

GBBR Teachers' Forum Final Report

April 2011

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1. Purpose

We are proposing an exciting Teachers Forum for a small group of highly motivated science/geography teachers at elementary or secondary level in the Near North District School Board & Muskoka region. The theme would be "Encountering Nature: Taking Your Class Outside" scheduled for Muskoka Woods camp on Wednesday, March 30, 2011.

The goal is to engage teachers that are environmental leaders in their schools and to give them the skills, confidence and knowledge to deliver prepared "Lessons-in-a-Backpack" units on the themes of: Aquatic Ecology, Forest Ecology, and Species at Risk within the Georgian Bay Biosphere Reserve. The workshop uses a "train the trainer" model, where teachers take part in lesson plans and then use them for their classes, and adapts the Lake Huron Environmental Teachers' Workshop held in Goderich (September 14, 2010) to meet experts and connect with area resources and organizations.

Partners for the day include: the Muskoka Watershed Council, Westwind Forest Stewardship Inc., the Eastern Georgian Bay Stewardship Council, and others. Following the principles of Community Based Social Marketing for effecting change, the day ends with a planning session to secure commitment from teachers, link them into the Biosphere Educators Network, and create a wider community of practice for environmental education.

2. Invitation & Agenda

The Biosphere Educators Network invites you to "Encountering Nature: Taking Your Class Outside" on March 30, 2011 at Muskoka Woods Camp.

Time	Activity
8:30	Registration & coffee
8:45	Who – You! Teachers with environmental values. Greetings from NNDSB Director, Heli Vail
9:00	What – Opportunities in a UNESCO World Biosphere Reserve
9:30	Why – Philosophy of Education: what going outside means for learning
10:00	Health Break
10:30	Wow! – Meet an Expert – Forest Ecology, Species at Risk, Aquatic Systems
11:30	How – Speed Dating with resource people & organizations
12:00	Lunch
1:00	Where 1 – Lessons-in-a-Backpack (choose 1)
1:45	Where 2 – Lessons-in-a-Backpack (choose 1)
2:30	Health Break
2:45	When – Vision & Planning Session for Environmental Education
3:15	Wrap-up – Evaluation

3. Participants Invited

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| 1. Leslie Ramsey – Shawanaga | 28. Trent Howell, Rosseau Lake College |
| 2. Nancy Reagan - PSHS | 29. Natasha Rodgers – Whitestone |
| 3. Zack Crafts - Victory | 30. Chris Chambers – Whitestone |
| 4. Emily Fells - Beatty | 31. Cynthia McAllister – Humphrey |
| 5. Sandy Aldsworth - Beatty | 32. Barb Pettinger - McDougall |
| 6. Cathy Downing - McDougall | 33. Donna Maitland Ontario Trillium Fdn |
| 7. Lisa Corbett - Whitestone | |
| 8. Susan Weeks - Nobel | 34. Becky Pollock |
| 9. Sara Lake - Mactier | 35. Carrie McGown |
| 10. Eric Fullerton - Mactier | 36. Martha Martens |
| 11. Trudie Johnson - McDougall | 37. Glenda Clayton |
| 12. Kristy Hodgson – PSHS | 38. Steve Munro |
| 13. Joyce Mansfield, volunteer | 39. Rebecca Willison |
| 14. Lisa Tabobondung – Wasauksing | 40. Kenton Otterbein |
| 15. TBA – Moose Deer Point | 41. Jeff Hathaway, Snakes |
| 16. Glen Hodgson – opening remarks | 42. Other, Snakes |
| 17. Susan Adamson, NNDSB | 43. Tony Cox |
| 18. Kelly Brown, NNDSB | 44. Jonathan Corral |
| 19. Heli Vail, NNDSB | |
| 20. Thom Morrissey | <hr/> |
| 21. Jamie Honderich , Huntsville High | 11 teachers |
| 22. Timo Bijl, Huntsville High School | 2 admin, board |
| 23. Ryan Smith, Huntsville High School | 4 GBBR staff |
| 24. Mar McBrien, Tawingo College | 7 resource people |
| 25. Anne Lindsay, Riverside School | <hr/> |
| 26. Danny ..., supply | 22 Total participants |
| 27. Katarina Smith, supply | |

Engaging teachers was the most challenging aspect of the event. We first invited (in January) all those who had participated in LIAB programs and got a poor response. We sent reminders to the list above. Then we sent a broader invitation through all principals. The response was still poor (n=11) and we had the same number of resource people and staff attend, along with one principal and one representative from the NNDSB who only provided welcoming remarks. Participants were mainly primary & elementary teachers; only two secondary level teachers (including one from Bracebridge). We had no teachers from First Nations schools. This is an area to address for future events.

