staff member who is now working with children in a different setting had this to say in regards to technology’s effect on children today:

We have replaced playing outside with a virtual world that exists inside the television or computer. Kids today are so plugged in that they have no interest in being outside. I work with middle school students and trying to get them to do little things like take a walk through the park is like you are punishing them. No one is encouraging them to be outside. In science classes students are learning about nature through a computer game. When I was their age my science teacher took us outside to the river and we tested the water levels, we determined the water quality by seeing what was living in the water. These kids need someone to take an interest in them and get them excited about the natural world. – past camp instructor, May 14th, 2009

Other staff members discussed how nature is now something children only see on the Discovery channel or at a zoo; how it is something that to them seems unreachable and foreign. Children have the false belief that everything they will ever need exists in the cyber world, right at their finger tips. During one interview a camp instructor mentioned this:

I’ve had kids actually brag to me, ‘last summer I was only outside four times.’ They take pride in the fact that they aren’t outside. I’ve had multiple kids tell me that they don’t need to go outside because they have all the video games and a computer. – current camp instructor, May 13th, 2009

One of the students who told me that she actually does play outdoors a lot also commented that none of her friends do. When asked why she thought that was, she replied without hesitation saying that all of them have Play Stations so are always inside
playing their computer games. She then mentioned that her family could not afford a Play Station due to her father’s hours being cut at work. This, combined with other children bragging about not needing to be outside because they have video games and such makes it apparent that there are issues of status involved here. Are children ashamed to be seen playing outdoors now, in fear that their peers will think they are poor and can not afford video games or a computer?

As Monke (2007) encourages, schools should compensate for society’s excesses. Obviously there is an excess of technology in society. So much that children are not being exposed to the outdoor natural world as much as they could and should be. This is not to suggest that teachers should completely ignore technology in their teaching, but that teachers should take some responsibility in uniting children with what was once so much a part of the average child’s growth and life; the natural world. Richard Louv (2005), in his book, Last Child in the Woods, tells a story of a child he met who when asked why he wasn’t interested in playing outside stated simply that “all the electrical outlets are inside” (p. 10). Few are encouraging these children to get out and explore nature. They are shown the wonder and excitement that exists outside less and less as time continues on. Schooling is a good place to start. If the parents are too busy to show children, who else is going to? The responsibility lies in the hands of our schools’ teachers.
Fear

Figure 21: A Path, Photograph courtesy of Beth Ciborek © 2007

Though, obviously believed to be a huge reason for children not being outdoors, technology is not the only thing keeping them in. Fear was also brought up quite frequently in my interviewing. Fear of strangers, fear of injury, fear of sickness, and fear of the unknown all were mentioned as reasons parents keep their children inside more often today compared to the past.

The lives of children are so structured and safe. Parents’ lives are so hectic. The combination has led to kids being kept indoors to protect them from the evils that lie outside. Parents continue to teach their kids that horrible things will happen outside. “You’ll get sick.” “You’ll hurt yourself.” “Someone may try to kidnap you from the yard.” These are all ridiculous excuses parents use to keep their kids sheltered. Ultimately, parents are getting in the way of child development and exploration. Some parents try to expose their kids to nature by movies or a trip to the local park district. But let’s be honest most of those trips are centered around the indoor visitor center and not a hike on the trails. The kids that are allowed and able to have a connection are the lucky ones. – past camp instructor/camp director, May 15th, 2009

Fear of the outdoors seems to stem from our changing society, but also from the way parents are raising their children. The parents are the ones who are fearful it seems, not the children. Though, if the parents are fearful, this then is likely to transfer to the children. Where does it all come from? Perhaps there really are more dangers out there
than there used to be, but some of it may also stem from …technology. Technology has
made the transfer of information faster via the internet, TV, radio and the newspaper. We
now have an increased and intensified idea of what happens in our world. Perhaps this
has been a big instigator in provoking fear in people?

A few years ago when West Nile was popping up on everybody’s radar and
people were getting scared I remember seeing doctors coming on the local news
and saying ‘go to the video store, rent some movies, pop some corn, stay inside
and watch TV,’ scaring people from being outside and I think that’s part of it.
There used to be a time when kids would climb trees, fall out of trees, skin their
knees, get hurt and everything was cool. But now we are so afraid of getting hurt,
we are so afraid of West Nile, we are so afraid of this and that. In reality kids can
go on computers and find more dangerous things than they possibly might playing
in their yard. – current camp instructor, May 13th, 2009

In attempting to be secure and safe, children are missing out on the entire world that
exists in nature. Not only are the parents propelling their fears onto their children, but in
keeping the children indoors, nature becomes foreign to them. We tend to fear what we
do not understand or know much about.

There is another fear involved here. This fear is not the kind that keeps children
indoors. It is the kind that stems from the knowledge that children are not spending
quality time out in nature. This fear is for the future; that as a human population we will
become so far removed from nature that it will feel even more foreign to us and
eventually we will forget about its existence entirely.

There was a time before modern society when you had to know what plants you
could eat. You had to know what plants were medicine. You had to know these
things and you just kind of took that knowledge base for granted. Over time now
we are forgetting this to the point where we are spending millions of dollars to kill
dandelions and poison our lawns. So farther into the future as we get more
disconnected from this knowledge base that got us to this point through history it
seems like we are starting to view nature as an enemy. Something we want to
conquer and have control over. …It seems like we want to be in control and
nature puts us in a situation where we aren’t always in control. It seems like some
people are doing whatever they can to have control and that’s separating us
further and further from that and forgetting that that’s where we came from and that’s who we are. So I don’t know. I really don’t know. I don’t want to be pessimistic but I mean some people go to work and don’t ever step on the land. They are in their apartment, go to the garage, ride the elevator, drive their car, go to a garage, get in the elevator, go to their office and they never once step on the land. So people start to forget. I guess that’s what is going to happen. We are just going to forget and there is going to come a day when we just don’t know any better because it is no longer a part of our everyday life. I don’t know. I’m a little afraid of that scenario. …I’m more than a little afraid. – current camp instructor, May 13th, 2009

Others I interviewed expressed similar sentiments. They stated that they see things moving in a dismal direction, but hope that something happens to reverse the direction of this disconnect that is growing between humans and nature. That something that needs to happen can be a move in the art curriculum in schools towards Nature Based Art Education.

Art teachers have a prime opportunity to mend the disconnect. If the parents are afraid, someone needs to stop the fear from becoming contagious and completely infesting the children. Where is our planet headed in the future if all of its inhabitants are fearful of the natural aspects of it? Children will grow up with the mentality that the natural is bad, that if it exists we should plow over it, build on top of it, destroy it, or let it die. After all, what is it to them? It is the unknown and un-appreciated. It is something for them to control. One staff person mentioned that teaching outdoors “…gets kids used to the idea that we are not the only ones who live here and that we are not necessarily the supreme alpha beings of planet earth. So it’s humbling. I think more kids need that… to be humbled.” David Orr (2004) focuses on the importance of, reverence for, and personal responsibility for the natural environment. Teachers can be the ones to stop the fear and instead instill humility, reverence and a sense of responsibility in the children today. This can help the future to seem less discouraging… and more encouraging.
Furthering the validity of Nature Based Art Education, as result of the decrease in time outdoors, social and physical health issues have become more and more prevalent in children today. Those that I interviewed discussed the increase in child obesity that they have personally witnessed as teachers. These teachers blame the shift in society towards technology and children’s use of it as reason.

We even had a kid who was way over weight and was having nose bleeds because his blood pressure was so high. His parents weren’t having any luck helping, so one day the kid went to the phys. ed. Teacher and said ‘I need help. I know I do.’ We switched his schedule all around so he would have two phys. ed. Periods a day. She has him in a regimen of weight lifting and aerobic type activities for right now and he’s starting to lose some weight. She’s trying to explain to him that come summer time he needs like an hour out of every day to do these things. So there’s the health issue. It’s there. It’s not just what I think. It’s documented. – accompanying school teacher, May 14th, 2009

One of the children I interviewed mentioned that they found camp tiring due to all of the outdoor activity, another seemed fearful of having to go on a day hike and night hike on the same day, while others expressed excitement in being given the opportunity to run around and be outside so much because it was something they rarely did, now were finding fun.

A lack of time outdoors can have a negative impact socially as well on health. Much of the technology that is keeping children indoors involves solitary activity or if it
is not solitary it involves interactions with other people over the web as opposed to in-person. Monke (2007) discusses multiple aspects of technology that contribute to the dwindling of face-to-face human interactions and communication. The youth today have had one third fewer face-to-face conversations than their parents did at the same age. The younger generation prefers mechanical means to interpersonal means and often will avoid human interaction if it is possible. Just as a camp instructor mentioned how people can get through an entire day without stepping foot on the actual earth, people can also quite easily move through an entire day without speaking to another person. Playing outdoors tends to be a more social undertaking. In many of the memories the staff and teachers shared from their involvement outdoors as children they mentioned meeting up with other children from the neighborhood or playing with their cousins and bothers and sisters out in the yard or at their grandparent’s house for example.

