

COURSE TITLE: TEACHERS & STUDENTS CONNECTING WITH NATURE

WA CLOCK HRS: 60

NO. OF CREDITS: 6 QUARTER CREDITS
[semester equivalent = 4.00 credits]

OREGON PDUs: 60

PENNSYLVANIA ACT 48: 60

INSTRUCTOR: Anna Switzer
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COURSE DESCRIPTION:

This course is designed for K-12 teachers, both for a personal connection with nature and for helping students connect with nature. Teachers will explore the impact of the natural world on our bodies, minds, spirits, and overall sense of well-being. In addition, teachers will learn how being in nature benefits students, calms their nervous systems and enhances cognitive, observational, and creative problem-solving skills. Ways of connecting to nature will be shared that can be accomplished in all kinds of settings (including urban) and for different age groups. Teachers will learn theory about nature connection and engage in practices to connect with nature in simple ways. Increasing one's own comfort level in nature is an important factor in taking students out of the classroom. In addition, teachers will explore the profound impact that human connection to nature has on the planet itself. When a person feels connected to nature and to the place, they are more likely to make decisions that are less ruinous for the environment.

Note: You need not have access to big expanses of wild space to do this course. It is designed to support teachers in all settings (urban, suburban, and rural areas).

400 & 500-Level participants, please note:

There is a \$30 fee for the "Natural Intelligence Toolkit."

The PDF document will be sent after payment (Venmo or PayPal) is received by the instructor. Please contact the instructor if you require payment instructions.

OR

You can download the PDF directly from the instructor's website (uses PayPal):

<https://annaswitzer.com/product/natural-intelligence-toolkit/>

LEARNING OUTCOMES: Upon completion of this course, participants will have:

1. Written an initial reflection about your own connections with nature; past and present.
2. Learned about what has been coined "Nature-Deficit Disorder.
3. Explored a "sit spot" practice.
4. Considered the power of children/students in saving the world.
5. Experienced "advanced" nature connection exercises.
6. Developed lessons plans or other ways of sharing about nature connection.
7. Explored a topic of special (choice) interest related to nature connection.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS:

Completion of all specified assignments is required for issuance of hours or credit. The Heritage Institute does not award partial credit.

The use of artificial intelligence is not permitted. Assignment responses found to be generated by AI will not be accepted.

HOURS EARNED:

Completing the basic assignments (Section A. Information Acquisition) for this course automatically earns participants their choice of CEUs (Continuing Education Units), Washington State Clock Hours, Oregon PDUs, or Pennsylvania ACT 48 Hours. The Heritage Institute offers CEUs and is an approved provider of Washington State Clock Hours, Oregon PDUs, and Pennsylvania ACT 48 Hours.

UNIVERSITY QUARTER CREDIT INFORMATION

REQUIREMENTS FOR UNIVERSITY QUARTER CREDIT

Continuing Education Quarter credits are awarded by Antioch University Seattle (AUS). AUS requires 75% or better for credit at the 400 level and 85% or better to issue credit at the 500 level. These criteria refer both to the amount and quality of work submitted.

1. Completion of Information Acquisition assignments 30%
2. Completion of Learning Application assignments 40%
3. Completion of Integration Paper assignment 30%

CREDIT/NO CREDIT (No Letter Grades or Numeric Equivalents on Transcripts)

Antioch University Seattle (AUS) Continuing Education Quarter credit is offered on a Credit/No Credit basis; neither letter grades nor numeric equivalents are on a transcript. 400 level credit is equal to a "C" or better, 500 level credit is equal to a "B" or better. This information is on the back of the transcript.

AUS Continuing Education quarter credits may or may not be accepted into degree programs. Prior to registering, determine with your district personnel, department head, or state education office the acceptability of these credits for your purpose.

ADDITIONAL COURSE INFORMATION

REQUIRED TEXT

The main text for this course is *Last Child in the Woods: Saving Our Children From Nature-Deficit Disorder* (Paperback), by Louv, Richard Louv, is the central text for the course.

Plus

There is a \$30 fee for the "Natural Intelligence Toolkit."

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MATERIALS FEE

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<https://annaswitzer.com/product/natural-intelligence-toolkit/> (uses Paypal)

ASSIGNMENTS REQUIRED FOR HOURS OR UNIVERSITY QUARTER CREDIT

A. INFORMATION ACQUISITION

Assignments done in a course forum will show responses from all educators who have or are taking the course independently. Feel free to read and respond to others' comments.

