

The Importance of Connecting to Nature

Liz Kirk



Who Am I?

Liz Kirk

- B.Ed. from Lakehead University – Outdoor, Ecological and Experiential Education
- Master's Degree from Brock University in Recreation and Leisure Studies
- Varied Experience as a Wilderness Trip Leader and Outdoor Centre Facilitator
- President of Council of Outdoor Educators of Ontario (COEO)
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Workshop Goals

- ▶ Introduction to what I do
- ▶ Why spending time outdoors is important – both for practitioners and clients
- ▶ Generating ideas on how to incorporate outdoor elements into current practices
- ▶ Addressing concerns and questions
- ▶ Time outdoors --exploring, relaxing, connecting, observing



What Do I Do?

Organize, plan and facilitate one day Outdoor Education field trips for NCDSB students (Kindergarten to gr. 8)

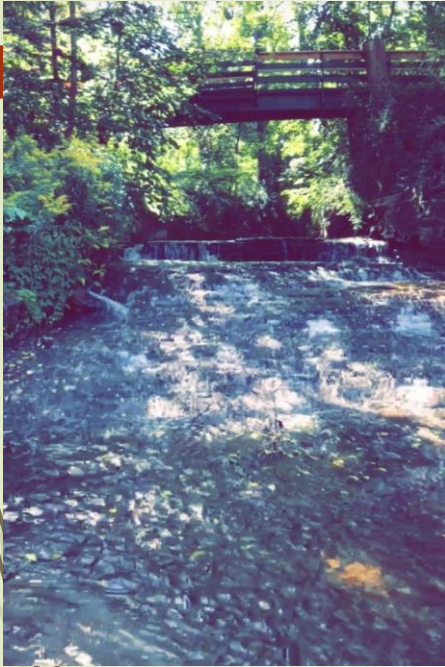
Plan innovative, and experiential programs based on curriculum expectations

Support and provide resources to teachers

Provide placement and internship opportunities to Brock University students

Provide opportunities to youth and teachers to connect directly with the environment





NCDSB Outdoor Education Program

Our Vision

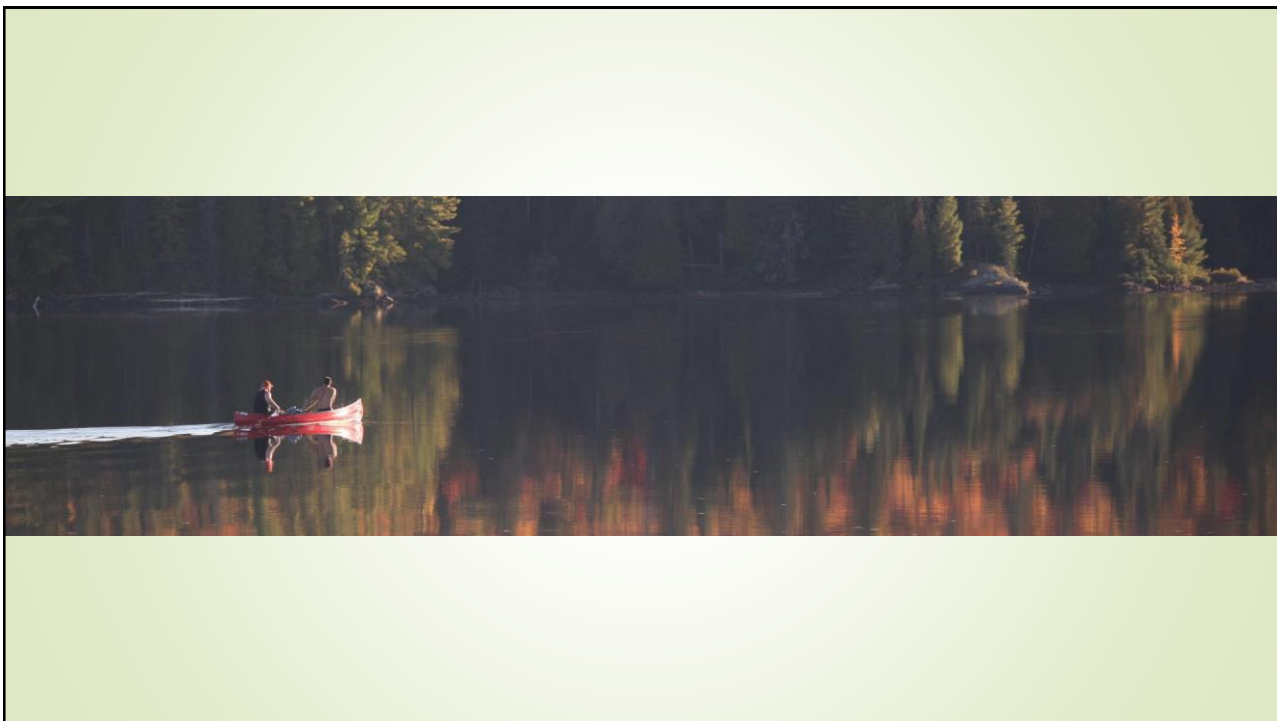
To provide a memorable, positive, and educational experience for every visiting student.