The learning in an average classroom is hindered by a setting not conducive to personal dialogue and cooperation. Many teachers, intentionally or not, establish territorial spaces in their rooms. The outdoor environment breaks down these barriers through the removal of the conventions that often stand in the way of interpersonal connections and friendly relationships among students and teachers. There tends to be more open interaction among the students themselves as well as the teacher and the students as they are more freely enabled to move about and have friendly banter with one another. The camaraderie brought about by teaching in the open outdoor setting can assist in feelings of safety in the students. Tom Barone (2001) discusses a student of the art teacher Don Forrister, who disregarded territorial space in his art room: “Barry could count on his new comrades for the support and encouragement needed to soften the blow
of failure in any finished product. Within this second home, the young artist felt safe enough to travel abroad, free to take risks that, next go-round, might move him beyond mediocrity” (p.63). Taking risks and moving beyond mediocrity are crucial aspects of a successful artist. The outdoor environment contributes to success in this realm.

As Monke (2007) testifies, education should establish life, and not machines, as the measure of value. By allowing for some time spent away from computer screens and technology, and for some fresh air and physical movement, art teachers can help children gain an appreciation for the natural environment, but also an appreciation for and interest in one another and their own well being and health. The outdoor environment is composed of life, and just being around so much that is living (and also taking the time to realize that so much life actually exists … since many children are not even aware that trees and plants are living) can inspire appreciation for other life; their own and that of others, human or otherwise.

The School Setting

Figure 23: El Grotto, Photograph courtesy of Beth Ciborek © 2007

Not only are children spending very little time outdoors while at home, but their time at school seems to be no different, again reinforcing the important contribution of
Nature Based Art Education. When asked how often they take their kids outdoors for class, the teachers I spoke with said that they go outside very rarely. A few did mention that they will go out every once in awhile if the lesson calls for it or if it is just a really nice day outside.

I don’t use it [the outdoors] too much unless it’s a really nice day. I don’t have any windows in my classroom. So it gets kind of confined some days, especially when it’s hot. So we go out sometimes. But I wouldn’t really say that we interact with nature as much as we just kind of enjoy being out of our box. – accompanying school teacher, May 12th, 2009

Some teachers mentioned that the subject matter they teach does not lend itself to being outside; that in science it might make sense…but not language arts for example. Others mentioned time as a factor, saying that there just is not time in one regular class period to get their class outdoors, teach the lesson and get them back in.

In interviewing the camp staff I was curious about their view of how schools and teachers utilize the outdoors. I was interested in what sort of opinion they had formed having not worked in a school, but being around and interacting with both the students from the schools as well as the teachers. Most of the staff expressed that they believe incorporating the outdoors into teaching in regular school settings necessary, and that it is not incorporated enough. The staff seemed to be aware of the difficulties teachers face. A few brought up the crunch that standardized tests, lack of resources, and time and finances puts them in. The belief that the schools and teachers are not doing enough to get the students outdoors when it is important that they do so was the common thread in all of their comments.

I see teachers bringing in lake samples and putting them under a microscope ….they’ll bring in dead natural things to cut up and observe. And they’ll be like ‘this is out there, but you’ll never see it.’ I don’t think the outdoors play much of a
part [in schools] and won’t in the future. Do I think it should? Most definitely. – current camp instructor, May 13th, 2009

It seems as though schooling today is just reinforcing nature as some distant and foreign terrain, something superfluous and less important than technology and getting high scores on tests.

Also, the student interviews made me aware that the kids rarely go outdoors for recess. When asked what they do instead I was told that they sit in the auditorium and talk. If there is snow on the ground, or if it is drizzling, or if it is deemed too hot, the kids stay indoors. It also seemed as though at times the students have a choice in whether to go out or stay in.

…I was on recess duty after lunch. I said to the kids ‘Hey, you want to go outside? Come on, let’s go outside.’ It wasn’t really hot, just about 60 degrees, but it was nice. And the kids said ‘Naw, I don’t want to go outside, I want to sit here.’ I said ‘NO, we are going OUTSIDE.’ – accompanying school teacher, May 7th, 2009

It would seem in the context of such comments that children today have limited concepts of the outdoors. Their lives are spent almost entirely inside. Of course they do not want to go outdoors for recess. Recess? Outside? To some of them this is a ridiculous concept.

Nature Based Art Education has the potential to make this concept seem more appealing and less ridiculous. Among other benefits, through more frequent and more quality time spent outside in nature, the potential exists for children to gain a better appreciation for the outdoors.
Further Benefits to the Students

In the Art/Nature Connection section of this chapter, multiple benefits for students are laid out including: increase in the use of imagination and senses; creative thought; and a freedom in self and expression. These however, are not the only benefits brought about by an NBAE curriculum. Other benefits include physical activity, experiential and active engagement, and an increase in responsibility and trust.

*Physical Activity*

As mentioned previously, health is a major concern. Many teachers expressed to me that students are not getting adequate exercise; that they see more kids huffing and
puffing than not. Teaching in the outdoors gets children up and moving. Getting some physical activity while learning naturally helps in the health department, but it also assists mental activity. Being active and physical increases the amount of oxygen reaching the brain and this in turn creates higher levels of attention and better mental functioning (Jensen, 1998). Often teachers will warn the camp staff about certain students stating that “so and so” is a trouble-maker, etc. Many times these students end up being well behaved, attentive, inquisitive and excited to be at camp. It is these students who frequently become the favorites of the camp instructors. They are in an environment where they can succeed and feel comfortable. Compared to a regular classroom setting, camp is less restrictive and certainly involves the expending of more physical activity.

I’ve seen a different side of them here. Some of my kids who I know aren’t attentive in class are attentive here. They get to expend energy and it’s something different too. It’s not just sitting in a classroom, taking notes, listening to a teacher. – accompanying school teacher, May 12th, 2009

An active healthy body often aligns with an active healthy mind. The non-stationary nature of teaching outdoors allows room for different types of learners to excel. The research connecting optimal brain functioning to sustained and regular motor activity is indisputable (Jensen, 1998).

_Experiential and Active Engagement_

Figure 26: Creek Explorers, Photograph courtesy of Beth Ciborek © 2007
Much of what students tend to do in school is inspired or based on content taken from books and not from life. When children are actively involved in their learning it becomes an actual lived experience for them in which learning is more meaningful and tends to imprint better. Addressing how children learn at camp versus at school, one accompanying school teacher stated, “getting it in school and out of a book, doesn’t get at it. You need the field experience you know, and I think that that’s really important for them. Being actually here helps it sink in.” In the outdoors, learning is taken out of books and into life. It then becomes real. It functions as something the children can fully experience with all of their senses and their entire being.

Here at camp, their learning is incorporated within their two and a half or three days of life, which I think is neat. They aren’t coming into school and then going back home. It’s more of an experience of a whole. –accompanying school teacher, May 12th, 2009

Learning should not be separate from life. Learning should be integrated into life. The experience of learning in the outdoors allows it to be more active, involved, and lifelike.

As London (1994) discusses, artists require direct access to the world. Vicarious or second experiences constrict vital intellectual and sensorial activities; too much is predetermined. The richness in art that can only come from first hand experience is sacrificed. Art teachers here seem to have an advantage as well. The art teacher is in many cases seen as the “oddball” amongst the faculty. Though labeling anyone is not normally a good option, an art teacher can use this to their advantage. They have the freedom to do things that may seem… out of the ordinary. This could include not only the way in which their classrooms are designed and decorated, but more importantly, how often their classes venture beyond the constraining walls of the school building. Perhaps
if the art teacher starts… the rest of the faculty will see that what he/she is doing is not so much ‘kooky’ or ‘crazy’ but actually quite beneficial to the students and learning.

Organic Flow of Instruction

The majority of that which is natural and organic is curvilinear. It would thus make sense that the teaching flow of Nature Based Art Education be curvilinear; a bit like crossing a wide stream, one stepping stone at a time. There is a destination (the other shore/ art education objective to be taught), but the natural state of the stepping stones in the stream make a perfectly straight trip across impossible. Instead, as each step is taken, where to place your foot next will need to be determined as you move along. Along the journey, you never know what you will find. There may be a fish or salamander in the water, one stepping stone may wobble and force you to get your foot wet, there may be many small stones in one place that compose one foot placement, or there may be multiple large stones within reach of your foot providing a choice of where to move next. The organic flow of instruction in Nature Based Art Education is composed of openness to emergent curriculum, the need for multisensory and multidisciplinary engagement for success, and the incorporation of learning into life.
The Emergent Curriculum

Figure 28: Deer Carcass, Photograph courtesy of Beth Ciborek © 2007

...yes there is standardized testing and yes there is curriculum but there is also a flexibility that comes with teaching and learning. That’s one thing that we have over classroom teachers – we aren’t stuck with a rigid curriculum that we have to follow. If I see a caterpillar on a leaf I can stop my hike and talk about that caterpillar. So that flexibility of being able to incorporate teachable moments gives the kids an opportunity to see the whole picture instead of just focusing on trivia or detail or memorization of facts. It allows the kids more flexibility and provides opportunity to want to learn. It reinforces to them that learning isn’t necessarily boring. –current camp instructor, May 13th, 2009

Spawned by the unpredictability of nature as well as the non-linear path of the child’s mind, the emergent curriculum of Nature Based Art Education flows forth like the wavering tide. Flexibility is a key for success in Nature Based Art Education. There should always be goals and objectives, but intertwined with those goals and objectives should be a willingness to take an uncharted path in order to reach them. This is not to say teachers should abandon lesson plans and simply allow what happens to happen. Instead of squelching the unpredictable teachable moments that will inevitably emerge when teaching outdoors, teachers should embrace them and allow them to merge with and enrich the plan.