Group participants can only view and respond to their group members in the Forum.

Assignment #1: Initial Reflection

Write an initial 2-3 page reflection about your own connections with nature from the past or present. Choose 3 of the 4 following prompts to address:

1. Share a story about any connection you felt with nature in your childhood. If you did not feel a connection with nature in childhood write about that.
2. What is your current level of comfort in spending time outside and/or in wild/natural places? Do you choose to do this regularly, sometimes, infrequently, or never? What do you think informs your decision about this?

3. What beliefs or assumptions do you have about those who spend time outdoors?
4. What motivates you to take this course? Feel free to include any personal and professional motivations.

Assignment #2: Explore the concept of "Nature Deficit Disorder"

Start reading the book, Last Child in the Woods: Saving our Children from Nature-Deficit Disorder.

1. Read the Introduction, Part I, and Part II of the text. (pages 1-111)
2. As you read, make notes either in the margin (if you own the text) or in a notebook (if you don't own the text) about examples, passages, or quotes that Louv is using to describe Nature Deficit Disorder so far.
3. Write a 2-3 page reflection about 2-3 key examples, passages, or quotes that really stand out for you from the text and/or relate to your own experience in life and/or teaching so far. Here are some additional ideas for this reflection in case they are useful to you:
 - a. Share a bit about your teaching context, and anything that is coming to mind so far that you might want to do differently based on what you've read in the text.
 - b. Bring to mind a particular student who you thought about during your reading. Why did they come to mind?
 - c. Share 2-3 questions that are surfacing for you about this topic. What, at this point, are you most curious about (could be in the personal or professional realm).

Assignment #3: Creating a "Sitspot" Practice

Establish a place and time of day to do a daily "sitspot" practice for a week.

1. Read the following article: <https://www.awakentonature.com/post/the-sit-spot-practice-all-you-need-to-know>
2. Think about a place near where you live, or in between where you live and where you work, or a park where you can go every day for a week. Ideally, you'll go there at the same time each day for a week.
3. Note: this assignment might be more easily accomplished for some compared to others. For example, the picture at the top of the article in step 1 above paints a certain picture that might not be available for everyone. For those in highly urban situations, or even high-rise apartment situations, the sitspot practice can still be done. Things to consider:
 - a. Time of day: when is the best opportunity for you to make/take 20 undisturbed minutes for yourself? If you need to get up earlier than normal, so be it. If you feel fine to be out before sunrise, that is great. If not, wait until sunrise or later.
 - b. Location: A feeling of relative safety is important. Options you might consider include the following:
 - b1. A park near where you live; sitting on the ground is preferable, but a bench is also fine; feel free to have a blanket or carpet square to protect your clothing in either case. You can also lean up against a tree if one is available. If, for safety, you'd like another person nearby, ask a friend or relative to be "on watch" while you do your practice (bonus is that they do the practice, too! You can be each other's safety person, but with some space between you to have a separate experience.)
 - b2. Your own or a neighbor's porch or yard. See b1 for options.
 - b3. A fountain or courtyard with trees/bushes in a city. See b1 for options.
 - b4. Your own window if you live in a high-rise. Sunrise and sunsets are particularly nice times if this location is your only option. Open the window if you are not currently suffering from an acute illness -- even in winter.
 - c. Clothing: Make sure you will be warm enough to be relatively still for the duration of your 20-minute practice. Jackets, hats, blankets, etc. can be used to assist you with this.
 - d. Make sure to turn off your phone or other devices for this time.
 - e. You are welcome to journal for part of the time, but try to spend at least 1/2 of the time in silence. Just watching, listening, sensing. Ideally, you could have 20 minutes to just sit, followed by additional journaling time.
4. After a week (or however long it takes to do your sitspot at least 6 times), write a 1-2 page reflection about what you witnessed. This could be a combination of internal and/or external things.

Assignment #4: Continuing theoretical exploration into "Nature-Deficit Disorder"

Looking at the downside of our best intentions in education.

1. Read Parts III and IV of Last Child in the Woods (pages 115-198). As you read, make notes either in the margin (if you own the text) or in a notebook (if you don't own the text) about examples, passages, or quotes that Louv is using to describe the factors that contribute to Nature Deficit Disorder.
2. Write a 2-3 page reflection about 2-3 key examples, passages, or quotes that really stand out for you from the text and/or relate to

your own experience in life and/or teaching so far. Include your thinking about at least one of prompts below the for this reflection.

