Instant Nature in Geography classes at High School

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Abstract: A practical guide about “How to make a school class in the open air with minimum preparation, time wasting and nerves”. In my eight-year practice as a school teacher I realized, that students and teachers adopt this method for variegate teaching with a great enthusiasm. Both sides are charged with positive energy and remember such lessons for a long time.

The idea is recommended for high school students i.e. 14-19 years old, but it could also be applied in work with younger students – 1st to 7th grades with insignificant adaption concerning their age features. The exemplary school class was organized with 9th grade students (16 years old) from the Language High School “Acad. L. Stoyanov” – town of Blagoevgrad, Bulgaria.

Keywords: education, nature, high school, geography

1. INTRODUCTION

“Instant Nature” emerged in the year 2005 in Language High School “Acad. L. Stoyanov” – Blagoevgrad. I was teaching, as usual, in the classroom. It was spring time and nature outdoor was awaking, the air was fresh and the plants were already turned green. The school process was intensive for both students and teachers. Sitting in the classroom I and my students felt somehow unnatural to be closed between four walls, instead of going outside, among green grass and fresh air.

So I thought: “Why don’t I organize my class outdoor on the plant landscape at the sunny weather?”

2. PERMISSIONS AND ORGANIZATION OF THE OUTDOOR CLASS

I asked and received permission from the school authorities. I don’t recommend to any teacher to organize outdoor classes without permission. There are several important things to beware of before that. You must be sure that the grass is treated against insects, weather is not too cold or hot etc. Involve your students to help you with the preparation of this fast-organized, but very unusual school class.

In my case in this first outdoor class at school boys helped bringing a long desk for the girls, so they can feel as comfortable as possible outside the classroom (Fig. 1) Than they showed what man’s solidarity is and sat on the grass as a separate group (Fig. 2).

All the students brought their notebooks and textbooks, some brought even their atlases.
Fig. 1 Girls sitting on a long desk, brought by boys, so they can feel comfortable outdoors.

Fig. 2 Boys sat down on the grass separately from the girl group.
The geographical map was attached on the fence. Then we proceeded with check out for absents and a brief review of the previous lesson. Important to say is that every teacher must be sure if he/she is in a good physical shape to sit down on the ground, to spend about 30-40 minutes there and then to be able to get up without having some health problems (Fig. 4). You must wear sunglasses if the sun is strong and to bring a bottle of water with you.

So after everything is done correctly it comes the time for examinations. Even suffering some objective limitations, such as lack of whiteboard and markers, you can use your imagination to bring comfort and uniqueness in the process of school exam in order to reduce stress in students.

Some useful practical ideas are to ask the group to look at the clouds above. The teacher can examine them to make classification by type, shape, height and risk of precipitation. This of course is not very precise, but your students will be very interested. Additional joy for them is to hope for fair weather in order not to be examined. If the teacher has information about the type and names of the surrounding plant species he could use it to make the class even more interesting. Another topic could be some information about the solar radiation (as you will experience its influence at the very same time), the air properties, the pollution and the importance of providing clean and fresh air for their organisms etc.
Fig. 4 Teacher’s ability to sustain outdoor challenges

Fig. 5 During the exam
The new lesson can be presented easily with descriptive methods, such as speech, discussion, school map, atlases, textbooks and other helping materials. There are some difficulties for the students to write while sitting on the ground, so don’t ask them to write long lesion plans during this lesson.

The last minutes of this lesson are the most valuable and possess unusually big potential for the teacher to make impact on his students. The natural environment, sun light, fresh air and higher mood leaves a long and pleasant impressions. The teacher must not lack the opportunity to talk with his students about some intransient and educational topics. The discussion at the end of such a lesson will be remembered for a long time with a feeling of joy and satisfaction. This is the most important and valuable part of this uncommon class.

3. CONCLUSIONS AND ADVICES

To run everything smoothly the teacher needs some preparations.

- Chair (if you need one)
- Exercise covers for the students (from the school gym) and a bench if needed
- School map

The school must have a small green area in the school yard.

- You can ask school authorities for support. You can create such a place together with the students. It will be a good practical lesson for them
- It is important for you to remain inside the school area, behind the fence
- This will keep the world out of your business and no one will disturb you

Important advices:

- Grass in the green area must be treated against insects
- The weather must be not too hot and not too cold
- The most suitable time of the year is:
  - In spring – May and June
  - In autumn – September and October
- Involve your students to help you
- Carry sunglasses and a bottle of water
- Be in a cheerful mood

Useful topics:

- Examine students to make classification of the clouds they see by type, shape, height and risk of precipitation
- Together try to make a short-term weather forecast
- Prepare and explain your students about the plants surrounding you
- Tell them some interesting facts about the solar radiation that they feel at the moment, about the properties of clean air and how all natural conditions influence their health
- Create a loving attitude on nature in your students
If the teacher is capable of organizing such an uncommon school class, he will achieve a strong educational and perceptual effect upon his students. Both sides will be enthusiastic and emotionally satisfied at the end of the lesson. Such practices give great opportunities for teachers to create attitudes in students for loving and preserving nature. Originality and imagination of teachers are challenged and the results will be proportional to their efforts and charm. The natural landscape, surrounding the group, the sunlight and the fresh air will bring cheerful mood to everyone and this valuable lesson will never be forgotten. I can assure you – this worth all the risks of unknown and eventual discomforts. So, be initiative, and you will be fascinated by the results achieved!

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