While at camp, the children are encouraged to look around; to observe the world in untraditional ways and seek out things that interest them. Whatever they find, may end
up guiding the movement of the instruction. This allows the children to take possession of their learning. They have the ability to be the first to spot a frog by the pond, to hear the piliated wood pecker, or to smell some skunk cabbage or a decaying deer carcass for example. This gives them a sense of empowerment. They feel involved in their own learning and the desire to find more, learn more and the drive to keep exploring and discovering grows. This also contributes to a more intense state of interest in what is being learned due to the personal investment that student has in the learning.

Like the flow of a stream, children’s minds wander. The thoughts that flood the human mind are rarely straight and narrow and rarely predictable and perfectly aligned with all previous thoughts. Like the rest of the natural world, humans are not composed of straight lines. We did not build our brains in factories, using rulers and hard edges, so why should our thoughts be restricted to filing in a nice orderly line? While always knowing what to expect can be a comfort to students, a bit of stepping off the path and allowing something unpredictable to guide learning can keep children on their toes. As Barone (2001) confirms in his study of art teacher Don Forrister, a rich imagination is generally incompatible w/ predictability. Being unsure of what is coming next, along with an excitement for the unknown and what the future holds can captivate children and their imaginations.
Brainstorming activities such as flow charts are often used in school and specifically in art in order to let one idea move to the next and to allow for more and more ideas to be born. Multiple routes and paths are grown out of one initial thought making inspiration more likely as there is more wealth to grab from. Thoughts spurt forth from the ground of the brain like a tree with multiple branches emerging from the soil. According to Jensen (2001), singular approaches hurt our brain functioning, while the exploration of alternative thinking and the option of multiple possible answers help our brain functioning. On a grander scale than multiple answers are multiple disciplines. The trunk of the tree grows upwards singularly, but multiple branches grow from that one trunk. Success in Nature Based Art Education depends on the utilization of other disciplines to make information more interesting, accessible, and understandable. Many of the camp instructors have diverse knowledge bases and many of those knowledge bases contain quite the diverse amount of knowledge. It is important to be able to pull together what is being taught with other areas of study in order for students to see the bigger picture; to see that art is not so removed from life for example.
In my close study of a specific camp instructor, I noticed that whatever he taught was multifaceted; he interwove what he was teaching with either life lessons or other divergent areas gathering information from multiple branches at once but allowing it all to converge at a central location. For example, on a night hike he stopped the group at one point to discuss night vision and how their eyes work. Not only was this discussion involving science and biology (parts of eye and their functions) but he interwove facts and an activity about pirates and why they wore eye patches into it as well as mentioning art and the way our eyes see color both in darkness and light. He talked about the number of colors that exist in the spectrum of what is visible to our eyes and challenged the children to think about how colors may have been created just for us to experience. Instead of just focusing on the straight and narrow and presenting the facts about vision and eye functioning, with his vast knowledge base, this instructor was able to connect the learning to other disciplines as well as to something the children might find interesting and memorable in that of the pirates and thus allow the children to take in the information in a way that was more whole.

With art as the base, or tree trunk (growing of course out of the ground; out of nature), and a teacher with either a wide array of knowledge in multiple areas or a willingness to learn a few things from different areas, an art education curriculum can really be enhanced by pulling information from a few branches at once. The art of course should always be the base, but learning makes more sense when it is not so separated from everything else. Tying art learning in with other areas of study can move it out of context putting it closer to the lives of the students.
Incorporating Learning with Life

![At Play at the Pond](image)

Figure 30: At Play at the Pond, Photograph courtesy of Beth Ciborek © 2007

Schools, whether purposefully or not, place boundaries on learning. The students come to school, they exist inside the walls of school for a certain amount of time each day and they learn. Then they leave the walls of the school and go home and continue on with their lives. This sets up the false understanding that learning can only occur within the bounds of that building. The children think, “I go to the school building to learn. That is where I learn. My life apart from that is separate.” This notion that learning is separated from life beyond the walls of school buildings needs to be combated. One accompanying teacher I spoke with while at camp mentioned that he likes how learning is incorporated into life while the children are at camp. There are no bells or doors to exit that say “ok it is time for learning to stop.” Instead, the experience as a whole is educational. Learning is so interwoven into daily activities and life that the children are often not aware they are learning.

The camp setting makes this an easy feat. The children are brought to a new environment away from home to live for a few nights. Their routine is broken, there are no classrooms or desks. In many cases if you take away those aspects so closely related to learning in a student’s mind they will automatically assume “I’m not learning. Where
are the desks? How can this crazy person who is my group instructor be a teacher?” It throws them off because they are so accustomed to learning occurring within certain parameters.

Taking learning out of these bounds and making children aware that learning does not have to be (and in fact should not be) separated from life can occur during single class periods inside average school days. Nature Based Art Education is a good place to start. By removing children from the conventions, and taking them into an environment where they are not used to learning they may realize that there is more to education than the walls of a classroom and that education can be something other than lifeless. It can be life-like. Learning has no bounds. Perhaps if children make this realization they will realize that art, much like learning and life, has no bounds. The freedom must be given to stray from the path, to gather material from different sources, to break free from the shackles and to let art, learning, and life follow the organic flow.

Performance Meets Personality: A NBAE Teacher Disposition

Figure 31: Winter Staff Training Hike, Photograph courtesy of Beth Ciborek © 2007

…the common thread, aside from being at least a little crazy, …is a passion for being outside. I’ve worked with a lot of people who are teachers but they didn’t want to be a teacher in a classroom. They wanted to teach, they felt that was their role but this gives them more flexibility, more freedom, more material. They have
a passion for teaching but also a connection to this environment—the natural world, land lab, teachable moments, the unpredictability of it. I think that’s what a lot of people have in common— the excitement of not knowing what might happen on any given day because nature is so… unpredictable. – current camp instructor, May 13th, 2009

One of my favorite questions to ask during the interviews was related to the camp staff; what qualities they share and also what qualities do they possess that might deviate from teachers you find in the average school. Most of the staff members laughed when I presented them with this question and replied with such things as “…people here are insane and I love that, …I think you have to be one quarter lunatic to work here, …we are a rambunctious group, …we’re not afraid of the children…” Obviously the staff see themselves as a bit out of the ordinary. What other qualities set them apart? And how do these qualities affect the students and how they learn? The average camp staff person is a different “breed.” Some of the qualities that compose the average staff member include: an undying enthusiasm/excitement/energy, a quirkiness that deviates from the mainstream, a willingness to reach the students at their level, love of life and the outdoors, and a sense of purpose and importance for the greater good.

*Undying Enthusiasm/Excitement/Energy*

![Figure 32: Winter Cave Exploration, Photograph courtesy of Beth Ciborek © 2007](image)
…it’s your excitement for the kids. I work with a lot of individuals who are wonderful. They are excited everyday when they come in, but so many teachers get bogged down with testing and fulfilling requirements. I don’t think it matters how long you’ve been a teacher, new teacher/old teacher, I think everyone can fall into that rut. But it seems like with you guys, even though you do this so many times a year with a new group of kids every week you can tell you’re still so excited. It’s hard to get up there and be excited every single time you teach and give 100%. You are new and exciting and this is different for a lot of kids so they want to hear what you have to say. I wouldn’t say it’s a lot less structured, but it’s a lot less formal, you know with rules and having to listen… and the kids are more apt to listen the way you explain it… - accompanying school teacher, May 14th, 2009

It was early in the morning when I first arrived at camp. The time of day never matters though… the enthusiasm and excitement are always there. I was reminded of this quite quickly upon my arrival when I was introduced to the current staff members. I had forgotten how ‘rowdy’ camp people can be. Not rowdy in the way a WWF wrestler might be, but rowdy in that they are easily excited about anything and everything and enjoy proclaiming this enthusiasm to the world…in a loud and sometimes dramatic way. It’s as though a camp staff member sees things through the eyes of a child. The spark in the eye is still there; the newness and awe of life never fades. This was all apparent to me within moments of my arrival that morning before the kids even got to camp.

There are a lot of those people here… the people who think everything is astounding and maybe it’s just a bird but they are so excited that they call the other staff people over to see it as well and say ‘look it’s an indigo bunting and it’s amazing!’ – current camp instructor May 12th, 2009

Positive energy breeds positive energy. It is contagious. It is not all a show. The people on staff have a genuine interest and excitement for what they are teaching, what they are learning, and what they are doing and this infects the children and gets them pumped up to learn, experience, and be a part of whatever is coming next.
The excitement the staff members possess stretches beyond the children and stems from their own personal love and desire to learn. The staff is able to choose the topics that they want to teach. This allows for much personal excitement to come through in what is taught and not surprisingly, it transfers to greater enthusiasm in the children.