- a. Re-read the full paragraphs on page 134. What are your thoughts and experiences that relate to the issue that Louv is pointing to here?
- b. Bring to mind a particular student who you thought about during your reading. Why did they come to mind?
- c. On page 137, the author states that "nature education stimulates cognitive learning and reduces attention deficits." What are some ways that you can see, specific to your context, the use of nature education for these reasons?
- d. On page 168, in the last bullet point, there is a quote: "I realize that sounds paradoxical-- structuring unstructured time, but you've got to do it." What are your thoughts about this paradox?

Assignment #5: The Serious Work of Saving the World

Consider the power of children in saving the world.

1. Reread page 146 of *Last Child in the Woods*. Focus especially on the paragraph near the bottom that starts, "That environmentalists need the goodwill of children..."
2. Write 1-2 paragraphs in response to that paragraph. What are your thoughts?
3. Read the article entitled, "[A Return to Nature-Based Education](#)" by David Sobel (2019)
3. Watch this video: https://vimeo.com/61025491?embedded=true&source=vimeo_logo&owner=5369800
4. What are your thoughts about what these students accomplished as the story is told in the video?
5. Is there an equivalent place to the "Yuba River State Park" in your local area? Do you think your students know it, could know it, stay away from it, don't care about it, or have some other relationship with it? Are there barriers to them knowing it that you might be able to mitigate?
6. Write a 1-2 page paper on whatever thoughts, from theoretical to practical, are swirling in your head after reading the article and watching the video.
7. (Optional, but highly encouraged): Consider doing a "sitspot" practice at the location you identified in step 5 (for 3-4 days). See what you might learn by doing this. Write a 1-2 page reflection about your experience in this place.

Assignment #6: Finishing the Nature Deficit Disorder Text

Read Part V of *Last Child in the Woods* (pages 199-230)

As you read, make notes either in the margin (if you own the text) or in a notebook (if you don't own the text) about examples, passages, or quotes that Louv is using to illuminate some possible paths forward and to reduce Nature Deficit Disorder

3. Write a 2-3 page reflection about 2-3 key examples, passages, or quotes that really stand out for you from the text and/or relate to your own experience in life and/or teaching so far. Include your thinking about at least one of prompts below the for this reflection.
 - a. On page 210, Louv states that, "Now that nature study has been largely shoved aside by the technological advances of the twentieth century, an increasing number of educators have come to believe that technically oriented, textbook-based science education is failing." Based on your own experiences and the whole text so far. What are your thoughts about this statement? What do you think about the word "failing" here?
 - b. On page 219, Louv describes this idea: "Schools could begin to build significant relationships with nature centers, environmental organizations, and bird sanctuaries, rather than using them for one-shot visits." And this on page, 227: "Every school district in America should be associated with one or more wildlife-and-childhood preserves in its region. Creating and nurturing such places would be far less expensive than building more brick-and-mortar science labs (though we need more of those, as well) and more needed than the purchase of the newest generation of soon-to-be-obsolete computers. These preserves could also become the focus of higher education's recommitment to natural history. And they should produce added impetus for a nationwide review of liability laws. Such nature-education preserves could be part of a new kind of school reform."

Do you see an opportunity for what he is describing in your context? Yes, there may be roadblocks, but does the idea appeal to you?

Assignment #7: Synthesizing your Experience So Far

Synthesize your learning and experience so far:

1. Think/journal/draw about "What" you have experienced/learned so far.
2. Think/journal/draw about what the significance of this experience/learning is for you. What is the "So What?"
3. Think/journal/draw about what this experience/learning leads you toward. What is the "Now What?"
4. Write a 3-4 page paper describing your What? So What? Now What?

ADDITIONAL ASSIGNMENTS REQUIRED FOR UNIVERSITY QUARTER CREDIT

B. LEARNING APPLICATION

In this section, you will apply your learning to your professional situation. This course assumes that most participants are classroom teachers who have access to students. If you do not have a classroom available to you, please contact the instructor for course modifications. Assignments done in a course forum will show responses from all educators who have or are taking the course independently. Feel free to read and respond to others' comments. Group participants can only view and respond to their group members in the Forum.

