Measuring the Effectiveness of an Experiential Learning Approach: A Case Study Using Project Wild

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Purpose of the study was to assess Project WILD, an experiential learning curriculum, in its ability to meet the goals and objectives set by Colorado content model science standards.

Compared Project WILD to Colorado's chosen curriculum to determine effectiveness in meeting science standards.

Report provides a historical view of education reform, with an overview of various education reform movements and provided a basis for the relevance of the experiential approach and the movement to standards-based and performance-based education.

Focus of research was 1) to understand the effectiveness of experiential learning curricula in increasing student knowledge and to support the use of experiential-based programs for meeting the criteria of model content standards and 2) to determine whether or not students could perform at the level expected by standards when engaging in experiential education.

Study used David Kolb's experiential learning model (concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, active experimentation) as a framework to understand the process by which students engage in learning when participating in an experiential activity.

Study involved 12 classes of fifth grade students using three different instructional treatments, two of which consisted of Project WILD activities. Effectiveness of the treatments was evaluated using both a quantitative and a qualitative method.

Results indicated that significant learning occurred as a result of all treatments, including Project WILD, and that Project WILD was successful in assisting to meet the objectives of content standards. A complete analysis of each treatment and its results is provided.

Findings suggested that Project WILD is capable of meeting goals set by state science standards, and when used as a supplement to the curriculum provides a strong method of teaching environmental science. It was also suggested that when used as an integrative curriculum supplement assimilated across subjects, Project WILD may prove to be useful in meeting other standards beyond science.

The report emphasized the usefulness of multiple methods of teaching and suggested that education would benefit from encouraging the use of multiple approaches to teaching, which include experiential components.