

Improving the Urban Youth Experience in Outdoor Science Education: Through Improved Teacher Training Techniques

Focus Question:
Can a new training module influence instructor success in teaching urban youth and underserved youth groups in a wilderness setting?

Background

The Yellowstone Association Institute (YAI), has be recently increased its educational programming for urban youth and underserved youth groups. As an instructor, I know first hand how difficult it can be to deliver meaningful outdoor education programs for diverse ethnic groups, without previous training.

This needs assessment explored how a new training module for the YAI, can provide the guidance needed to help instructors succeed in making outdoor science education a life-changing experience for urban youth and underserved youth.



“I have been arguing for a while now that connection to nature should be thought of as a human right.”
Richard Louv, Author of *Last Child in the Woods*, 2005.



“Nature is important to children’s development in every major way—intellectually, emotionally, socially, spiritually and physically” (Kellert, 2005).

Methodology

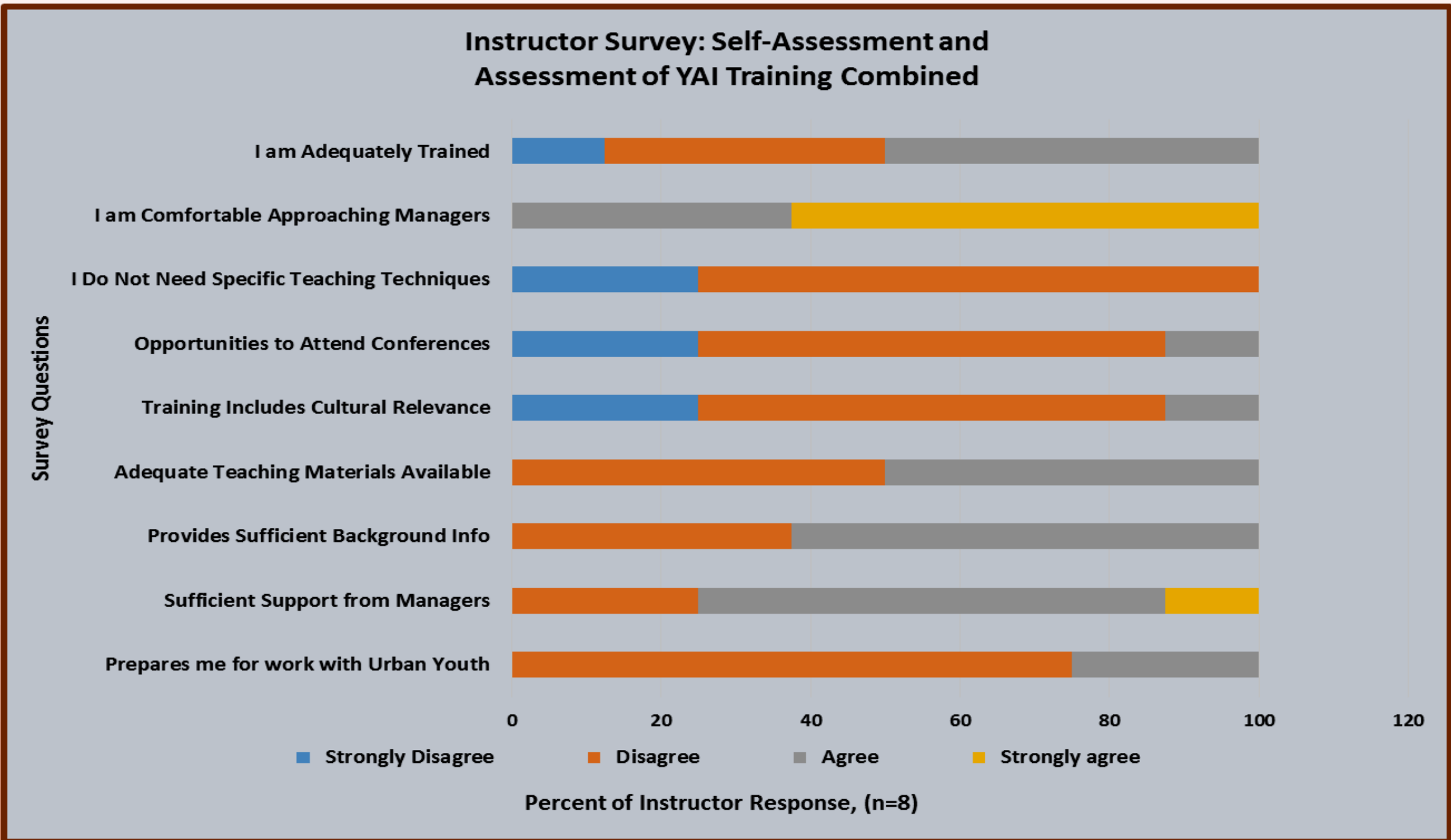
In investigating the needs for a new training module, I captured he views of YAI instructors, students, group leaders, and I investigated best practices by experts in the field of outdoor science education. Through the use of five instruments, including Likert Surveys, questionnaires and personal interviews, I was able to triangulate the specific needs required to help instructors succeed in teaching to urban youth and underserved youth groups.

Research Questions	Common Themes Expressed Throughout Instruments
What are the characteristics of a successful training module?	Includes cultural sensitivity training. Models teaching techniques. Relies on best practices .
How do instructors feel about our current training?	Specific Training. Shadow-time. Co-teaching. Exposure to diverse groups. Paid preparation time.
What are the ideal qualities of an urban youth instructor?	Caring. Culturally Sensitive. Open. Engaging. Patient. Effective Communicators. Human .
What are the best practices for delivering culturally relevant content?	Hands-on. Explorative. Fun. Student Centered. Use Storytelling and Metaphor. Connects wilderness to their daily lives. Encourages conservation practices at home.
How do we successfully meet their learning needs and overcome the challenges of learning in an outdoor setting?	Create a Safe Environment to Explore Outdoors. Establish Precise Boundaries. Clear expectations. Quiet Time for Reflection. Less Teaching. More Sharing. Less Bus Time.

“Our students become their best selves when given the chance to learn and explore in an outdoor setting” (Group Leader, 2016).



“The YAI instructors...can break down walls that sometimes take our staff years of work to do “ (Group Leader, 2016).



Results

I have learned that the YAI instructors have mixed feelings about their abilities to meet the needs of urban youth and underserved youth groups. I found that 75% of the instructors felt strongly in need of more training, and 87.5% felt that YAI ‘s current training did not include relevant content or specific teaching techniques for this demographic. The group leaders, students and leading experts all expressed similar themes; our training needs to include cultural awareness and cultural sensitivity training, the instructors needs to care about the students, and get to know them individually, and provide a fun, hands-on and safe environment to explore the natural world. Only then, will instructors be successful at instilling a love of wild places and the desire to become future stewards of the natural world.