Assignment #8: Continue with the Sitspot Practice

Becoming more a regular "sit-spotter" in the environment.

1. Continue your sit-spot practice. Refer back to assignment #3 for suggestions.
2. Consider changing your spot to someplace that you might take your students at some point.
3. Do this practice for 7-10 more days.
4. Write a 2-3 page reflection on what you are learning. This learning could be about the environment you are in or yourself or the relationship between the two.

Assignment #9: Experience Additional Nature Connection Exercises

Tapping into Natural Intelligence by working with additional nature connection activities

1. Read the [PDF](#) you receive from the instructor for the materials fee of \$30. Note: If you don't have Paypal, you can contact the instructor for Venmo or details for sending a check. Feel free to try out any activity from the first four that you haven't tried yet. In addition, spend some time doing Activities 5, 6, 7, and 8. Practice 5, 6, and 7 at least twice before putting them together in Activity 8. Activity 8 is a more "advanced" technique because it builds on these others. It might take a week or more to complete this assignment. And, as always, safety first! If you don't feel safe in a particular location, don't hesitate to leave. Trust your instincts. You can always continue the assignment another time and/or in a different location.

What the advanced activity (#8) does: Helps a person gain insight into a meaningful question they have in their life, with the natural environment* providing guidance. Each person doing the activity creates their own question to bring into the activity; here are some potential questions** in this context:

- How can I approach my relationship with _____ (a specific person, place, or situation)?
- What is mine to do in the world right now?
- How can I best serve _____ (a specific person, place, or situation)?
- What do I most need in order to move forward with _____ (a specific person, place, or situation)?

The question needs to be open-ended– not yes/no or include an expectation of a discrete answer.

* The environment can be a backyard, a park, or any other place with relative quiet. It doesn't have to be remote or completely removed from the built environment... the more natural, the better, however.

**The question can be changed for any purpose at any time.

Who it is useful for: This exercise is useful for anyone who is willing to set aside their "logical" and "problem-solving" mind and who is open to a new experience of gaining wisdom through interacting with their environment. It is great for learning how to "problem solve" with a different part of the mind than we normally rely on for wisdom or solutions.

How to obtain the instructions:

There is a \$30 fee for the "Natural Intelligence Toolkit".

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2. Write a 2-3 page reflection on what you experienced and what you gleaned through connecting with nature in these ways. Consider including answers to the following:

- Was there any part that was particularly challenging for you in any of the activities?
- Was there any activity, moment within an activity, or outcome that surprised you?
- Are there aspects of this activity you can see doing with your students, either as described here or modified to fit your students in some way?

Assignment #10: Lesson Plans and/or other Methods for Sharing

Create a way to share nature connection with others.

1. Do one of the following:

Option A: Design/teach students directly (3 lesson sequence minimum).

- For guidance, please download [THI's lesson template](#).
- Implement your lesson with students in your classroom.
- Write a 400-500 word commentary on what worked well and what could be improved.
- What more did you learn about teaching or facilitating nature connection for others?
- Include any student feedback or noteworthy student experiences or "a-ha's."
- Submit your lesson to your instructor via the lesson tab.
- Share what you've learned with other teachers taking our courses by checking the [lesson library](#) box when you submit your lesson.
- Upload these lesson plans for feedback.

Option B: Design/teach a PD session for/with colleagues (at least 90 minutes long or two 45 minute sessions).

- Implement your lesson with colleagues in your context/setting.
- Write a 400-500 word commentary on what worked well and what could be improved.
- What more did you learn about teaching or facilitating nature connection for others?
- Include any participant feedback or noteworthy experiences or "a-ha's."
- Submit your lesson to your instructor via the lesson tab.
- Share what you've learned with other teachers taking our courses by checking the lesson library box when you submit your lesson.
- Upload these lesson plans for feedback.

Option C: Your choice, given your role and context. Requires pre-approval.

2. Write a 2-3 page reflection on what you created, who you taught/facilitated, and how it went. Feel free to include any feedback you received as well (if there is any feedback), as well as your thoughts about that feedback (meaning what it might lead you to do differently next time or not).

Assignment #11: Pulling it all Together

Write a 4-5 page paper about why it is important for children and adults to develop and cultivate a connection with the environment.

Assignment #12: (500 Level ONLY)

Choose a specialized "track" for further exploration, based on your interests. The following are topics on which I can provide starting points for reading (in the following lesson). If one of these does not quite fit for you, feel free to propose a new/unique track for yourself.