Exercise 1 – Impact of Digital Images of Nature

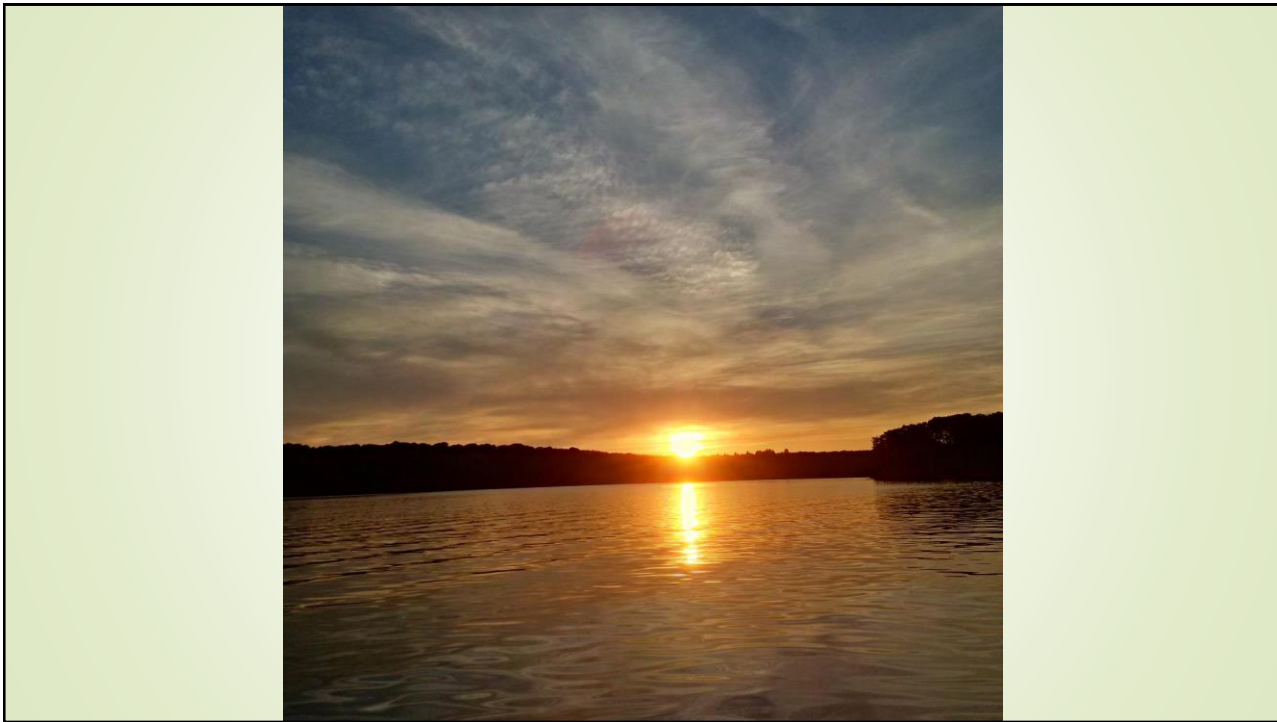
- **What descriptive word or feeling comes to mind when seeing each of the images?**
- Please write the number 1 through 10 and document whatever comes up for you when you look at each picture
- At the end, share with others at the table – contrast and compare











