Formal vs. Informal Education

Formal education is classroom-based, provided by trained teachers. Informal education happens outside the classroom, in after-school programs, community-based organizations, museums, libraries, or at home.

What are the main differences between the two?

In general, classrooms have the same kids and the same teachers every day. After-school programs are often drop-in, so attendance is inconsistent, as is leadership.

Classroom activities can last several days. After-school programs need to complete an activity each day because a different group of kids could be in attendance tomorrow.

You can assume that classroom-based teachers have a certain level of training in educational philosophy, effective teaching strategies, classroom management, and content. After-school providers, by contrast, vary in experience and knowledge of teaching techniques, content expertise, and group management. Typically, materials for after-school settings need to include a lot more structure.

Teachers need to meet educational standards and stick to a specified curriculum, which can make it difficult for them to incorporate nontraditional content. After-school programs, on the other hand, can be more flexible with their content.

Both formal and informal education settings offer different strengths to your educational outreach project. If your project fits in the classroom, it can have a very long life; teachers will use trusted resources for years. After-school programs offer a different kind of environment, where your activities don't need to be as formal and where you can reach a different audience.

While both schools and after-school programs serve students, many kids who feel disenfranchised at school blossom in after-school settings. Real learning can happen in a setting where kids feel less intimidated or more comfortable than they do in a formal classroom. The ultimate goal is that their success in an informal setting can lead to greater confidence in the formal classroom.

An additional benefit of developing materials for informal educational settings is that they may be useful to parents at home with their kids, or to adult learners who are looking to expand their knowledge, either for their own enrichment or to increase their career options.

Ref.: [http://enhancinged.wgbh.org/started/what/formal.html](http://enhancinged.wgbh.org/started/what/formal.html)

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