- a. Health Benefits of Nature Connection:
- b. Specific Nature Connection Support for Teachers
- c. Age Appropriateness Environmental Education

- d. Nature connection for adults
- e. Litigation that gets in the way of nature connection
- f. Nature and Spirituality

2. Write a 1-2 page introduction as to why this particular "track" interests you. How does it relate to your work/context? Include a "guiding question" as you'll be diving into some new reading in the next assignment.

Assignment #13: (500 Level ONLY)

1. Based on your chosen "track" from the previous assignment, do some additional reading. Here are my recommendations, but you are not limited to these:

a. Health Benefits of Nature Connection:

- Your Brain on Nature (2012) by Selhub and Logan

b. Specific Nature Connection Support for Teachers

- Childhood and Nature: Design Principles for Educators (2008) by David Sobel
- MapMaking with Children: Sense of Place Education for The Elementary Years (1998) by David Sobel

c. *Age Appropriate Environmental Education*

- [Beyond Ecophobia: Reclaiming the Heart in Nature Education](#)
- 2 other articles or one book on this topic (choice, but approval from instructor is required)

d. Nature connection for adults

- Coyote's Guide To Connecting With Nature (2010) by Young, Haas, McGown (Note: The Foreword is written by Richhard Louv)

e. Litigation that gets in the way of nature connection

- Chapter 18 of Last Child in the Woods (2005) by Richard Louv
- 2 other articles or one other book on this topic (choice, but approval from instructor is required)

f. Nature and Spirituality

- Chapter 21 of Last Child in the Woods (2005) by Richard Louv
- 2 other articles or one other book on this topic (choice, but approval from instructor is required)
 - ?If you are looking for books more for/about adults' spiritual connection to nature, here are three I recommend especially for women. They are all written by women (in contrast/addition to most of the texts used so far in the course).
 - [The Four-Fold Way: Walking the Paths of the Warrior, Teacher, Healer and Visionary](#) by Angeles Arrien (1993).
 - [Women Who Run With the Wolves: Myths and Stories of the Wild Woman Archetype](#) by Clarissa Pinkola Estes (1992/ 1995/1997)
 - [If Women Rose Rooted](#) by Sharon Blackie (2016)

2. Based on your reading, write a 3-4 page paper that answers your "guiding question" from the previous assignment and feel free to conclude by asking more questions. Include the reference(s) for the reading you have done to inform your paper.

C. INTEGRATION PAPER

Assignment #14: (Required for 400 and 500 Level)

SELF REFLECTION & INTEGRATION PAPER

(Please do not write this paper until you've completed all of your other assignments)

Write a 400-500 word Integration Paper answering these 5 questions:

1. What did you learn vs. what you expected to learn from this course?
2. What aspects of the course were most helpful and why?
3. What further knowledge and skills in this general area do you feel you need?
4. How, when and where will you use what you have learned?

5. How and with what other school or community members might you share what you learned?

INSTRUCTOR COMMENTS ON YOUR WORK:

Instructors will comment on each assignment. If you do not hear from the instructor within a few days of posting your assignment, please get in touch with them immediately.

QUALIFICATIONS FOR TEACHING THIS COURSE:

Anna Switzer, Ph.D., is a long-time educator and started her career in the classroom as a high-school Physics and Math teacher. Later, she taught Earth Science (courses and labs) and Oceanography (labs) at the college level. She has also taught pre-service teachers (science) and in-service teachers (K-12, all subjects). Anna earned a BA in Physics (Kenyon College), an MS in Oceanography (North Carolina State University), and a Ph.D. in Education (University of Michigan). She has a strong background in Experiential Education, Project-Based Learning, and Environmental Education. She is a watercolor artist, lives in Oregon, and has written one book (so far) called License to Learn: Elevating Discomfort in Service of Lifelong Learning (2020).

BIBLIOGRAPHY

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Louv, R. (2005) Last Child in the Woods: Saving Our Children from Nature-Deficit Disorder, Algonquin Books of Chapel Hill, Chapel Hill, NC.

Selhub, E.M., Logan, A.C. (2012) Your Brain on Nature: The Science of Nature's Influence on Your Health, Happiness, and Vitality

Sobel, D. (1998) Mapmaking with Children: Sense of Place Education for the Elementary Years, Heineman, Portsmouth, NH.

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