4. Press Release

PRESS RELEASE – March 28th 2011



Outdoor-Teaching In And About The Biosphere

Teachers had a chance to spend a day outdoors with the Georgian Bay Biosphere Reserve staff during a special training day called “Encountering Nature: Taking Your Class Outside” on March 30 at Muskoka Woods Camp in Rosseau.

The goal was to involve teachers who are environmental leaders in their schools, giving them greater skills, confidence and knowledge to deliver prepared "Lessons-in-a-Backpack". Each lesson is a unit linked to the Ontario curriculum and related to the local UNESCO Biosphere Reserve. Themes include aquatic ecology, forest ecology, and species at risk.

Since 2009, 15 different units have been developed and are available free to teachers from the Georgian Bay Biosphere Reserve website.

“The Lessons-in-a-Backpack take children

outside, encourage them to discover the fascinations of nature and are designed to fit into the curriculum for grades one to ten,” says Martha Martens, program coordinator. “That’s why teachers can easily build the units into their related subjects. I offered some of the lessons myself and had great fun doing them! We want to encourage teachers to carry on themselves by using the various educational materials we developed.”

The workshop on March 30 used a "train the trainer" model allowing teachers to take part in lesson plans that they can use for their classes later. The units included: wetland study, biodiversity, geology, and animal tracks, all adaptable topics for different grade levels. During the day, three experts presented related topics. Steve Munro, from Westwind Forest Stewardship Inc., gave an overview of forest ecology and key issues,

such as how climate change is increasing pest outbreaks in the industry. Glenda Clayton, from GBBR, updated teachers on the 35 species at risk here, and Rebecca Willison from the Muskoka Watershed Council gave an overview of water quality monitoring techniques for children to use.

Other organizations invited to share what resources they offer included Killbear Park and “Sciensational Sssnakes.” With contacts such as these, teachers are given the opportunity to expand their outdoor teaching.

Carrie Nolan, also staff of Georgian Bay Biosphere Reserve, is working on her Ph.D. thesis related to leadership.

“Outdoor education can be an important link to nature, which is society’s very basis,” she explains. “Children learning not only in classrooms but also directly in the outdoors reap academic benefits as well as increased appreciation and knowledge of nature. Studies have shown that learning in nature can help students improve attention, academic performance and attitudes as well as foster creativity. We hope to make the benefits of outdoor education accessible for local teachers and we want to encourage them to integrate the natural world into their lessons.”

Outdoor teaching in and about The Biosphere. Teachers learn about life in The Biosphere and how to teach it to their students. *Cody Storm Cooper photo – April 1st Lifestlyes.*

“The Board supports environmental education and wants students to learn about local issues and to feel proud of their UNESCO designation,” said Glen Hodgson from the Near North District School Board.

The “Lessons-in-a-Backpack” program has also attracted the attention of teachers outside the Board.

“We have been contacted by teachers in Midland and Oakville,” says Becky Pollock, of the GBBR. “A Montessori school in southern Ontario takes all their field trips in the Parry Sound area and are interested in using our lesson plans.”

The training event was made possible by the Ontario Trillium Foundation and the Lake Huron-Georgian Bay Framework for Community Action. The day ended with a planning session to secure commitment from teachers, linking them into the Biosphere Educators Network, and creating a wider community of practice for environmental education.

The Georgian Bay Biosphere Reserve stretches from Port Severn to the French River and is meant to be a model of sustainable development through conservation, community development, education and research. For information visit: www.gbbr.ca.

QuickTime™ and a
decompressor
are needed to see this picture.

5. Evaluation

The evaluation below consists of three parts: (1) closing circle comments with participants at the event (2) staff comments after the event, and (3) an the comments and attached spreadsheet of results from the teachers' written surveys.

a. Closing Circle Comments

Teachers were invited to informally provide us with comments, particularly to reflect on how they will use what they learned during the day. They were also given disc copies of all LIAB units to date to take home. It was mentioned that they are part of an informal Education Advisory Committee to help make recommendations on future programming. General comments:

- Use of games is effective e.g., biodiversity
- Purchase some small sample bottles for benthic invertebrate display
- Use of units adapted to primary levels e.g., tracks
- Promote the program to colleagues at Nipissing faculty of education
- Liked and will use the game "move it" as an ice-breaker
- Don't have to be outdoor experts to enjoy nature... just go out!
- Students show higher test performance scores if they go outdoors prior
- Link the UNESCO biosphere reserve theme to higher grade levels
- The simplest things will be learned, used, replicated (less preparation)

b. Staff Comments

a) Greatest strengths/what to repeat...