I quickly learned that the children were extremely excited about being here and their questions clearly outnumbered my answers. So in the course of them asking me things I had to look stuff up. … I tried to provide that bridge between what they can see and what they can know and along the way combine it. Each season I picked up a little bit more and I feel I have learned more as a teacher than I ever did as a student. – current camp instructor, May 13th, 2009

The staff never allows themselves to become bored. Nothing is ever predictable, new classes are being taught all the time, learning is exciting, fun and unavoidable. Often times the kids are so busy being excited and having fun… that they are not aware they are learning.

There are not as many rules to follow as there might be in a standardized curriculum. There is far less rigidity in what a staff person can do with their teaching, not only because of the setting, but also because of the more relaxed and less tense/pressure filled atmosphere. Speaking his view of regular school teachers a current camp staff member said this:

…they’re so afraid of messing up and they don’t want to step outside their comfort zone. I don’t want to know what I would do with an hour everyday with the same kids, because I would just destroy their minds. They would explode with fun and knowledge. I think teachers don’t have that drive to… I think they’re very limited in what they can do. They are cornered and petrified because they’re afraid of the rules and their kids’ opinions of them. – current camp instructor, May 13th, 2009

Instead of living in any amount of fear, the average camp instructor lives in pure unadulterated authenticity. They are what they know best; themselves. They live by their own compasses. Their lives become works of art of the purest form. In reflection over the
teaching of Don Forrister, Tom Barone (2001) states “...life can be lived as a form of art; a drama in which the playwright, disregarding recommendations from habit and convention, slices off pieces from the ordinary line of time and fashions them into aesthetically bracing experiences” (p. 119).

*The Quirks*

Whether they have a huge obsession with superheroes, carry around a rubber chicken named Daisy, create a talking puppet with their hand, giggle an absurd amount, make french fries talk, have an irrational fear of chipmunks... whatever it is, every staff member has some sort of quirk that does not seem completely “normal” by traditional societal measures. According to one teacher the camp staff will go to “...any length to be silly, to engage the kids... and some teachers do that but...” Another teacher added, “…it’s hard to do that when you know you have to get this much covered in this amount of time. It’s hard to think beyond what you’re required to do... to incorporate that silliness...” In general a good description of the average staff member is that they are animated, silly, loud, nerdy, and generally something of a ham. Everyone is unique though and each person possesses different levels of each of those, which helps to reach more of the children. Often times the children will find at least one quirky staff member
to whom they can relate, whether it be in personality or similar interests. Gaining respect can be more easily achieved when the kids are captivated, and share similar interests, such as a love for superheroes.

The following excerpts are taken from my personal reflections and are descriptions of a few of my fellow camp instructors, written upon completion of my first season as an instructor on May 28th, 2006. Though composed three years ago, the quirks present then in the staff are evidence of what exists now and of the possibilities in the future.

She’s obsessed with super heroes; Batman and Spiderman especially. She wishes she was a super hero. It’s my opinion that she is one. She wore a Batman mask and Spiderman cape for one of the campfires. She was Spatman. Her room was decked out with super hero stuff. It covered the walls and ceiling. She collects forks. She has a lot of them and they are all different. She’s got a huge heart and would do anything to help a friend. She’s very selfless. I can’t remember her ever being in a bad mood throughout the season. She laughs and smiles a lot and does things like give her shoes away to kids who need them. You can not help but love her.

...she is quite possibly one of the most unique people I have ever met. She collects big belt buckles and John Deere stuff. Her tractor belt buckle is of course her prized possession. She is more concerned and vocal about her bowel movements than anyone else I know. She likes to talk about poop and farting. And she’s 26. She sticks her tongue out whenever she is concentrating hard. Her face is very animated and she has a voice to go with every face. Yet she never comes across as a fake. She’s completely genuine, insanely intelligent, and very down to earth.

She’s bright. She smiles a lot and is immensely positive. Just being around her makes me feel good. She’s got a light in her eyes. Her sense of humor is dry and brilliant. She’s very excitable and the littlest thing can make her so happy. She loves peas and the color green.

...he has a wealth of knowledge. He knows a lot about a lot. He feels things deeply. He is a thinker and has a philosophy degree. He can be soft and gentle and quiet and also loud and crazy goofy... He’s a great actor. He is completely amazing with the children. They love him.

Her nickname is “Random.” And it’s for good reason. Her brain works in ways no one can possibly understand... even her. There will be a conversation going on...
and she will chime in with something like ‘is that why there was a celebration?’
...and we might have been talking about turtle poop. We will ask her to explain...
and often she won’t be able to. I love this about her. She gets lost in her head.
She’s got strong convictions about what she believes. And she holds to them.
She’s mad crazy emotional and talks with her hands.

Rapport Building

Figure 34: Approaching a Clearing, Photograph courtesy of Beth Ciborek © 2007

…they see you differently. I think that’s so important in schools; that they see you
as a person and not just their authoritative figure. They are more willing to listen
to you and respect you more if they have something in common with you. So it’s
nice that you can break the mold a little bit. – accompanying school teacher, May 12th, 2009

Teachers are human too, …really. Often times it is difficult for students to see
their teachers as “normal” human beings who live “normal” lives. Why is this? Is it
because they dress nice everyday? Is it because they are serious so much of the time? Is it
because they are only ever seen in the school and classroom environment? Whatever the
reason, students becoming aware that teachers are indeed human just like them can help
build rapport with them. Some teachers may argue that they have a reputation to uphold
and that their students would lose respect for them if they loosened up some, shared a bit
about their lives apart from school, or had some fun and laughed with the students. If no
personal connection exists however, the students may be less likely to pay attention or to take what they are learning below the surface.

Rapport is also built when it is obvious that the teacher or staff member is genuinely interested in the student. Camp staff members tend to have a very childlike quality themselves which makes taking a honest interest in the students more natural. A few of the teachers I interviewed stated that they noticed how much the staff really seemed to be interested in the kids and how they would take the time to listen.

You guys really take the time to sit down and listen to the kids. I think parents a lot of time, will ask questions in the car on the way home from school but I’m not sure that they listen. So I definitely think teachers can take a bit from that. – accompanying school teacher, May 14th, 2009

A teacher? Really listen to their students and care about them? This should not be such a foreign concept. As Barone (2001) states, “protection and enlargement of students’ imaginative capacities requires some knowledge of their character” (p.136). The desire to know and understand their students should be inherent in teachers. And this desire should stem not only out of pure interest, but out of an effort to instruct them in more suitable and personal ways. It is those teachers who show a deep interest, true care, and intense focus on their students as individuals who have the most success building rapport with them. In knowing where their students are coming from, a teacher is better able to empathically adopt their perspectives and thus assist in making learning more meaningful for them.

As one teacher stated… it is hard to think beyond what you are required to do. Thinking beyond the requirements is, however, necessary in order to be a successful teacher. If a teacher is so focused on doing everything the “right way” they are likely to miss the boat and end up drowning in a sea of children who either refuse to cooperate or
are numbed and bored by the mediocrity being presented to them. Teachers need to put
themselves out there; to let their true colors shine; to even let themselves be vulnerable in
the eyes of the children. They need to break the barriers and allow themselves to form a
bond with their students and make it apparent that they care about their learning and life.
Showing their quirky side never hurts either. Who does not enjoy a bit of entertainment?
It is important that, while still keeping balance and control, teachers not sacrifice
themselves, their ideals, or their personalities to the rules and regulations of a set
curriculum, and conventional standards. Nature Based Art Education affords this kind of
care and rapport-building potential through the removal of the traditional teacher space
found in the typical classroom. The open setting of the outdoors invites more freedom in
movement and less boundaries that often prevent teachers and students from
communicating in optimal ways. This positive rapport building allows students to feel
comfortable and is also motivating for them to work harder in their artistic endeavors. As
Don Forrister did for many of his students, art teachers have the power to inspire students
to go beyond and to become more than they are (Barone, 2001).

*For the Greater Good: A Love of Life and the Outdoors*

![Forest Sunshine](image)
The common thread that bonds us is the belief that what we are doing is positively affecting something. Even if it’s just a kid who, instead of throwing a gum wrapper out a car window, decides to put it in a trash can. I think we all believe in that and that what we are doing here will somehow affect the world around us positively. – current camp instructor, May 14\textsuperscript{th}, 2009

Every camp staff member really is different. The one true constant is that every instructor believes what they are doing is causing change for the betterment of the children, society as a whole, and the future of life as we know it.

An understanding can be come to by the staff that they are all working for the same thing and that gives room for one instructor to have their style and another instructor to have their style and so forth – with the understanding of supporting each other. That in turn makes each other stronger and a little bit better. – current camp instructor, May 13\textsuperscript{th}, 2009

There is no pressure for one staff member to be like another staff member, or for one quality to be present in all personalities. The different personalities ignite the sky with fireworks of all varieties and colors each fading in and out of the spotlight and moving to and from supporting roles. It is an enduring love of life and the outdoors that pervades the core of all staff members. Some staff members come from vastly different backgrounds, but in spending time at camp; a place of such beauty and awe, as well as being around so many other people who are so obviously passionate for the natural environment, it is nearly impossible to prevent that love from seeping into their veins and enveloping them. If this love of the earth and life, as well as the desire to care for it is so contagious and transfers so easily from time spent and camp and from staff member to staff member, does it not also transfer to the children? That is the hope.