Exercise 1

DISCUSSION

What about these images?
What words or feelings come up?



Therapeutic Workplace Overview

- Turnover = Rate at which an employee quits or voluntarily leaves a job (Baron, 1985)
- Higher for employees in human services field
- Average annual turnover rate for workers offering direct patient care in nursing homes was estimated at
 - 93% for certified nursing assistants (CNAs) (Wagner, 1998)
 - 119% for nurse aides, 89% for licensed practical nurses, and 87% for registered nurses (Castle, 2006)
- For child welfare case workers
 - Sizeable number leave during the first 2 years (Strolin-Goltzman, 2008)
 - Annual staff turnover rates = 23% to 60% (Drake & Yadama, 1996)


DISCUSSION QUESTION 1:

What are the major challenges facing practitioners that may lead to burnout/turnover?



Nature is the antidote to stress (Louv 2016)

- Green space proximity predicts better mental health and emotional adjustment in children (Chawla, 2015)
- Greater concentration (Chawla et al. 2014)
- Greater sense of energy and happiness, less anger (Roe & Aspinall, 2011)
- Improved cognitive development, better memory (Dadvand et al., 2015)
- Calming, rejuvenating and restorative benefits (Louv 2016)
- Lower cortisol, pulse rate, BP, and sympathetic nerve activity (fight or flight) (Park et al., 2010)



Psychological health benefits of time spent in nature

- The more stressful events children experienced, the more strongly nature acted as a buffer (Chawla, 2015)
- More green space associated with significantly lower rates of depression for children (Mass et al., 2009)
- Nature relatedness (=one's level of connection to the natural world) was a major predictor of happiness (Nisbet, 2011; Zelenski, 2014)
- Natural areas = places for creative play, opportunities to develop strength and skill, as well as quiet retreat (Kreutz, 2015)

How to incorporate the outdoors in everyday work

- with clients
- for ourselves



- Go Outside!
- Sensory Activities
- Scavenger Hunt
- Art Activities
- Field Trip to Outdoor Sites
- Meditation



DISCUSSION QUESTION 2:

What are some potential ways to include time in nature to support practitioners facing burnout/high turnover?

Practitioners should...

- Include outdoor learning activities using the senses
- Include a lot more time and mindful opportunities for students to be outdoors in direct contact with the soil, rocks, trees, and water and to be more curious and conscious about our connection to the earth

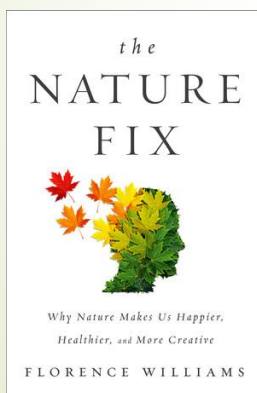
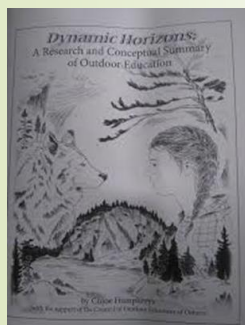
Bai (2009)



Let's go outside!



Summary



Camping:
good for your mind and your body

ACTIVE LIVING
Camping requires more daily activity, improving your heart health

LUNGS
Higher oxygen levels put less strain on body

SUN
Resets your circadian rhythm for better sleep

OntarioParks.com/hphp



QUESTIONS ?

Contact Liz at ekirk@brocku.ca