

IMPROVING THE URBAN YOUTH EXPERIENCE IN OUTDOOR SCIENCE
EDUCATION THROUGH IMPROVED TEACHER
TRAINING TECHNIQUES

by

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ABSTRACT

This research describes the needs assessment phase for the promotion of a new training module for the Yellowstone Association Institute. This assessment explores how a new training module for teaching urban youth groups and underserved youth groups could create more effective instructors. In order to identify best practices for teaching to this demographic, five instruments were employed to survey and interview administrators, instructor staff and leading experts in this field.

The literature review revealed that students achieve more when provided with a safe learning environment where they are valued as individuals, and where the teaching methods employed are student centered. The literature supports that students often become more confident, respectful and excited about science when allowed to learn and explore in an outdoor setting. The literature suggests that students will build a strong connection to nature only if they are provided with opportunities to develop their own sense of place within that new environment.

The research gathered in this needs assessment suggests that a successful training module is one which promotes a culture of caring and respect, teaches instructors cultural awareness and develops their cultural competence. It should encourage effective communication and provide practical advice for successfully identifying and meeting the educational needs of urban youth and underserved youth, learning in an outdoor setting.

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

As outdoor educators for the Yellowstone Association Institute (YAI), we pride ourselves on being able to successfully educate and engage any audience base; be it seven year olds or seventy year olds, our goal is to cultivate a love of learning and create future stewards of the natural world. In the past few years, the organization has implemented new programs designed to serve urban youth and underserved youth populations of varying socio-economic and culturally diverse backgrounds, yet it has failed to include additional training for instructors to specifically meet the needs of this more diverse audience.

As our organization has continued to grow, we have begun to include a much broader range of diversity in our participant base; diverging from groups consisting of upper middle class retirees, or groups of affluent high school and college students, to urban and underserved youth groups with varying socio-economic backgrounds.

I know first-hand how difficult it was for me to be asked to teach a group of underserved youth without previous training, and it is especially difficult if one is new to the job. I would like to help our team provide a better foundation for future instructors at the YAI.

For my action research project I conducted a “needs assessment” for the organization, investigating how a new training module for teaching urban youth groups and underserved youth groups could create more effective instructors. Based on the information gleaned from this investigation, I created an outline of what this Training Module Framework should include, to be shared with YAI program managers and staff (Appendix A).

For the purpose of this investigation, the Yellowstone Association Institute's definition of "urban youth groups" typically consists of youth that come from a mix of middle class and upper middle class socio-economic backgrounds, while our "underserved youth" program groups that come to the YAI often fall into two categories; one pertaining to children grades 5-12, from economically depressed areas, and often from low-income or single parent families with limited access to quality education, and the second, high school age students who have been facing drug and alcohol addiction. Underserved youth populations are often considered "at-risk" of never being able to achieve economic self-sufficiency and are "at high risk of never becoming responsible adults" (Dryfoos, Joy, 1990, p. 3).

My overarching research question is *"How could a new training module for urban youth groups and underserved youth groups help create more effective instructors?"* In order to answer this, I investigated the following sub-questions; *"What are the characteristics of a successful training module? How do instructors feel about the current training for urban youth groups and underserved youth groups? What are the ideal qualities of an urban youth and underserved youth instructor? What are the best practices for delivering educational content that is culturally relevant to urban youth groups and underserved youth, and how do we successfully identify and meet the learning needs and overcome the challenges of learning in an outdoor setting?"*

One of our group leaders recently stated that learning in an outdoor setting in Yellowstone National Park can be extremely challenging for youth who "spend very little time outdoors because their streets are not safe, and the only time they may venture outside is to travel to and from school and home."

Our programs are taught outside for up to 8 hours a day, typically three to five days in length. Each day is designed with a specific content or curriculum in mind. Our first day includes an investigation into the geological history of Yellowstone. The second day emphasizes wildlife ecology and management ethics, and the third day focuses on history and art. Our mornings typically focus on the content of the day, visiting pertinent locations and learning about the area. Our afternoons include a hike to more remote locations to allow for exploration, journaling, sketching or painting, and absorption of the subject matter.

We hike in the rain and hot summer sun at high elevation, only retreating to the bus if lightning is imminent. There is a bus available to take refuge if the weather becomes extreme, or if the biting flies and mosquitoes become unbearable. Ultimately, we ask a lot of our urban students; students who have very little exposure to the outdoor world in their everyday lives.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

As novelist and environmental activist Wendell Berry said,

Our children no longer learn how to read the great book of Nature from their own experience, or how to interact creatively with the seasonal transformations of the planet. They seldom learn where their water comes from or where it goes. We no longer coordinate our human celebration with the great liturgy of the heavens (AZ Quotes, n.d.).

