



LONG TERM IMPACT OF CHILDHOOD EXPERIENCE AT FOOTHILL HORIZONS OUTDOOR SCHOOL

The Study

We surveyed 58 adults who went to Foothill Horizons Outdoor School as children about the lasting impact their experience had on their lives. Respondents took an on-line survey with multiple choice and free response questions. The survey results demonstrate that the learning at Foothill Horizons is effective, valuable and memorable. The study revealed lasting growth in the areas of science education, personal and social skills, and connection to nature.

Lasting Science Education

The surveyed adults remember the science that they learned at Foothill Horizons six or more years earlier! The science learning at Foothill Horizons is effective because it is interactive, novel, fun and relevant to the students. These findings reflect the current educational research about effective teaching.



For many children, Foothill Horizons Outdoor School offers novel life experiences, such as being away from home, seeing a hawk up close or hiking in the woods. These novel experiences make the learning memorable and effective.

Visiting classroom teachers recognize the value of the science education at Foothill Horizons. Back in the classroom, teachers reference these experiences to enhance the classroom learning.

"I still use some of the Foothill Horizons songs when studying for some of my major-related classes"
-Survey response

- **80%-90%** of respondents **remembered what they learned** about plants or trees, animals, and geology.
- **75%** of respondents agreed the experience increased their **interest in science**.
- **80-90%** of respondents remembered a specific **activity or song**

When the adults were asked to write what they learned, many mentioned ecology, decomposition, conservation, Big Trees and Moaning Caverns. Many remembered specific information about a plant or animal, indicating strong learning experiences.

Scientific concepts learned at Foothill Horizons remembered 6 or more years later.

Number of responses	Concept	
7	Specific organism	We sorted responses to the question, "What did you learn?" This process revealed how many respondents remembered each concept that they learned as a child.
7	Ecology	
5	Decomposition	
5	Conservation	
5	Field trip	
4	Rock cycle	
4	Science skills	
3	Night hike	
3	Me-wuk	

"Critical thinking and wondering prepares them for Common Core."
-Andrew Bylow, Teacher, Creekside Middle School



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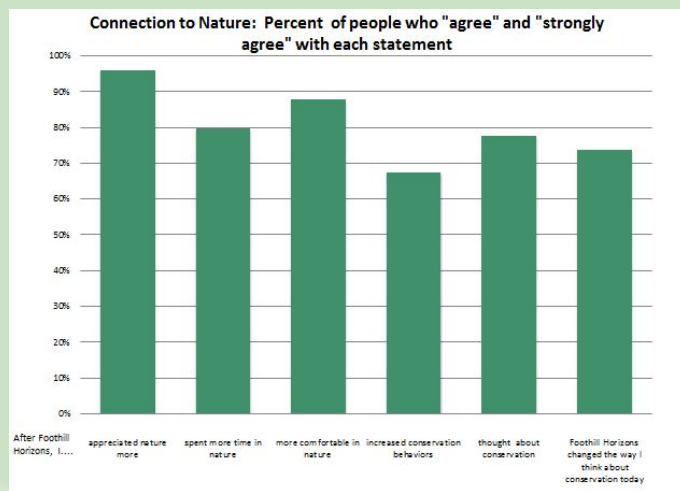
Lasting Connection to Nature

Many children do not have the opportunity to play, learn and be in nature. Not only is time spent in nature beneficial for human health, it is essential to create a sustainable future. A three-to-five-day experience at Foothill Horizons gave the adults from this survey the chance to appreciate nature and feel more comfortable in nature. After they went home, children were more likely to seek time in nature, and actively participate in conservation by recycling, reusing or reducing their waste.



"It makes kids fall in love with nature."

The respondents said they enjoyed everything from quiet time in nature, to being in nature with friends, to hiking and seeing new plants and animals.



- **74%** of respondents agreed that their experience at Foothill Horizons Outdoor School **changed the way they think about conservation.**
- **4 out of 10** adults wrote that being in nature made their experience both meaningful and valuable.

"Life is learning. And there is a big world outside of children's daily routine."

Personal and Social Growth

Six or more years later, **66%** of surveyed adults remembered and agreed that during their experience at Foothill Horizons Outdoor School they made new friends, felt closer to friends and got to know classmates better. These social bonds and skills reduce bullying and prepare children for adulthood.

"What I remember is the responsibility I was given to make decisions, try new things, and just be ... It gave me validation of my choice. A sense of self."

3 out of 4 of the adults surveyed agreed that they faced a personal challenge during their time at Foothill Horizons, and afterwards felt more confident and mature. When asked what made the experience at Foothill Horizons meaningful, over half the written responses mentioned personal and social growth.



Personal and Social Growth



This personal and social growth is supported by memorable positive role models from our staff, visiting classroom teachers and high school counselors.

"I consider my experience with my naturalist to be one of the strong reasons why I have decided to pursue a degree in environmental science!"



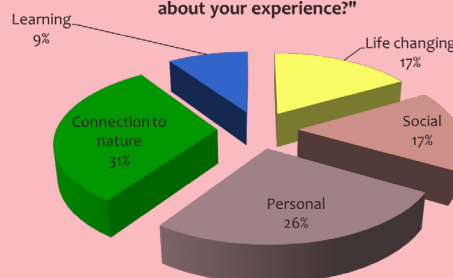
Value and Meaning

We asked two broad questions at the end of the survey:

1. What is valuable about a childhood experience at Foothill Horizons Outdoor School
2. What was meaningful about the experience?

These answers were then sorted into categories according to the content of people's responses. This analysis revealed some new perspectives on the meaning and value of Foothill Horizons Outdoor School.

Percent responses to question "what was meaningful about your experience?"



Some individuals wrote that the experience was life changing. In their comments, they indicated that the experience altered their life choices as adults and changed their perspective on life.



"I thought about the world differently. I understood how massive nature is and I felt humbled."

Responses to why was the experience valuable

Number of responses	Category
14	Experience/opportunity
14	Personal and social
13	Connection to nature
9	New learning environment

When asked why the experience was valuable, responses fell into the four main categories listed in the table above. A new revelation in these answers was how valuable a new learning environment is for children.

"I got to be a part of something that really changed my life and mattered."

For more information:

- Falk, J. and Dierking, L (2010) The 95 Percent Solution. School is not where most Americans learn most of their science. American Scientist, 98, 486-493.
- American Institutes of Research (2005). [The Effects of Outdoor Education Programs for Children in California.](#)
- Knapp, D., & Benton, G. (2006). Episodic and semantic memories of a residential environmental education program. Environmental Education Research, 12,165-177.

93%

said the experience was very valuable or extremely valuable

"The experience one has cannot be repeated in any other venue: conservation, cooperation, independence, maturity."