If they see nature and how it works then maybe they will be more apt to take care of it. I feel like if you sense the beauty in it or know why it’s important and enjoy it then you will be less likely to throw something out your car window or deface things or things like that. So I think the more they understand and become a part of it I think they will take care of it better. – accompanying school teacher, May 14\textsuperscript{th}, 2009
If the children are exposed to the natural world, are given the opportunity to be involved with it on some personal level and see the love and care that the staff devote to it, it is likely that they will gain a better understanding and appreciation for it.

In art class, it is common to look at art work from different time periods and from different areas of the world. Looking again to Appalachian art teacher, Don Forrister, Tom Barone (2001) says of his inspiring teaching, “The high art of museums and the masterworks of humankind could of course be enormously life enhancing, but Don believed in moving outward from the simpler beauty of the proximal… toward the more complex and remote” (p.112). Starting small and with what is closest to home and the personal lives of students allows the learning to be both meaningful and more easily transferred to the larger picture as children move on to adulthood. Nature is one aspect of life that is close to home, no matter where home is. Even in the most populated and industrialized city in the country there is still nature to find, explore, and experience. Forming a bond with that which needs our care and attention and at the same time can be artistically engaging, inspiring, and educational seems like a good route to take.

As stated in the quote above: “if they become a part of it, they will take better care of it.” With the current state of things, children are not getting the opportunity to feel a part of nature. As is the case with any relationship, the closer you are to something, the stronger bond you gain and the more care you tend to put forth in an effort to help it. If a child grows up across the country from his or her grandparents and rarely sees them, no bond is able to be formed and as the time comes for those grandparents to pass from this life, the grandchild may feel very little and may continue to move through life unaffected. On the other hand, if a child grows up and sees his or her grandparents on a regular basis,
a bonding relationship is established and as the grandparents near the end of their lives, it
may be that grandchild who visits daily in the nursing home or sends cards and flowers or
takes them to the grocery store or to doctor appointments. With a close bonding
relationship comes the desire to help and care for that or who one is bonded to. Currently
many children are under the impression that nature is some distant relative in some
foreign country. Unless old Uncle Nature comes for a visit once in awhile children will
continue on oblivious to the natural world at their finger tips, oblivious to what a
relationship with nature can hold for them, and oblivious to how their actions and
attitudes are affecting old Uncle Nature.
In order to be a successful teacher utilizing Nature Based Art Education, it is important to know how to guide your students along their pathways of interaction with and creation in and using nature. While it seems as though the teacher may take a more passive role than is customary in order to allow the children a proper amount of freedom, it is still necessary that the teacher be able to communicate, direct, and provide helpful suggestions to their students. Word choice is of course important. For example, the word “draw” should only be used if the students are required to actually draw. In the outdoor environment the choices are meant to be more expansive and less constrictive. It is essential to not place unnecessary restraints on creativity through the use of words, statements or questions that may lower the number of possibilities for students. Without sacrificing the lesson objectives and goals, the language used by the teacher should be as open as possible.

At the other extreme however, the teacher should never just say “Ok, go outside and make something out of whatever you find.” Each lesson should of course have goals
and objectives, just like any other art education lesson. There should be assessment, just like any other art education lesson. Pure and simple interaction with nature is not meant to be the one and only basis and emphasis of a Nature Based Art Education lesson. It is meant to just be a key aspect that other ideas and learning can be wrapped into.

I’m not proposing that art teachers take their classes outdoors every single day of the school year. I am proposing that they DO take their classes outdoors though, more than a few times. Employing Nature Based Art Education does not require that every lesson in the curriculum be nature based. The idea is for this to be integrated into the already existing curriculum. While I think that if Nature Based Art Education were to compose the entirety of the art learning of children, it would be beneficial to them, I also know there are other aspects of art education that are necessary and important and can not be taught in the outdoor setting.

Nature Based Art Education Curricular Suggestions

![Figure 37: Rocky Creek Floor through Tree Reflections](image)

I have created a list of artists (past and present) who utilize nature in their work (see Appendix C). Two requirements guided my choices in which artists to include. The artists had to either be physically involved with nature and using nature as the medium in their artwork or their work had to provoke thoughts regarding our relationship as humans
to nature. Most of the artists on the list do actually work outdoors and use natural elements in their creations. This list is far from complete. It is meant to be a tool used as a starting point. The two books that I found to be most helpful in my search to find these artists are, Rosenberg’s *Art in Action: Nature, Creativity and Our Collective Future* as well as Grande’s *Balance: Art and Nature*.

During my search, one of the artists who stood out was Lezli Rubin-Kunda. The main emphasis in Kunda’s work is personal interaction with nature and her surroundings in an attempt to connect with and feel apart of it as opposed to feeling like an observer. Her work tends to be performance based and almost always involves direct physical interaction with natural elements. For example, in her Backyard with Olive Grove project that took place over the course of multiple months in Tel Aviv, Kunda attempted to relate to an olive tree as a mother might to a child. The performance included several acts including knitting the tree sweaters, laying in its branches, visiting often, and even covering its bark with powdered soup mix. Instead of offering some answers and an explanation concerning this project Kunda poses some questions to the viewer: “Am I domesticating the tree to make it more contained and familiar? Am I taking possession of it by leaving my painted mark on every leaf, anthropomorphizing it to protect it from the elements, eroticizing it’s hidden cavities?” (Rosenberg, 2007, p. 124). This kind of performance work which involves direct interaction with and closeness to nature resulting in the formation of a bond or personal relationship with nature is a good example to work from in Nature Based Art Education. Perhaps Kunda’s work, ideas, and questions could be the basis for a Nature Based performance art lesson.
Another artist who stood out in my search was Philippe Pastor. Using calcified tree trunks from forest fires (started by arson and negligence), Pastor creates sculptures meant to communicate the importance of being more careful with our planet’s natural life and resources. Pastor states, “My work is meant to give new life to these large trees, some of which are more than a century old. Through the universal language of art, I wish to alert the world to the damage caused by forest fires and the need to preserve our natural resources.” (Rosenberg, 2007, p. 126). If a Nature Based Lesson were to tie in environmentalism Pastor could be a good artist to discuss. The theme could involve something regarding a turn around, movement from negative to positive; how to use what is going wrong and the destruction caused by humans to create artwork that could promote positive and healthy change.

Skill building is something that may seem to not have much of a role in Nature Based Art Education. However, skill building could certainly be intertwined into a Nature Based Art lesson, especially in the area of craft. The artist John McQueen is a good example. McQueen began in the art of basket making, but moved on to the creation of sculptural forms composed of interwoven willow twigs. In something like this, while the work itself may not have been created in the outdoor setting, involvement with nature and natural materials was still necessary, as was hand eye coordination, patience, and the learning of a craft or skill. The interaction that the students may have with nature may not always be extensive. For example an entire week long lesson may not require that everyday be spent outdoors. Perhaps for one lesson, the students may simply need to get outside, move around, search for, and gather materials to be used for a project that may need to be completed in an indoor setting. While the goal is to be outside and personally
interacting with nature, the entirety of every lesson need not be outdoors. Skill building and the basics of art such as the elements and principles of design should of course not be neglected.

There exists a multitude of historical models for the basis of Nature Based Art Education. A great portion of art history fits within the realm of Nature Based Art Education. Life used to be an outdoor event, so artwork was created outdoors, utilizing what was available, not at the local art supply store, but in nature. The art historical ties that can be drawn and incorporated into Nature Based Art Education are expansive. Something I would often do while leading hikes at the camp involved taking the children to the creek and talking about how the Native Americans made their paints. I would show the children how to make paint using sandstone rocks from the creek and a bit of water. I gave them the opportunity to make their own paints and experiment to see how many different colors they could find and make. Perhaps an entire lesson could be based on something similar, involving of course the art historical aspect, the gathering of the natural materials, the making of the paints from the natural materials, and finally creating artwork using the paints the students themselves created.

In addition to the list of artists, I also have compiled a short list of organizations, mission statements and websites that I feel would be useful sources to a teacher implementing Nature Based Art Education (see Appendix D). Again, this is only a starting point and meant as a source to lead an NBAE teacher in a positive direction.
Implications for Pre-service Art Education

Visual Culture and Design Education is still a prevalent focus of pre-service teacher programs. I am proposing Nature Based Art Education, not as a replacement for Visual Culture and Design, but as an off-shoot of it; as another facet necessary of inclusion within its realms. The natural world after all, composes part of what is our visual culture. Instead of being shoved in our faces and force fed to us like media, advertising, and the other aspects of our visual culture, it is getting overshadowed and overlooked. Nature is the disappearing landscape continuing to be overwrought with our insistent need to destroy every inch of it and build up industry and consumer cultures in the name of progress. Nature Based Art Education should not be overlooked like the natural landscape often is in pre-service education programs. If in-coming teachers who are on the beginning paths to a career as art teachers have at least a small dose of what Nature Based Art Education is and can be in their preparation, the future of art education, children, and the planet will all benefit. Perhaps a requirement should be that pre-service teachers design a lesson to be taught outside of the classroom, utilizing the natural world and the magnitude of materials and inspiration it has to offer. Perhaps the professors in art education programs should realize the necessity of the addition of Nature Based Art Education into the average art curriculum and set an example by teaching college art
education courses outdoors; somehow utilizing the natural world in there teacher. Experiencing what it is like to be taught in this fashion may be a memorable experience for those pre-service teachers. It will after all lift life out of the ordinary and the routine they are accustomed to. They may then feel more inspired to take their own classes outdoors in their future career as an art teacher.

