

Effects of Project WILD on Fourth Grade Students in Wisconsin

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1989-1990

Summary of research conducted in 1988; Surveys mailed to 400 WILD trained teachers in Wisconsin. Responses indicated that the importance teachers place on environmental education and their involvement in environmental education are the most important determinants of use of Project WILD (Zosel 1988). Workshop characteristics are the second most important influence. But Wisconsin sponsors also wanted to know the effects of Project WILD, as it is used in Wisconsin, on students.

1989-90 school year -- 24 fourth grade classes; mix of schools and communities in Wisconsin; half teachers Project WILD trained, other half not.

Surveyed students and teachers in fall and in spring, and observed students and teachers throughout the year.

Students and teachers both considered teachers and classroom activities the primary influence on student learning about wildlife.

When we considered only the questions that were answered incorrectly in the fall and correctly in the spring by the same student as evidence of learning, a higher percentage of learning occurred in the Project WILD exposed classes.

Students with teachers trained to use Project WILD knew significantly more about four wildlife concepts (definition of wildlife, carrying capacity, food chains, and interdependence) than students in the control group.

However, teacher interest in wildlife education plays a significant role -- more wildlife-related artifacts, books, posters, bulletin boards, aquaria, bee hives, bird nests, rocks, plants, etc. in Project WILD trained teacher classrooms. These teachers also enjoyed more outdoor activities and contributed to more environmental, conservation, or sportsman's organizations. Highest influence on student learning.

Difficult to sort out the effects of just a few educational activities used during the year on children who had been exposed to the environment, wildlife, and wildlife-related concepts and attitudes through direct experience, media, school, and family for 9 years.

No significant differences in behavior were found between Project WILD and non-Project WILD classes in behavior. Because students are not always in a position to control their own behaviors, the behavior scores may not be a good representation of student interest in or responsibility for the welfare of wildlife.

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Project WILD teachers' estimates of hours spent on wildlife topics during year: 33.5; non-WILD teachers: 23.6.

National phone survey: teachers indicated that Project WILD increased the time they spend teaching about wildlife (WREEC, 1990).

WILD teachers used an average of seven activities per year.

Qualitative data indicated that Project WILD asserts a positive effect on students. When teachers were interviewed in the spring and asked what was the most successful activity related to wildlife that they had done with their students that year, the most frequent response they volunteered was a Project WILD activity. When students were asked what the most interesting activity was that they had done related to wildlife in the past year, the most frequent response described a Project WILD activity.

Many influences on students' knowledge and attitudes about wildlife -- teachers and classroom activities ranked first.

Rural classes generally scored higher than urban classes. However, Project WILD was of greater benefit to urban dwelling students than non-urban in making gains over the year as rural students knew more in the beginning. Wildlife education programs such as Project WILD may be important sources of learning about wild animals for urban students, as they are likely to have less opportunity to learn in other ways.

Teachers reported limits on wildlife education: need for more classroom materials, need for training, lack of planning time.

When teachers were asked what would help them infuse more wildlife and environmental education into their curricula, they expressed a need for more training, more educational materials, and more planning time.

Study shows Project WILD does impact teachers which indirectly affects students.

Recommendations:

- Provide classroom-ready materials.
- Provide training.
- Recommend follow-up activities (field trips, etc.)
- Support wildlife education in urban communities because of reduced familiarity with the needs of wildlife.
- Expose children younger than fourth grade to wildlife concepts.
- Links should be made to current events.