I too have seen the widening disconnect from the natural world that our children seem to be experiencing. Working for the Yellowstone Association Institute (YAI), we often have children come to us from inner-city environments who have never walked on uneven ground and have no idea how to walk up or down a steep dirt hill. Many have spent their entire lives on concrete and indoor flooring. I have also seen students struggle

to find a “sense of place” during their field trip to Yellowstone National Park, and I am dedicated to improving their sense of wonder and discovery for the natural world, both in Yellowstone and at home.

“A sense of place refers to a psychological construct that involves a geographic location with meaning, values, and a sense of connection” (Rogers, Zoey, Bragg, Elizabeth. 2012, p.307). Our goal as outdoor educators is to connect our students with the natural world in a way that will hopefully help them to become more environmentally conscious to live in a more sustainable way. Our hope is that they will becoming good stewards of their planet, and to understand that their lifestyle choices can have profound effects on their quality of life, even in a city. Tredinnick (2003) sums this up best with this statement,

I sense that human beings live best when they remember they live inside a natural order, that the land includes us all and all our schemes and creations, and that when we begin to imagine our lines of kinship and our bonds of responsibility extending out, beyond ourselves....to the many forms of life and intelligence that compromise our home place, then it is that we learn how to behave well, not only at home, not only in human society, but as inhabitants of the earth (p.27).

During my search for a framework to build upon, I found many papers that addressed the achievement gap that exists for many at-risk youth, but there were few examples of programs similar to the YAI. Much of the underserved youth literature focuses on extreme wilderness therapy programs where children have been sent to avoid juvenile detention, or they were exclusively adventure based programs. The Outward Bound Program out of Colorado is designed “to prepare students of all ages and circumstances with the strength of character and determination they need to thrive—in

the classroom, in the workplace, in the family and in the world” (Outward Bound, 2016. Outward Bound Today section, para 2).

Although our programs encourage teamwork, respect and growth of personality, and we are pushing them outside of their normal comfort zones each day, our goals are not as extreme as an Outward Bound Program, where students often experience extended mountain climbing or 10 day backpacking trips. Character building and empowerment is just as important to our programs, but it has not been on the forefront of our program design. Growth of character seems to just happen naturally over the course of a 3-5 day trip spent day hiking, exploring and experiencing new things for the first time, but our students return to a warm bed each evening. In the end, we want our students to have fun experiencing new things, and to learn, even though they may not realize they are learning.

There were very few examples of research on programs geared specifically toward outdoor adventure and education as a gift instead of a punishment, and even fewer papers in the literature on outdoor programs geared specifically with education in mind.

One of the few exceptions to this is Beetles Project: Science and Teaching for Field Instructors, out of Berkley, CA. They “infuse outdoor science programs with research-based approaches and tools to improve science teaching and learning” (Beetles Project, 2016, para 1). My program manager has recently attended a Beetles workshop and the YAI instructors have been incorporating what she learned into our programs.

The Beetles Project was not specifically geared with urban youth or underserved youth teaching techniques in mind, but the format and design works well when teaching in a field setting. The tools used are helpful in teaching students how to be more

observant of the world around them. It has activities to encourage inquiry and discovery and promotes discussion in students, which helps them to achieve higher-level thinking. I have been incorporating a few of their journal writing assignments into my programs, and have had a great response from students of all ages.

The School in the Park (SITP) program in San Diego was also of particular interest to this project. It relies on the principles of brain-based learning in that, “1) where there is meaning, there is learning; 2) there is no learning without emotion; 3) movement facilitates learning; and 4) making multiple connections between new information and prior knowledge enhances memory” (Mathison, C., Wachowiak, S. Fieldman, L. 2007, p. 205).

I found this extremely helpful in laying the groundwork for what our programs should be striving for. The four principles above will help us to create a clear and precise definition as to what all YAI learning experiences in Yellowstone should incorporate.

By using what we have available to us every day in a wilderness setting such as Yellowstone, where bears, wolves and bison roam the landscape, we are providing students with a wilderness challenge which “involves a person physically, intellectually, emotionally and spiritually, and thus leaves an imprint in the psyche that is often indelible and more profound than what is learned through traditional and didactic methods of teaching” (Van Scoyoc, 1996, p.11).

