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 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.”

Shauna Baron, Resident Instructor, Yellowstone National Park, July, 2016.
Photos: courtesy of the Yellowstone Association.

Methodology
In investigating the needs for a new training module, I captured the views of YAI instructors, students, group leaders, and investigated best practices by experts in the field. 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

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<th>What are the characteristics of a successful training module?</th>
<th>Includes cultural sensitivity training. Models teaching techniques. Relies on best practices.</th>
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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 need 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.

Shauna Baron, Resident Instructor, Yellowstone National Park, July, 2016.

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