

A Study of Project WILD's Impact on the students of exemplary teachers

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The purposes of the research were to examine instructional methods employed by teachers using Project WILD and determine the beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors of their students after nine months of instruction.

Similarities of exemplary teachers included: easy access to the out-of-doors from their classrooms, early career exposure to Project WILD or PLT, and personal commitments to the natural world outside of teaching duties.

Teachers provided opportunities for students to interact with live animals and animal parts (skulls, owl pellets, pelts, tracks, etc.). All expressed confidence in teaching about wildlife. All teachers viewed their wildlife instruction primarily as science. Participation activities were highlighted: Habitat Lap Sit, Oh Deer!, Owl Pellets. Teachers taught between 15 and 20 Project WILD activities in a school year. Activities were incorporated into the classroom in a variety of ways --throughout the year or within a specific semester; within science programs or across the curriculum. Teachers felt positive attitude development was more important than knowledge retention.

Conclusions:

- Project WILD impacts content, quantity, and methods of instruction.
- Project WILD workshops provide excitement about wildlife education, contacts with people and agencies, and additional content information and resources. Teachers were positive about their Project WILD workshop experiences.
- Teachers' pedagogical beliefs about wildlife influence students' attitudes. The attitudes each teacher promoted and taught enriched and in some cases, changed, students' attitudes about wildlife.
- Teachers pedagogical beliefs influence the quantity and quality of information students learn about wildlife.
- Topic-specific scope and sequence lists recommended by school districts and textbook companies force teachers to try to cover all the topics, leading to breadth of exposure rather than depth of understanding. Because Project WILD was viewed as science, the topic-driven approach was carried into wildlife instruction.
- Most wildlife teaching and learning is on a low cognitive level. Few students know how to apply what is taught. The teachers' major goal was to make students aware of certain facts about wildlife and the environment.
- Most students do not know how to act individually to help wildlife nor do they have confidence in the power of individuals to make any difference. Regardless of their positive attitudes and knowledge about wildlife and their involvement in action projects with school, most students did not feel they could take any action to really help.
- Most students do not make the connection between teacher-directed behaviors to aide wildlife and what they can do in real life.
- Lack of appropriate assessment methodologies makes the evaluation of wildlife learning an enigma for teachers.

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Recommendations:

- Promote greater use of Project WILD Aquatic materials and workshops.
- Revise workshops and materials, if possible, to stress the application and understanding of wildlife concepts. Promote the use of pedagogy that supports understanding and enables students to conduct inquiry, solve problems, make decisions, and engage in higher order application.
- Add action-oriented activities to workshops and the Project WILD materials.
- Continue to encourage opportunities for high school students to actively assist with wildlife management, making certain they understand why the methods are being practiced and how the management techniques are helping wildlife.
- Suggest assessment techniques that enable teachers to determine their students' conceptual understandings and environmental behaviors.
- Encourage further study of teacher use of Project WILD materials.

Teachers use Project WILD because it enables them to teach what they are required to teach--it works with their curriculum, and because it is a fun way for their students to learn. Teachers appreciate how Project WILD reflects their instructional beliefs and its interdisciplinary nature.

Students may not have remembered all the content they were taught, but all but two felt they had learned a great deal about wildlife over the school year. Students stressed how much they cared about wildlife and the environment.

A majority of students shared what they learned with others (families, friends, etc.).