By encouraging a teaching style that allows the children the freedom to safely explore, instead of dictating what and when they will be learning, children become more confident in a new and foreign environment, which can ultimately have profound effects on a child’s self-esteem.

YAI instructors not only need to understand the challenges facing urban youth or underserved youth, but also the potential challenges to working with these students. In assigning a program to a YAI instructor, we have never stopped to ask what preconceived notions, misconceptions or possible prejudices our instructors may have when working with diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds different from their own. I wondered what we were missing.

A study on cultural diversity by Virginia E. Causey, Christine D. Thomas, and Beverly J. Armento (1999), explores the long-term effects of sensitivity training and teacher preparation using case studies of the views and attitudes of two of the participating teachers. Both teachers claimed to be unbiased towards other ethnic groups but when asked to express their perceptions in a daily journal, their prejudices came to the surface.

I realize that we have never asked any of our instructors how they actually feel about different ethnic groups. We assume that our instructors have the skills to successfully communicate without bias when working with urban youth or underserved youth, but we have not prepared them for the discord that could result from, for example, a teacher from a suburban neighborhood, with little familiarity to urban life, trying to motivate African American inner-city teenagers.

Causey, et al, (1999) states, “it is difficult to influence long-held beliefs and attitudes in the space of one (college) course...we must commit to follow-up programs...if we wish to support sensitivity to cultural diversity in classroom settings over the career path of educators” (p.43). I will use this information to address additional questions as to how the YAI can create successful training opportunities within the confines of an often short

seasonal position, how can we advocate for change if we don't know change needs to be made, and how can we inspire sensitive and thoughtful rapport if we do not seek out an honest conversation on the subject.

In searching for insight into the views and attitudes of underserved youth, and ways to communicate these views and attitudes to our predominately white affluent instructors, I found that ethnic bias may go both ways, from teacher to student and student to teacher. For example, the literature states that African American teenagers often struggle with what is called a dual personality, "a need to act differently depending upon where they were or who was around" (Gullan, R., College, G. Hoffman, B. 2011, p.36). Throughout this research process, I have become more aware of the extreme duality facing urban African American youth and I found myself emotionally moved and frustrated by the challenges that many of my students face. This duality is due to the fact that as Gullan et al, (2011) suggests,

This population feels intense pressure to actively reject mainstream (i.e., White) values, because they believe that the mainstream paths to success are not open to them, therefore they often chose to dress, talk and act in ways de-valued or rejected by the mainstream society (p. 36).

Trying to fit in by only showing "their true selves in one setting (often with their own cultural group) and a false self in another (i.e., the majority group)... might manifest in a feeling that one does not belong in either group" (Gullan et al, 2011, p.35). They may also feel pressured to reject their own culture in order to try to fit in with mainstream society because the messages "that members of their ethnic/racial group feel, think and act in ways that are neither acceptable nor consistent with success" means that many urban African American youth are ultimately forced "to reject a fundamental part of

themselves” (Gullan et al, 2011, p. 36), and that, is something we should strive to avoid at all costs.

Although it infuriates me to realize that this type of attitude still permeates in today’s society, it has me motivated to develop ways in which to inform our instructors to be sensitive of the mixed messages being sent to African American youth, and be mindful of how conflicted this group must feel in thinking that they should behave or act in a certain way in order to succeed in the world. Gullan et al, (2011) encourages teachers, parents and counselors working with this demographic to promote multicultural perspectives of identity by celebrating “the myriad of positive factors associated with African American culture, such as a strong sense of community and familial support, and to help youth explore their ethnic and/racial heritage” (p. 36).

As I reflect on my own programs, I have endeavored to create a safe place for my students to feel free to be themselves, to share their culture with me and to be honest about our differences; it is ok to come from different worlds. I am a white woman who grew up on a dairy farm; with little experience of the inner-city, but being outdoors with these students, dealing with the same bugs, the heat or the freezing cold temperatures seems to break down many of the barriers between us. Part of the positive feedback I receive from my students is, that I always treat them with respect and allow them to “be cool.” I do not respond to their comments and actions as if they are being disrespectful to me, but try to let their excitement and energy direct our discussions. I now have a greater understanding of why this has been so important to them, and I hope to share this information to guide and encourage other YAI instructors.