Suggestions for Future Research

The sun is just peaking above the horizon; soon it will be overhead. There is much more to know and to research in the area of Nature Based Art Education. What I have presented here can be seen as the first stepping stone on the pathway to a full view of nature as a part of the art curriculum. Obviously I was limited in this study. Time was a huge restraint. I was only at the camp collecting my data for two weeks and the children I observed and taught were only immersed in the setting for three days before a new group of students arrived. Future research in this area is an absolute necessity. For example, a study could be done on specific artists who utilize the outdoors in their artwork. A list of sources for teachers utilizing Nature Based Art Education could be compiled including names of artists and artworks, how and why artists today and in the past incorporate the natural world/materials in their art, and perhaps a list of lesson plans or ideas. A study could be done to find out what percentage of art teachers across the country (or even
worldwide) are taking their students outside as a part of their teaching. This could include reasons for doing so, the potential benefits or set backs of doing this that these teachers have noticed, as well as whether current teachers see taking their classes outdoors as something worthwhile. What is the prevalent opinion? Just because all of the teachers I interviewed locally believe it to be important this does not mean this fact is necessarily 100% transferable beyond this study. Another aspect that could be researched is the utilization of this in an actual school setting as opposed to observing it at its extreme; the camp location. The children could be closely observed over a long period of time in order to really grasp the true benefits of Nature Based Art Education. The teacher utilizing Nature Based Art Education could also be studied in depth.

Final Reflection

Figure 40: Shadow by the Pond, Photograph courtesy of Beth Ciborek © 2007

I am immensely grateful for the time I spent working as an outdoor educator before my two years of graduate study. While at the camp I saw the attitudes of the children, and how much learning and fun was taking place, all while the children were being expressive, creative and forming a positive bond with the natural world. Being a first hand witness to and a part of that was incredibly influential in this study. It has also
been influential in my growth as a teacher and I’m certain it will play a huge role both in how I teach in the future, and in where my studies lead me. As I said before, this is only the beginning, it is something I know I will never let go of. As I move forward I will always be learning more and growing as a teacher and researcher in the field of Nature Based Art Education. I do not expect my path to be straight and narrow, but I expect it to be ever expanding and growing. The sapling has emerged. The redwood is on its way.

The field of Art Education has the potential to encompass so much. It is my hope that this study will broaden views of what an Art Education curriculum can and should encompass. Nature Based Art Education is an important addition for the field of Art Education in order to help children form a positive relationship with the natural world that will lead to reverence for the natural world and eventually actions that will help preserve the environment. Today especially, adults and children alike are more caught up than ever before in the consumerist, materialist, and overall media-infested culture in which we live. If our educational system does not begin to pay more attention to our societies distancing from the natural world, the last living tree may be the next big tourist attraction or wonder of the world.
APPENDIXES
Appendix A

Example of Nature Based Art Education Lesson

1. **Title**: A Breath of Fresh Art: Communication with Nature

2. **Grade level**: High School

High school students are conscious of their place in the world and the impact they are having on others and the world around them. They are critical thinkers and understand complex ideas. Often though, high school students are caught up in relationships with each other, what they will do when they graduate, who to ask to the dance, whether or not to go the party at Bobs place on Friday, how late the mall is open, if they should instant message Steve or give him space when they get home from school … there is so much going on in their minds that often they forget there is a world beyond school, friends, shopping, and college applications. This lesson forces them to take a step back and think about that which is normally just stomped upon and disregarded; their relationship with nature. It is meant to provide them with a bit of relief from the chaos that generally surrounds them.

3. **Length**: 6, 50 minute class periods

4. **Objectives**:

   * **Critical Inquiry**: Students will learn about the human relationship with nature as well as their personal relationship with nature. Students will think critically about and discuss how and why we change nature, how nature changes us, and about their personal relationship with nature.

   * **Art History**: Students will learn about the art of Giuseppe Penone, Jean Dubuffet, and Pavel Tchelitchew. They will learn about the context of artwork and how
and why these artists utilized natural materials and images to create meaningful art expressing a relationship between humans and the natural world.

-Aesthetic Students will learn about Arte Povera and will discuss whether this kind of art should or should not be considered art and why. Students will share their opinions and learn that not everyone always agrees. They will learn the importance of backing up their opinions and of being opened minded to other ideas.

-Studio (Media): Each student will create an artwork utilizing at least one natural material that represents their personal relationship with nature or that marks their presence in nature in some way. Students will make choices of what materials to use and in what way to construct the final product or process.

-Studio (Elements and Principles): Students will learn how different qualities, such as texture and color, of different materials, play an important role in the interpretation and meaning of artwork. By giving the students complete freedom of choice in materials they will need to be conscious of the qualities of the materials they are using and how this will affect their final artwork.

PROCEDURE:

*Weather permitting all of these class sessions will be held outdoors.

DAY ONE:

Materials: game cards, visuals

OPENING ACTIVITY/GAME:

*Being Nature: A Game of Charades*

Students will each receive a game card. They will be told that it is top secret and to make sure their neighbors do not catch a glimpse of it. I will explain that we will be playing a
game of charades and that they will act out the word on the card to get the class to correctly guess what they are portraying. I will give them a moment to study the pictures on the cards and think of possible ways to act the word out. One at a time, the students will take turns acting. Once the class has guessed correctly, the cards will be passed around so that all students can look closely at the pictures. I will explain that this will be important for what we do after the game.

After everyone has taken their turn, and all cards have been seen, I will ask what all of the cards have in common. Students will of course pick up on the fact that they are all items found in nature… I will force them to think beyond this and realize that each picture shows either nature personified (we will discuss what this means if they don’t already know) or how humans have altered nature in some way. We will discuss why humans do this. Is it for power? Is it to make our world look better? Is it out of boredom? Why do we so often give human characteristics to natural elements? Why is it necessary for the star to smile and the fire to grimace? Does it have to do with humor? Does it have to do with making the inanimate more accessible and easy to understand? Is it all simply for our own entertainment?

I will tell students that their homework is to look for items that show nature personified or nature being altered by humans. They should come ready to class tomorrow ready to share what they found.

**DAY TWO:**

**Materials:** game cards, visuals, drawing paper, pencils, brainstorming hand out
Procedure:

We will first recall the game, images involved, and discussion from the previous day. Who can tell me what we discussed yesterday etc…I will ask them about their homework and give them the opportunity to share what they found.

Discussion of Visuals:

*Hide and Seek*, 1940-42, Pavel Tchelitchew

*The Magician*, 1954, Jean Dubuffet

*The Tree Will Continue to Grow Except at This Point*, 1968, Giuseppe Penone

In looking at the visuals one at a time, I will ask the students what the images have in common with the game we played. I will ask them questions about what they see and why they believe the artists may have made the decisions they did. For example in looking at Penone’s work I might ask ‘Why do you think Penone did this? Why would he want an iron cast of his hand on a tree?’

After all visuals have been discussed I will show them my models.

Before I show them my first example though, I will ask the class to imagine they are standing before a big field of snow, flat and smooth, no footprints, no tire tracks, no animal tracks, nothing…I will ask them what they would do. Would they stand there overwhelmed by the beauty of it? Would they run through it all willy nilly? Roll around? Throw the snow up in the air? Or would they be like me and create a certain pattern in it by walking through?

Then I will show them my model of my snow art. I will give further explanation of why I did it, why I chose a spiral pattern, how it was meaningful to me etc and then show my
example of the ‘leaf quilt.’ I will ask the students what they think it is made out of and then show them a close up photo so they can see that it actually is leaves.

I will next ask the students if they have ever personified nature or in some way altered nature themselves. I will ask them to share any personal examples they can think of. This will lead into a discussion of aesthetics. Are what you just described works of art? Is what I did in the snow art? The plow guy came in the morning and destroyed it. Does this matter? Does art have to be lasting? Do you have to be able to put it in a museum for it to be art? What about the images we’ve seen yesterday and today? I will bring up arte povera, explain what it is and refer back to Giuseppe Penone. We will talk about how some artists use materials in nature to create their art.

After the debate/discussion, I will explain their assignment and present the guidelines/rubric (see attached documents) I will tell them that they will be creating an artwork that somehow represents their personal relationship with nature. This can be done by altering nature in a way that is personally meaningful to them, creating a ‘portrait’ out of natural materials, or finding some way of leaving their mark in nature. I will explain that they can use whatever materials they would like as long as they incorporate at least some form of natural material and take into account the preservation and health of the environment (ie no cutting down of forests, spraying toxic chemicals on flowers etc).

