

**NATURE TEACHING:**  
**Place-Based Education in South Florida Schoolyards**  
(IDS 4920 sec. U01A) T, R 8:00 – 10:45 am  
Suzanne Koptur, Biological Sciences



**Course description:**

Engaging students in hands-on activities in science, math, social studies, and art has been demonstrated to be the most effective means of teaching students in these disciplines. The more the learner does for themselves (reading, writing, discussing, thinking, teaching), the more expertise they gain and material they retain (McNeal & D'Avanzo 1996).

In this course we will read and discuss books and articles on how people learn, how we can best assess to promote learning, and how educators in various disciplines have revolutionized teaching by taking students outside and having them use schoolyard habitats for learning. Students in this colloquium will work in groups on lesson plans addressing state-mandated education standards in a cross-disciplinary way. Each student will spearhead the production of a unit in their primary area of interest (or area of their choice), to be conducted in south Florida schoolyards, including assessments and student learning outcomes. Each person leads one and helps on two other projects during the final two weeks of the course.

The grade in this course will be determined as follows: Nature journals 20%; attendance and class participation 20%; group projects 20%; independent projects 40%.

**Learning outcomes:**

Students completing this course will experience different models of place-based learning by participating in directed field exercises, assigned group projects, and by creating a place-based learning unit of their own design. Students will know about various types of education (e.g., critical, place-based, environmental) in theory (reading and discussing books and articles) and in practice (classroom and field demonstrations and exercises). They will become familiar with education standards in various disciplines, and learn how to address the standards in lessons and activities they create. This course will prepare and inspire them to teach students of various ages in a variety of contexts by engaging them with their surroundings.

**Course Policies:**

You are expected to be on time to class, and to stay the full period. You are expected to maintain high standards of academic honesty. Any student found in violation of these standards will earn an automatic F and be reported to the Deans Office, no exceptions made. In accordance with FIU's policy on academic honesty, as set forth in Section 2.44 of the Academic Affairs Policies and Procedures Manual (<http://academic.fiu.edu/docs/aapolicies.htm>), it is expected

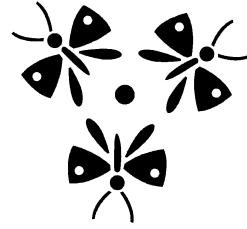
that students in Nature Teaching will not submit the academic work of another as their own. Additional discussion of academic honesty and integrity may be found in the Manual of Student Conduct.

## **Syllabus for 2007:**

### **Readings:**

- 1) Angelo, T.A. and K.P. Cross. 1993. Classroom Assessment Techniques (2<sup>nd</sup> edition). Jossey-Bass. San Francisco.
- 2) Feinsinger, P.F. and M. Minno. Handbook to Schoolyard Plants and Animals of North Central Florida. Nongame Wildlife Program, Florida Game and Freshwater Fish Commission.
- 3) Matsumoto, Karen. The Nature Journal as a Tool for Learning.  
<http://www.newhorizons.org/strategies/environmental/matsumoto.htm>
- 4) McNeal, A.P. and C. D'Avanzo. 1996. Student-active Science. Saunders College Publishing.
- 5) Walker Leslie, Clare. 2000. Keeping a Nature Journal: Discover a whole new way.
- 6) Walker Leslie, Clare. 1999. Into the field: a guide to locally focused teaching. Nature Literacy Series Number 3. The Orion Society.
- 7) How People Learn – Brain, Mind, Experience, and School. 2000. National Research Council. National Academy Press. Washington, DC. 374 pp.
- 8) Schoolyard Nature Study. Activities for Ecological Education in Florida backyards and schoolyards. EcoCognizant, Inc.
- 9) The “Grinnell” method – Museum of Vertebrate Zoology, University of California  
[http://mvz.berkeley.edu/Grinnell\\_Method.html](http://mvz.berkeley.edu/Grinnell_Method.html)
- 10) Gruenewald, D. A. 2003. The Best of Both Worlds: A Critical Pedagogy of Place. Educational Researcher 32 (4): 3-12.





## Nature Teaching Schedule of Events

date/day	topic	readings (see #s above)
8 May T	Introduction to course, student introductions	
10 May R	How people learn; the outdoor experience and nature journaling	#3, 5, 9, 7 (ch. 1 & 2)
15 May T	Different learning styles; the hand-mind connection	#2,7 (3 & 4)
17 May R	The mouth-mind connection; field exercises in groups	#6, 8, 7 (5 & 6)
22 May T	memory vs. puzzle- solving; linking different content areas	#4, 7 (7 & 8)
24 May R	best assessments for different disciplines; first group projects assigned	#1 (part 1)
29 May T	concept mapping and flow-charts	#1 (part 2)
30 May R	jigsaws and hierarchies	#1 (part 2 con't)
5 Jun T	presentation and discussion of group projects	#10
7 Jun R	formulation of topics and activities for independent projects	
12 Jun T	students work on independent projects	
14 Jun R	independent projects further development	
19 Jun T	final presentations	
21 Jun R	final presentations and course evaluations	

