

OUR WYOMING KIDS 2015 MINI GRANT PROJECT

Equitable Access to Learning through Outdoor Education and Recreation by Joanie James

On September 9-10, 2015, instructors from the UW College of Education and UW Lab School teamed up to take 56 seventh and eighth grade students from all socioeconomic-status (SES) families, experiential backgrounds, and academic developmental levels on a school-related, extracurricular-style, two-day outdoor education and recreation learning experience.

In small groups, the students participated in nine outdoor science centers where 11 community experts explained and demonstrated their expertise. Six middle-school teachers/paraprofessionals and eight College of Education pre-service teachers facilitated the learning and mentored the students as they engaged in experiential minds-on learning. Through involvement in engaging extracurricular activities, positive adult mentorship, and exposure to a plethora of possible future careers, this experience was helpful in narrowing the well-researched opportunity gaps documented in *Our Kids: The American Dream in Crisis* by Robert D. Putnam (2015).



Left to right: Chris Lindt (pre-service teacher), Jennifer Tyner (paraprofessional) Finley O'Conner, Max DeYoung and other UW Lab School students explore science up at Chimney Park Scout Camp.

broadened horizon. The city kids and kids from lower-income families who never go to the mountains benefited the most from this learning experience.” Theresa Williams, another teacher, commented, “Students who have trouble focusing or being motivated in class were very engaged in these hands-on outdoor centers.”



Trish Penny (Wyoming Rivers Conservation District) teaches Zavria Brizuela and Arris Harris about erosion.

Initial observations and the middle-school students interviews indicate that this outdoor education experience was a worthwhile. Students commented that they learned many new things about science and nature, the hands-on field activities made it easier to remember, and they got to know their peers better.

Cindy Webb, a middle-school teacher commented, “It’s the experience out of the normal that’s valuable - the

An integral part of this grant was educating pre-service teachers concerning the realities for children affected by SES opportunity gaps, and the ways schools (and they as future teachers) can help to narrow these gaps. This experience gave these eight teachers in training a hands-on opportunity to lead teambuilding activities, mentor, and facilitate the learning of a small group of middle-school-aged students. The pre-service teachers indicated that their eyes were opened to specific developmental characteristics of this age group. They were overwhelmed at first, but were successful in developing respectful and friendly relationships with the students. Also, the pre-service teachers learned management skills and how to handle behavioral outbreaks.

The Wyoming School-University Partnership Our Wyoming Kids grant paid for camp rental, tents, and sleeping bags to provide equitable-access for the UW Lab students.

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