Before they leave class I will present them with the brainstorming handout (see attached documents). Their homework will be to complete the handout and to think of possible ideas for the project.
I will tell them that the next day will be for brainstorming and sketching and that I will meet individually with them to discuss their ideas. The following day will be a work day and they will be required to have all materials they need.

**DAY THREE:**

**Materials:** game cards, visuals, drawing paper, pencils, brainstorming handouts

**Procedure:**

I will begin class by asking if anyone wants to share their ideas from the brainstorming handout or for their project with the class. After this, I will instruct the students to continue thinking, jotting down ideas and doing sketches, while I meet with them one on one to discuss their thoughts and project proposals.

**DAYS FOUR & FIVE:**

**Materials:** game cards, visuals, the students will be responsible for bringing what they need

**Procedure:**

Class will meet inside initially so that the students in need of paints or colored pencils etc can gather up the supplies they will need. We will then move outdoors, so that the students working with/from the natural environment outside of the school have access to their materials as well. The rest of the period will be work time.

Students will be responsible for cleaning up their individual supplies, bringing them back indoors, and returning them to the appropriate locations on the storage shelves. I will of course give them time to do this at the end of class.
In closure I will explain to the students that the next class period will also be a work day, that they will have the weekend to complete their projects, and that their projects will be due on Monday.

**DAY SIX:**

**Materials:** game cards, visuals, final artworks (to be brought in by the students)

**Procedure:** For the sixth and final day of this lesson, students will share their artworks with the class and then help with the installation of the exhibition of them in the hallway outside of the art room. Throughout the discussion and sharing of the art work we will review the main ideas of the lesson and the ideas we have discussed. I will also ask the class why they think we did the lesson, ask them if they think nature is important and whether or not this lesson changed their opinion or view of nature in any way.

**Evaluation:** Through their participation in discussion I will be able to assess student understanding. Also in talking with the students individually and looking at their brain storming handouts, I will be able to assess their understanding of the lesson and their progress. I will fill out the guideline hand out each student received at the beginning of the lesson in order to assess their final projects. I will also of course be listening as they share their art work with the class as well.
Brain Storm.
Do you feel the wind and rain? Do you see the lightning? Hear the thunder?

1. What element did you act out for the game? If that element could talk what might it say to you?

2. What element/s in nature do you feel particularly drawn to? Why?

3. Think of a time when you felt very aware of nature around you. Describe it.


5. Do you and nature share any qualities? The sun is warm and bright, the sky is ever changing, the trees are reaching, the grass is growing…. In what ways can you relate to nature?
Guidelines for: A Breath of Fresh Art: Communication with Nature

10 points are possible for each category. This project is worth 50 points.

1. Personal meaning/relationship to nature __/10
   Your artwork should be about you and your relationship with nature. Make sure it is meaningful to you and relates to your involvement with nature in some way.

2. Incorporation/use of natural materials __/10
   You need to include or incorporate at least one natural element. Think about how your materials work together and relate. You should have a reason for choosing the materials you did.

3. Final product/presentation __/10
   Whether it be a drawing, photograph, painting, or sculpture craftsmanship and presentation are important. The final product should be well crafted and presented.

4. Effort/thought involved __/10
   Take some time and put some effort and thought into this. Don’t just go with the first idea that comes to mind. What are other possibilities? Challenge yourself. Your artwork should demonstrate hard work and thoughtfulness.

5. Written explanation/artist statement __/10
   This should be a clear explanation of your artwork, one or two paragraphs in length. Why did you make the decisions you did? What does the piece mean to you? What does the viewer need to know about it in order to understand it fully?

Total Points: __/50
EARTH ART: A Nature Based Art Lesson (written originally for use at the camp)

Grade Level: 6th grade

Length: one 60 minute session

Objectives:
- **Art History:** Students will learn about the art of Andy Goldsworthy. They will be able to see the possibilities that exist in creating art purely out of natural materials. They will learn about the context of artwork and how and why Goldsworthy (or other artists) utilizes natural materials and images to create meaningful art.
- **Aesthetic** Through an activity and discussion/debate students will think about and consider the question ‘what is art?’ Students will share their opinions and learn that not everyone always agrees. They will learn the importance of backing up their opinions and of being open minded to other ideas.
- **Studio:** Students will have the opportunity to explore the environment and select natural materials to use in their artwork. Each student (or group of students) will create an artwork composed entirely from what they find in nature. Students will make choices of what materials to use and in what way to construct the final product or process. Students will learn how different qualities, such as texture and color, of different materials, play an important role in the outcome of the final piece.

Materials:
Paper, visuals/pictures of earth art to share, about 6 different ‘art’ objects to be debated (for example a child’s scribbles, a brochure, a snapshot, you can also use items in your surrounds such a students hat or backpack, etc)

Background:
Students are often unaware of the possibilities that exist with nature. This lesson opens their eyes to their environment and allows them to see their surroundings in a new way.

Flow Learning Procedure:

*Awaken Enthusiasm:*
Begin by giving the students a “mission.” They must find something in their natural environment to be used as a writing utensil. Ex: Bark, rocks, leaves etc. Have the children return with their items and sit down. Ask the children to think about what qualities make art, art. What defines art? What qualities does an artist need to be considered an artist? Make a list of what the students say.

*Focus Attention:*
Pass out a piece of paper to all students. Tell them to use their natural writing utensil to number the paper 1-6. Hold up 6 different objects - one at a time. (*Ex: photograph, childs drawing, information pamphlet, greeting card, camera, leaf) Ask the students to
write down ‘yes’ if they think the object is art and ‘no’ if they think it is not. Afterwards go through each item asking who said yes or no and their reasons for deciding such. (Play the devils advocate if need be to get a friendly debate going). Refer to the list you made of art qualities and see if each item has the qualities listed. If the children ask for the “correct” answer (and they will), just ignore the question and move on. After you have gone through each item ask if any were frustrated that you did not give them a definite answer. Most often some will be. Explain why you did not give them an answer. Talk about the dictionary definition of art...and discuss whether or not is should be/or is the only definition that exists. Discuss the fact that though they may disagree with their fellow students it does not mean one of them is correct etc. They will begin to understand the importance of backing up their beliefs.

Tell them there are some artists who create art out of the earth and that some people don’t believe their art to be ‘art.’ Discuss reasons this may be… the temporary quality of it etc. Show them some examples of Andy Goldsworthy’s work (or another artist/s). Discuss whether they believe the art you show them is or is not art.

**Direct Experience:**

After the students have seen some examples give them some boundaries and allow them to venture off and become inspired by their environment. Have them use things they find (already on the ground...there shall be no tearing down tree branches or killing living things) to create a work of art inspired by those items. Allow them to work in partners or groups if you like.

**Share Inspiration:**

With about 10 minutes left in class gather up all of the students and take a “tour” of the outdoor gallery. Stop at each piece of art and have the students share about their art. Allow for questions as well as comments or critiques. IN order to tie it all together, before dismissal ask the students if they believe what they have created is or is not art.
Appendix C

Examples of Artists Who “Use” Nature

Francis Baker:
www.francisbaker.com
Deals with what confines us as humans… casts everyday objects that to him represent this confinement such as a Barbie Doll, and uses the cast negative as a container in which to grow a plant. Baker says, “…recording its ultimate suffocation under the conditions of being root-bound, I am able to connect to a life-and-death struggle with physical confinement…You can see these images, reflect upon them, and then maybe come to some of the same conclusions. Slow down. See things fresh. When the direction we are pointed in is not a direction best suited to our health, we can then use the awareness that we are being confined by thoughts and emotions as a tool to find a different action” (Rosenberg, 2007, p.108).

Alfio Bonanno:
www.sculpture.org/documents/scmag01/oct01/bonanno/bon.shtml
Bonanno creates site specific work completely out of natural materials. Bonanno states, “I needed to find a connection, an idea that could be identified with this area, something that would make me feel that I was not intruding but instead creating a dialogue with this specific site…Nature has taken millions of years of evolution to achieve a delicate balance; preserving that balance demands our care and attention…The forms cling to the site, creating a new visual experience and, hopefully, sharpening our sense of awareness and responsibility…” (Rosenberg, 2007, p. 122).

Chris Booth
http://chrisbooth.co.nz
Uses a variety of natural materials to create sculptures in the outdoor environment.

Jackie Brookner:
www.jackiebrookner.net
Biosculptures are living works of art that function ecologically as well as aesthetically and metaphorically. The vegetated sculptures involve use of mosses and the bacteria that live in plant roots transforming toxins in water to nutrients for their own metabolism (Rosenberg, 2007, p.166).

Agnes Denes:
www.greenmuseum.org/content/artist_index/artist_id-63.html
One of the pioneers of ecological environmental art, she believes art must change with the world. All of her artworks call attention to a variety of social concerns. She has planted ten of thousands of trees. Denes says of her works of art, “As difficult as it is to realize, it is absolutely necessary to create them and to do so in the nervous tension of cities, to give people a chance to stay in touch with nature wherever they are in the world…I left the ivory tower of my studio and entered the world of concerns” (Rosenberg, 2007, p. 154).