In exploring ways to help train our instructors to be more culturally aware of the duality facing many underserved youth (especially in the African American population), I discovered some interesting resources that we could incorporate into the new YAI training module.

The website sources from the National Education Association (NEA) and the National Center for Education Statistics have research-based sections devoted to closing what is known as the achievement gap. The achievement gap is the apparent disparity of educational success or performance between a “group of students, such as students grouped by race/ethnicity, gender” or socio-economic status, which is outperformed by another group” (National Center for Education Statistics, n.d.).

The NEA site has links to research papers and articles that would benefit YAI instructors in the development of increased cultural awareness. Their *Focus on Blacks* publication has a section that gives advice on educating black boys with a list of *Ten Things You Can Do to Promote Culturally Responsive Instruction*. It includes tips on how to validate students’ cultural identity in classroom practices and acknowledge students’ differences as well as their commonalities, or ways to encourage students to think critically and assist them in becoming socially and politically conscious. This article also has a statistical analysis of Black youth and their struggles along the educational spectrum. Example such as; “Forty-two percent of Black students attend schools that are under-resource and performing poorly, or Black boys are three times as likely to get expelled from school than their White peers, and less than half of Black male students will graduate from high school, although many eventually complete a GED” (National Education Association, February, 2011).

Students at the University of Texas, San Antonio have created a handbook specifically dedicated to creating culturally responsive and culturally sensitive teachers. It states that “caring seems to be the most important factor contributing to positive teacher-student relationships,” and that teachers need to become effective communicators, which can only be achieved “by means of active listening.” Teachers should “hold high expectations for all students, and that culturally sensitive teachers know their students well and have gathered information about their lives both inside and outside the school.” The handbook also gives sound advice on the socio-cultural differences of teachers and their students. “Culturally sensitive teachers have gained a lot of consciousness about their own socio-cultural identities and issues of inequalities that effect their students.” (Culturally Responsive Classroom Management and Motivation Handbook, 2008, para. 14.)

These resources could be powerful tools in helping our instructors understand the background and potential future of these students. As part of our training module, we will require our instructors to navigate these websites before teaching any urban youth or underserved youth programs. We will assign specific sections or use these sections during the training session.

This type of work will be new to my organization, but my goal through this action research process will be to continue with my literature review and to connect with experts in this field to learn more about best practices for working with this demographic.

METHODOLOGY

Treatment

My treatment is a “needs assessment” that helped guide me in the development of a Training Module Framework for teaching urban and underserved youth programs (Appendix A). It provides the YAI with a product incorporating new tools to help instructors to be successful in this area and avoid repeating difficult lessons of the past. In doing so, I explored the best practices for teachers working with urban youth and underserved youth by interviewing and surveying instructors, students, group leaders and experts in this field. I also worked with a focus group of resident instructors and managers to determine exactly what it is they wanted to see included in the new training module.

Through in-person meetings and electronic correspondence, the focus group has helped to define the missing aspects in our training, and outline new components to be incorporated into a new training module.

I began our correspondence with a large list of potential subjects that we could include in our training module. My goal was to try to determine what we all felt were important to keep and what we could exclude. The list included a definition of culture and cultural competence, information on why we should consider culture in our teaching, how to address the power of misinformation and stereotypes, what are the qualities of a culturally sensitive teacher, and what new evaluation forms would instructors like to see included, as well as practical advice for teaching urban youth.

Some of the terms were new to the focus group and needed more clarification, but once that was completed, they were all committed to helping me succeed in this research

project. They agreed that we should include items such as teaching techniques and practical advice for teaching urban youth, but wanted separate lists, one for students age 8-12 and another for high school groups. We discussed the handbook created by the University of Texas, which describes how students from different cultural backgrounds often communicate with a unique style. The handbook explains that,

African American students have a social interaction style referred to as “call response” in which students frequently speak while the teacher is speaking as a response to their feelings about a teacher’s comments. They do not do it to be rude, rather they are acknowledging or agreeing with what the teacher is saying. Asian students on the other hand may smile and laugh as a response to their confusion, and or misunderstanding (Culturally Responsive Classroom Management and Motivation Handbook, 2008, para. 10).

They liked the idea of pre-and-post trip surveys to help us get to know the students better before they arrive and to help us assess our performance as educators. We all felt that we need to get away from content based trainings and focus more on how to teach to this demographic, and that we need to create teaching materials that were designed with this demographic in mind. They also suggested that we use our own personal experiences as scenarios to help our instructors to be more prepared for what challenges they too may face.

