RESOURCES

TITLE | HOW TO TRAIN GARDEN EDUCATORS: EDUCATION OUTSIDE'S TRAINING APPROACH

CATEGORY | Garden Educator Training

OVERVIEW | This resource provides an overview of high-quality, standardized training for garden educators. It serves as an introduction to the Garden Educator Training resources included in the Table of Contents.

What this resource is:

Garden educators need to wear many hats, from architect to teacher, social worker to gardener, curriculum writer to scientist and everything in between. Education Outside provided weekly training to garden educators, knowing that their jobs required them to complete a range of tasks from building raised beds and amending soil to teaching standards-based science lessons, often all in one day. Education Outside's training was inspired by groups like the National Equity Project and KIPP, informal science educational spaces such as zoos and aquariums, other training programs such as BEETLES, immersive environmental science programs like NatureBridge, and research-based methods from the Lawrence Hall of Science at U.C. Berkeley. The training program was built over eight years with annual evaluation and assessment of garden educators and feedback from classroom teachers. This iterative process shaped Education Outside's training approach and sequence to best reflect the needs of the 23,000 students served.

The Education Outside training program consisted of three training strands representing the essential elements that make up the garden educator position:

1. Learning and Teaching Outdoors
2. Outdoor Classroom Design
3. Leadership for Community Engagement

The **Learning and Teaching Outdoors** strand takes the best practices of effective classroom teachers and translates them to the garden setting. Trainings in this strand will look familiar to formally-trained classroom teachers, but serve to strengthen informal educators who often come to this position with experience as camp counselors, child care providers, or environmental educators. This training strand includes how to plan and execute engaging lessons, manage and create inclusive classrooms, understand child development, facilitate effective inquiry, and use and adapt existing curriculum that is Next Generation Science Standards-aligned. Many of the training sessions in this strand have been built upon the work of Life Lab, BEETLES at the Lawrence Hall of Science, Youth Outside, and other environmental educator trainings and conferences across the United States, including the Children and Nature Network and North American Association for Environmental Education.

The **Outdoor Classroom Design** strand was designed to help educators vision, grow and maintain a beautiful and engaging outdoor learning environment in the garden. It develops gardeners, artists and carpenters in order to make these spaces engaging, safe and inclusive for learning. Proper maintenance and upkeep of outdoor classrooms is key to ensuring that students have positive experiences connecting with nature. The skill sets and concepts covered in this strand include basic gardening principles and plant care, composting, construction basics and how to build and maintain our "Top 10" infrastructure elements of effective outdoor classrooms.

The **Leadership for Community Engagement** strand addresses the need for educators to build financial, spatial and emotional buy-in from the school community in order for the outdoor classroom and program to thrive. This work requires deep engagement with school communities, and this strand teaches the following skills: partnership building, grant writing, asset mapping, volunteer engagement and stewardship, and critical relationship-building techniques appropriate to the public school environment.

Why this resource was created:

Many people drawn to teach in the outdoor education workforce come from informal settings like summer camps, so teaching in a formal classroom is a new skill set for them. Garden educators may enter the field knowing how to manage a group of 20 students outside, but they may not initially know how to create an effective scope and sequence or a strong lesson plan that is aligned with academic standards. In order to create effective garden educators who can maximize learning in the school garden, training must provide more traditional classroom teaching techniques and approaches. Garden educator training, lessons, and expectations must be standardized to ensure that the experience in the garden is considered as valuable to students' education as traditional classroom experiences.

Experiential education, whether it's in a garden, national park or local playground, requires positive, safe, engaging interactions that are designed for student success. These trainings must be linked with on-the-ground practice and ongoing reinforcement to be most effective. Although there are specialized graduate degrees available, there is currently no formal certification in garden based education that is widely available and applicable across regions. This resource seeks to provide a starting point for this type of certification.

How to use this resource:

When leading trainings, Education Outside strived to model best practices for teaching students and adults. We also taught as many workshops as possible outside so it would best imitate the learning environment of our students. In addition, we used the learning cycle to structure our workshops and suggest the following framework for facilitation. (This framework is described further in the Backwards Planning, Learning Cycle & Lesson Adaptation training overview in *Learning and Teaching Outdoors*, available in the Table of Contents):

- Activity: Do something that sparks learning.
- Reflection: Use facilitated sharing to identify core principles.
- Framing: Presenter puts formal language around participants' observations.
- Application: Put it into practice.

We have not incorporated this framework directly into our training overviews, but encourage you to use this overarching structure in your facilitation so as to support grounded-in-reality learning and peer idea exchange. Education Outside subscribed to the 70/20/10 model of professional learning where learning happens on the job (70%), through peers or mentorship (20%), and/or through formal training (10%).[1] We've found educator motivation and engagement to be high when formal trainings were focused and relevant to the on-the-job demands of their role. We provide suggested timing for each of these trainings in the overview of each workshop. Additionally, Education Outside training sessions were designed for early career professionals, but they can also be used by anyone entering the garden education field. Finally, all workshop summaries conclude with Exit Tickets to assess understanding in the workshops and push educator thinking and synthesis of the content.

References:

1. Lombardo, Michael M; Eichinger, Robert W (1996). *The Career Architect Development Planner (1st ed.)*. Minneapolis: Lominger.