J.C. Didier:
www.unep.org/art_env/Exhibitions/trapped.asp
Created an installation consisting of an endangered tree with its roots exposed, its body on life support, and clear feeding tubes support it. The viewer can step inside as a guest might visit as patient. The tree is dependent on human care for survival. The installation is set up for long term so that the tree will exist after its species is extinct. Didier states, “Trapped inside symbolizes both destruction and regeneration. It gives us a glimpse of the future and puts us in a close relationship to nature in jeopardy… we need to step carefully as we walk into the future. For the sake of future generations we need to use our wisdom now” (Rosenberg, 2007, p. 144).
Mark Dion:
www.pbs.org/art21/artists/dion/index.html
Dion states, “Nature is one of the most sophisticated arenas for the production of ideologies… once I realized that, the wall between my two worlds dissolved. I consider myself a visual artist with a keen interest in the science of life. My work is mostly about exploring questions around the representation of nature, which means that rather than being about nature, it is concerned with ideas about nature. By this I mean that my work tries to investigate what nature means for a particular group of people, in a particular place, at a distinct point in history” (Rosenberg, 2007, p. 66).

Patrick Dougherty:
www.stickwork.net
“Combining his carpentry skills with his love for nature, Patrick Dougherty began to learn more about primitive techniques of building and to experiment with tree saplings as construction material.” (quote taken from above site)

Chris Drury:
www.chrisdrury.co.uk
Drury creates sculpture using natural materials such as stone piles and geo-domes of braided wood where the chaotic flux of the energies in nature seems to have an order (Grande, 2004).

Andy Goldsworthy:
www.goldsworthy.cc.gla.ac.uk

Michael Heizer
http://doublenegative.tarasen.net
Heizer was one of the first to create "land art" or "earth art" which used the earth as its medium. His works reached unprecedented size.

Lezli Rubin-Kunda:
www.lezlirubinkunda.com
“She has an overwhelming desire to connect with nature and be part of the place, not just an observer. She longs to feel at home in her immediate surroundings, as well as in the world at large. She begins by relating to this olive tree, making offerings to it as a mother might – giving it conventional powdered soup mix and knitting it sweaters...” Kunda states, “Am I domesticating the tree to make it more contained and familiar? Am I taking possession of it by leaving my painted mark on every leaf, anthropomorphizing it to protect it from the elements, eroticizing it by exploring its hidden cavities?” (Rosenberg, 2007, p. 124).

Richard Long
www.richardlong.org
“Nature has always been recorded by artists, from pre-historic cave paintings to 20th century landscape photography. I too wanted to make nature the subject of my work, but in new ways. I started working outside using natural materials like grass and water, and this evolved into the idea of making a sculpture by walking.” (quote by Long taken from above site)

John Lundberg:
www.circlemakers.org
Lundberg is the founder of The Circlemakers, the collective of artists who claim to have created some of the many “crop circles” that have been appearing in British farmlands since 1970s (Rosenberg, 2007, p. 82).

Sally Matthews:
www.sallymatthews.co.uk
“The materials I use such as coire fibre, cow muck, steel, copper, wood, all have a relevance to the subject I am making. They usually have a texture and colour that means no surface has to be added. The materials I use for drawing and sculpture are often suggested by the subject, or the place I am working in.” (quote by Matthews taken from above site).
Ana Mendieta:
www.frieze.com/issue/print_back/ana_mendieta
“In Mexico she also made the first of her ‘Siluetas’ (1973–80), richly developed, eerily symbolic works in which she cut, burnt, drew or otherwise shaped a human silhouette (usually her own) into an array of outdoor sites… Questioning the tendency of much Earth art to dominate the landscape, she used the term ‘Earth Body’ to describe her ephemeral interventions.” (quote taken from above site)

Philippe Pastor:
www.monacomodernart.mc/uk/philippe-pastor.php
Pastor uses calcified tree trunks from forest fires (started by arson and negligence) to create sculptures. Pastor states, “My work is meant to give new life to these large trees, some of which are more than a century old. Through the universal language of art, I wish to alert the world to the damage caused by forest fires and the need to preserve our natural resources.” (Rosenberg, 2007, p. 126).

Reinhard Reitzenstein:
http://www.reinhardreitzenstein.com
Reitzenstein explores ways to interconnect nature, culture, science and technology.

Armin Schubert:
http://www.armin-schubert.at/index.html

Dustin Shuler:
www.artleak.org/shulerRainforest.html
Schuler created an ecosystem in the shower. He states, “Instead of having my studio in the woods, I’ve got my woods in the studio….They’re living life and I’m just observing. The thing is that we are all caged. We are caged within our cities and our homes and such. There are boundaries in our culture and there are boundaries in nature” (Rosenberg, 2007, p. 118).

Alan Sonfist:
www.alansonfist.com

“His concern for the fragility of Nature, rather than for its sublime-ness or monumentality, makes him a forerunner of the new ecological sensibility” (quote taken from above site).

Robert Smithson:
www.robertsmithson.com

Steven Siegel:
www.stevensiegel.net

Peter von Tiesenhausen:
www.tiesenhausen.net

Urs-P. Twellmann:
www.twellmann.ch

“Number one in all the work of Urs-P. Twellmann is wood in all its many forms - but ice and fire and nature in general are part of the artistic inspiration and challenge” (quote taken from above site).

Nils Udu:
www.greenmuseum.org/content/artist_index/artist_id-36.html
Designs art with and in nature. His work reflects a conscious desire to merge as opposed to stand apart from surroundings (Grande, 2004).
**Bob Verschueren**
http://digitalconsciousness.com/artists/bobverschueren
“After playing with the wind and the elements in vast natural sites (the Windpaintings 1978-1985), the artist began further concentrating on his plant installations (since 1985) and on Nature as a material; twigs, branches, leaves, pine needles, moss, sand, seaweed or even citrus fruit or potato peelings…” (quote taken from above site).

**Amy Youngs:**
http://hypernatural.com/
“We started thinking about the petroleum dollars involved in transporting our food and postulating about what we, as artists, could do or make that might help remediate waste. The Hydroponic Garden produces only a handful of herbs and tomatoes… but because it is an art piece it can have the greater impact of starting a dialogue…and might encourage others to consider what they are putting on their tables” (Rosenberg, 2007, p. 100).
Appendix D

Useful Sources for NBAE Teachers

The Art for the Environment Initiative
www.unep.org/art_env
“The world of art has always played a critical role in provoking thought and generating dialogue. The UNEP Art for the Environment initiative aims to generate environmental awareness using the universal language of art as a catalyst for individuals, communities and leaders to focus on environmental values. UNEP promotes the creation and installation of a growing number of exhibits around the world, in conjunction with major events such as World Environment Day (5 June) and the UNEP Champions of the Earth awards. UNEP hopes that, by sharing artists' sensitivity to the plight of the planet in works of art ranging from ancient and indigenous objects to contemporary forms and multimedia visions, we can promote a deeper understanding and connection to our natural world.”

Arte Sella
www.artesella.it/eng/index.html
“Arte Sella is an international exhibition of contemporary art which began life in 1986. It takes place in the open, in the fields and woods of the Sella Valley (Borgo Valsugana municipality, in the Province of Trento). Since 1996 the Arte Sella project has been laid out along a path in the woods on the southern slope of the Armentera Mount. The ideal route, named ARTENATURA (“Art in Nature”) which has taken shape in this way is designed to enable visitors to observe the works of art and at the same time to enjoy the natural site itself with its different types of woods, rocks and monumental trees.”
*this site shows a lot of examples of the artists who created work as apart of Arte Sella… all of whom would be great additions to a Nature Based Art Education curriculum.

Children and Nature Network
www.childrenandnature.org
“The Children & Nature Network (C&NN) was created to encourage and support the people and organizations working worldwide to reconnect children with nature. C&NN provides access to the latest news and research in the field and a peer-to-peer network of researchers and individuals, educators and organizations dedicated to children's health and well-being.”

Green Museum
www.greenmuseum.org
“greenmuseum.org helps people create, present and appreciate art that heals our relationship with the natural world.”
*There is a massive list of artists (with images and info on each) on this site who incorporate nature or environmental ideas in their work.

The Natural World Museum
www.thevolunteercenter2.net/org/3739888.html
“VISION: NWM will be the world's first venue dedicated to global conservation through environmental art within a working model of sustainable architecture, growing our replicable program model world wide to have the broadest social impact.
PURPOSE: NWM is a cultural institution that collects, cares for, and exhibits world-class art that explores the relationship between humans and the environment for the purpose of generating a sustainable culture.
GOAL: To bring together a coalition of individuals, organizations, and businesses who believe that art inspired by nature serves as a catalyst for cultural evolution and empowers people to make informed decisions about protecting our endangered planet.”
The Orion Society

www.orionsociety.org

“The Orion Society is a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization supported by donations from individuals, families and foundations, and corporate and government grants. The Orion Society’s mission is to inform, inspire, and engage individuals and grassroots organizations in becoming a significant cultural force for healing nature and community. We accomplish that mission by way of our programs, this and other websites, and gatherings of people brought together to explore the important issues of the day.”
REFERENCES


