

Down in the forest something stirs

Sally York explains why educational visits to woods will find a lot more than teddy bears.

Education and learning can occur throughout life, but the focus for Forestry Commission Scotland education is on formal education for schools, pre-school children, and young people. Our current provision tends to be focused towards the Environmental Studies curriculum in primary schools, with the programmes generally based on the forest industry or the forest as an ecosystem. We also work with others such as groups with different abilities or with secondary schools working on subjects such as design and technology.

We have set up the Forest Education Initiative (FEI) as a partnership initiative between the education and forest sectors to encourage the use of trees, woods and forestry as an education resource. In Scotland local FEI groups have come up with some great projects including:

- The wood tour – a hands on opportunity to work with wood in the school grounds. The wood tour visits a number of schools enabling children to make wooden objects.
- New initiatives like Forest Schools, a technique adapted from Scandinavia. Forest Schools take advantage of the stimulating, flexible, robust and relatively safe nature of woodlands to build children's self esteem and confidence through a series of activities over a number of weeks.

So is there really a dividing line between education and interpretation? They both provide ways to learn, but are often placed at opposite ends of the learning spectrum and barriers created between the two. Yet there is a lot of commonality between them. The word interpret comes from the Latin *interpres* meaning "an agent between two parties" and later "one who explains", and it is the word "explain" that crops up in any definition of interpret or interpretation.

Flicking through copies of the Times Educational Supplement (TES) I was intrigued to note that many of the articles rarely mentioned the "e" (for education) word. For example, here are some extracts from a piece giving advice to teachers on how to engage with secondary children, from the TES for 26 November 2004:

"Use practical, visual, oral and kinaesthetic approaches; hands-on, energetic activities always go down well ... Explain, demonstrate and exemplify new learning. Make the thinking visible ..."

It's not just the absence of the words "education" or "explain" here, but the way teachers are being encouraged to use a variety of techniques to get the message or course content over to their audience that makes clear the links between education and interpretation. As our knowledge of the brain, how it works and how we learn

increases so, I suspect, we will see a greater blurring of the lines between the two disciplines. The best teachers are often the ones who use a range of techniques, whether they are in the classroom or out in the forest. Those involved in education have a lot to learn from interpreters but vice versa too. In the end we are all in the same game: aiding understanding and enjoyment of subjects!

Sally York, Education Development Officer, Forestry Commission Scotland
sally.york@forestry.gov.uk

More information about FCS education work, together with ideas for educational activities in woods and forests, are on the Tree Trunk website, developed in partnership with SNH and Central Scotland Forest Trust www.forestry.gov.uk/treetrunk