

Evaluation of Teacher Use of Project WILD

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The purpose of this study was to assess the use of Project WILD environmental education materials by elementary and secondary teachers and examine possible determinants of use. A mail survey was sent to a sample of Wisconsin teachers who had attended Project WILD workshops. A focus group and a phone survey were also used. Use was measured by number of different Project WILD activities used per school year. Three types of factors and their relative influence on use were examined: teacher characteristics (environmental education concern and involvement), instructional setting characteristics (grade level, administrative support, and involvement of other teachers), and workshop characteristics (time spent on practice, participation, and planning, workshop follow-up, quality of presenters and perceived influence of the workshop).

Most teachers surveyed use the materials and evaluate the program highly. Teacher concern for and involvement in environmental education is the best predictor of use, although workshop characteristics and grade level are also significant influences. An index of workshop characteristics positively correlated with use of Project WILD can be used to make workshops more effective. Teachers' reports and comments indicate that workshops may increase environmental concern and involvement, though more research is needed on values development strategies. Limitations on use such as grade level, subject area, special education, and planning time indicate a need for workshops to include specialized, individualized instruction in the use of Project WILD.

74% of respondents reported using at least some Project WILD activities. Most teachers use four or more different Project WILD activities in one school year.

Most teachers (86%) reported that they "select Project WILD activities where appropriate and incorporate them into the existing curriculum." Some (20%) said they "use Project WILD as the basis for one or more instructional units.

The more importance teachers placed on environmental education and the more interest in wildlife they reported, the more Project WILD activities they used.

The more other environmental education programs teachers use, and the more training they have in environmental education, the more Project WILD activities they use. Teachers who have been involved in projects to benefit wildlife or the environment also use more activities than teachers who have not been involved in such projects.

Number of teachers using and not using the materials were compared between high school and non-high school teachers and a significantly greater percentage of high school teachers do not use the materials.

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Administrative support and proportion of other teacher in the school who had attended Project WILD workshops are not correlated to the number of activities used.

The only workshop characteristic found to be significantly associated with use of Project WILD was practice teaching activities, although the amount of time spent in practice did not significantly affect use.

Teachers who attended a follow-up workshop or took the initial workshop for university credit use more Project WILD activities than teachers who did not.

Receiving follow-up communication was not significantly related to the number of activities used.

No facilitator characteristics were significantly related to the use of Project WILD materials.

Almost all the teachers (90%) felt that the workshop helped to increase their interest in teaching about wildlife and environmental issues. There were significant correlations between the reported influences of the workshop on the teachers and the number of activities they use. Teachers who reported greater influence of the workshop on their knowledge of wildlife, understanding of environmental issues, and interest in teaching about wildlife and environmental issues use more activities.

Two major reasons were given for attending Project WILD workshops: "an interest in getting new activity ideas to integrate into my curriculum," and "my personal interest in wildlife."

Findings indicate that use may be increased if workshops target teachers who have received training in environmental education or have been involved in other environmental education programs or if workshops can increase environmental education involvement and environmental concern.

The greater the influence of the workshop perceived by the teacher, the more Project WILD activities that teacher will use.

Time to plan for use and time in the school day to use were the reasons respondents most often identified as the most important limitation on use of the materials.

Effective workshops:

- provide a maximum amount of time to practice teaching activities.
- provide a maximum amount of time in active participation in activities.
- provide an opportunity to develop a plan to use the new program within the teachers' curriculum.
- provide the opportunity to use the activities with students and then discuss their use with other teachers.
- provide follow-up communication and opportunities for follow-up workshops.
- are led by high quality presenters.