



Planning a Meaningful Youth Education Event

What makes a successful and meaningful field education experience for youth? A lot of chapters offer a lot of different types of education events, and they all have many things in common. TU youth education events:

- focus on the fish and the water,
- are hands-on and interesting for the participants, and
- are either outside or focus on being outside eventually.

These are all qualities of excellent events that hook kids into caring about trout, salmon, and streams.

When kids come to your chapter events, do they know what they're learning and WHY they are learning it? Having kids understand the whys of their learning is important to making a lasting impression, and to helping kids think carefully about their local water resources. To ensure that we give kids the opportunity to deepen their understanding of their home waters, each education experience should have four parts:

1. BEFORE: **Preview the Activity and Ask the Big Question**

Either during a classroom visit before the field day, or at the very start of the field day, give the kids an overview of what they are going to be doing and learning. Learners who know what they are going to be learning are better prepared to absorb whatever comes their way. And share with them the Big Question that you're trying to answer that day—all of your



activities should be related to different possible answers of the Big Question. As the day goes on, you can refer to the Big Question at different moments, and you can bet that the kids will be asking themselves the Big Question, too, once they've heard it often enough. Big Questions are questions that have long, complex answers with no "right" or "wrong." For TU, our Big Questions are often ideas such as "Who lives here?" "What's in the water?" "How are we connected to this stream?" "Why do we care so much about trout?" and the like.

2. **DURING: Be Hands-on and Thoughtful**

While giving the kids lots of opportunities to participate in hands-on ways, we should also give them the opportunity to ask us questions. And we should ask them questions, too, such as repeating the Big Question or asking other “why” and “how” questions. The kids might not know exactly “why” or “how” something is, but having them think about it, even if their reasoning is wrong, is a useful learning experience for them to think about how or why something might be.



3. **FREE TIME: Let Them Pursue Their Own Adventures**

As hard as it may seem, and as opposed as some adults may be to the idea, kids need free time, especially in natural areas. Once kids know their boundaries and the safety rules for the area, we should give them some time to roam free. Kids learn so much more when they have the chance to explore the rock, pool, or tree that’s calling to them. By pursuing their own interests, they’ll form new ideas and come up with new questions. We should be available if they want to ask us the questions they come up with, but as often as not, we probably should answer their question with one of our own: “Why do YOU think that is?”



4. **AFTER: Review the Activity and Discuss the Big Question**

As things are wrapping up, it can be tempting just to let all the kids rejoin their families and let the event end without any fanfare. But having a final activity, gathering, or discussion is really valuable for learners. It gives us the opportunity to revisit the Big Question, and it allows the kids to share their ideas of the answers they found. If the field day was for a class, we’ll want to go back to the classroom and look at the data the students collected and the observations that they made, and help them pull their evidence together into a big picture of what they learned. This is also a time for the kids to think about how what they learned might affect their behavior. Do they want to create an improvement project to help the stream? Does this change the way they use water at home? Will they make a plan to go fishing more often? How does everything they’re learning help them become the next generation of water stewards?



Does your chapter already take this approach to its youth events? If so, what do you do? Is there anything missing from this list? What do you think are the most successful ways to make sure our field education experiences are successful and meaningful?