Location - I think that the MW facility and staff contributed to the success of the day; fantastic location. Good presenters and ice-breakers. The atmosphere (warm-ups, the place, our own motivation), the duration and structure, the fine weather, and the media work (good article). The advance preparations. The 'why' session was a good reminder for some folks and stuff to ponder for others.

The background, of both LIAB and the biosphere was great. Getting outside and doing the lessons was essential. Next time, go through how to get a lesson step-by-step, see what one looks like, what materials are needed, etc. would have been useful. Our focus was on bringing the actual lesson to life, but starting before that with them would have been good.

b) Weaknesses/what to avoid...

LIAB units should be presented differently to teachers than as to students. I felt that was the weakest part of the day. Should have all LIAB lessons online so we could show how to access the lessons via the screen. We could have adjusted the schedule to go outside once in a.m. then again in p.m. Break up the LIAB sessions - it was tough going back-to-back for me as a presenter and tough on the teachers as participants too.

Questioned the value of having Killbear be a "resource" as teachers already come to the park. The "resources" speed dating wasn't all that it could have been (needed more options and more diversity) and the format: did folks know how to make the most of the time?

c) Participants...

Would have liked to have more uptake from teachers - especially the ones initially contacted. Would have been nice to see more people and new people. This should be a question for next EAC meeting: how to engage teachers?

Loved seeing younger and new teachers out (including 2 supply teachers) - though there was a lot of the 'on board' crowd, I think we reached a new demographic with some long lasting influence.

d) Presenters...

What a fine bunch! Loved the urinal guys (Jonathan and Tony) from Leaders of the Day did ice-breakers and were an excellent start - good energy and activity.

The proportion of experts to teachers was not ideal. Steve and Glenda did excellent presentations and could have given more time to them for questions.

e) Venue and food at Muskoka Woods Leadership Studio: Wow! Fantastic. Just marvelous! I think that the MW facility and staff contributed to the success of the day.

c. Written Survey Summary

Overall, the day was very well received – really positive numbers for whether the day was professionally enlightening, rejuvenating and helpful for future planning. Folks loved the setting. Glenda was the top hit and speed dating was at the bottom of the totem pole. The lessons themselves were appreciated.

From the answers – the highlights were: place, our positivity, and the ease & simplicity with which what we were doing could be incorporated.

Specific improvements for the day: map to the place and getting more teachers involved, as well a couple of people mentioned wanting more activities.

As far as barriers go, two that came up more than once were how LIAB fits into the curriculum and resources. Each lesson identifies how it meets the Ontario curriculum – so perhaps this needs to be reiterated – it's on each lesson, but we didn't show a lesson as written up which would have been good. With the resources barrier, I wonder if we didn't emphasize (clearly communicate) that all the needed resources are available to them.

Lots of other good observations were shared on barriers and are summarized, below:

If I could change one thing from the day, I would change... by...

- having more opportunities to explore how lessons will work outside
- include a map to the specific building
- introducing a few more activities
- choice of LIABs (already done 3 of 4)
- more lessons in a backpack - I would love to see all 4 being offered
- include more teachers - ones that haven't used the program - 'preaching to the converted'
- nothing - what a great, refreshing enlightening day

What are barriers to the LIAB program being used by teachers?

- awareness and contact with the GBBR
- teachers themselves not wanting to make the effort
- it ending in June
- unit planning - how the LIAB will fit into the unit and which curriculum expectations it will help address
- persuading teachers who are not here that LIAB staff can make the experience 'easy' and doable
- some teachers are reluctant to even think about science - this should make it easier!
- connecting to curriculum at the right time of the year
- resources and prep involved for lesson
- liability, travel costs, fear if they haven't done it, classroom management in the outdoors
- understanding from the rest of the school
- equipment
- a barrier might be getting the resources needed (nets, container, etc.)

pressures to cover 'curriculum'

Overall, an excellent event for a motivated group of teachers!

Follow-up Educational Advisory Committee meeting scheduled for May 26, 2011.