

Creative strategies for evaluating teaching and learning on out-of-school visits

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The scale of the Eden Project built in the disused Bodelva clay pit at St. Austell is very impressive as per the vision of its creator, Tim Smit.

‘We have intended to create something that not only encourages us to understand and to celebrate the world we live in, but also inspires us to action. Eden isn’t so much a destination as a place in the heart. It is not just a marvellous piece of science-related architecture; it is also a statement of our passionate belief in an optimistic future for mankind.’

(Smit, in Readman et al. 2001)

Since Eden opened in 2001, over 100,000 children have visited Eden on school trips. The Schools Team have been working to build a specific philosophy and approach to learning for children and young people at Eden. Ultimately, we are exploring the question of how to make young people feel connected to the world that they live in – from both a global and local perspective.

We are exceedingly fortunate to have the freedom to experiment with our own ideas, mixed with those drawn from a range of other inspirational sources and conversations. Through our collaboration with Exeter University’s School of Education, we have been able to properly research and evaluate our work. This has allowed us to re-direct this learning back into our design process.

We have been engaged in a research project evaluating the effectiveness of an Eden Education Officer-led workshop called ‘Don’t Forget your Leech Socks’ - a rainforest survival adventure. The Workshop involves an ‘Expedition Brief’ challenging students to test their survival skills and find plants for food, drinking, shelter and health. Using team skills they must consider climate and environmental conditions to decide what to take with them. This simulation adventure attempts to demonstrate the richness of a humid-tropic eco-system, how tropical plants have evolved for these conditions, how we use rainforest plants, how indigenous people use them for practically in their environment and explores commonalities and differences between cultures.

The research has looked at 300 primary-aged children and involved them completing a simple classroom activity in the form of a Personal Meaning Map (PMM) before and after their visit to Eden Project. Children’s written work and drawings from the PMM’s have been analysed and a report written on the findings. The workshop will share these findings and explore how educators need to be creative in their approach to learning on out-of-school visits. Equally how educators might use and develop effective strategies such as, good preparation, high adult to pupil ratio, informed mediation, learner-orientated rather than task-orientated learning and also an understanding of interactive learning.

Workshop aims

- To understand what evaluation is and why it is a crucial measure for developing quality learning practices and environments for students.
- To gain an understanding of different evaluation methodologies.
- To give advice about how to develop an effective evaluation approach.
- To identify learning experiences and share good practice with other educators.

Workshop outline

Time	Activity	Props
2mins	Welcome and Introductions	
15mins	PowerPoint presentation on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Education at Eden - philosophy ▪ What is Evaluation and why evaluate? ▪ Evaluation at Eden and methods 	PowerPoint Post its
10mins	'Don't Forget your Leech Socks' workshop and Personal Meaning Maps - analysis of writing and drawings – the technique.	PowerPoint
30mins	Have a go - use existing Personal Meaning Maps to gather concepts. Use children's examples from Eden Project Discussion.	Personal Meaning Maps
10mins	Results of the evaluation - Effective teaching and learning strategies for out of school visits e.g. to Eden Project	PowerPoint and (*handout)
5mins	Any questions?	

* Handout Findings - Effective teaching and learning strategies for out-of-school visits to Eden Project