While discussing how to create a team of culturally competent instructors, one of the team members stated,

We need to front load them with the idea that we are not trying to stereotype, but that these are common things and that there will be cultural differences, and that there is a difference between knowing and being sensitive, for example, we need to be mindful of little things like using the word caregiver instead of parents, because these kids do not always live with their parents.

While talking about our self-awareness to socio-economic or socio-cultural differences between ourselves and our students, I asked the focus group to participate in a short activity during one of our in-person meetings. I gave each of them an index card and asked them to recall a time that they made a cultural assumption about a person or a group. I asked them to write down what assumption they made and what effect it had on the situation. I then asked them to recall when someone else made an assumption about each of them and consider how it made them feel. We openly discussed a few of those private and very personal moments.

The group discussed the need to establish some helpful dialogue to address when students do not have the proper clothes for the current field conditions they will be experiencing. We have a stout gear bank and we discussed the best way to distribute clothes to a student without offending. We agreed that we need to give our instructors the tools to handle this situation with grace.

Along that same note, we talked at length about building rapport. One of the focus group members reminded us how important is it to be “culturally genuine, to be open and fair to other’s backgrounds by not pointing out the stereotypical quirks and that we need to be more genuine and open with these students.” We all agreed that being open and real is the only way to connect with them, and that they must see you as open and caring if they are going to trust you.

Currently, the YAI does not offer any sensitivity training to help instructors understand the socio-economic backgrounds and challenges facing these children in an outdoor learning environment and very little background information is provided to the instructors to describe the environment these students are coming from and the challenges

they may face once they arrive in the Park. Therefore, instructors have limited knowledge on how to meet (or even understand) the learning needs of inner-city and underserved youth. Additionally, the YAI does not offer any additional training as to how we can help our students make connections between the natural world and their own environments.

To achieve this goal, we need to know more about our students. We need to know our student's learning preferences, their base-line knowledge of the Park, as well as any hopes, fears and reservations for coming on the trip. With advice from this focus group, additional questions have been added to YAI's Youth Program Pre-Trip Questionnaire (Appendix B), which will be address in more detail in the Interpretation and Conclusions chapter of this paper.

We also need a way to adequately assess how our YAI instructors are doing when it comes to creating relevant and meaningful programs for these particular students. Our current evaluation forms for these groups are fairly generic. With input from my focus group, we discussed a system for Instructor Self-Evaluation and Assessment of YAI Training to be done by the instructor pre-and post-season (Appendix C). We also discussed a need for a more defined post-evaluation form for the students to assess the program, their instructor and their overall experience.

Even though we have not been able to meet in person again, I have relied heavily on individual conversations and e-mail communication with this group. This correspondence has allowed me to gather their feedback and narrow down the building blocks for the training module.

We have discussed testing the new training module in the fall of 2016, testing it first on Resident Instructors and then running it with all urban youth instructors in the

summer of 2017. It will provide more in-depth training and give our YAI instructors the skills to succeed in teaching urban youth and underserved youth groups.

Research Methods

I developed five instruments to address my research questions, as well as a research matrix design for these instruments to help me ensure that triangulation was employed in my data collection (Table 1).

Table 1.
Research Matrix

Research Questions	Data Source			
	1.	2.	3.	4.
Adequate training?	Interviews	Instructor Survey	Instructor Questionnaire	Focus Group & Continued Literature Review
Culturally relevant content?	Instructor Self-Assessment Survey	Student Questionnaire	Group Leader Questionnaire	Focus Group & Continued Literature Review
Meeting & identifying learning needs?	Group Leader Questionnaire	Student Survey	Interviews	Focus Group & Continued Literature Review
Characteristics of a successful training module?	Interviews	Instructor-Self Evaluation & YAI Training Assessment	Group Leader Questionnaire	Focus Group & Continue Literature Review
Ideal qualities of a good urban youth teacher?	Instructor Self-Assessment Survey	Interviews	Group Leader Questionnaire	Focus Group & Continued Literature Review

In creating the training module, I felt it was important to obtain a baseline for how instructors feel about teaching these types of group programs. To achieve this, I created an Instructor Self-Assessment Survey: Teaching Urban Youth in the form of a Likert

Scale to discern the confidence levels of our instructors when they are asked to teach to this demographic (Appendix D).

To evaluate our current training from the instructor's perspective and obtain information on what key elements would help them succeed in teaching to this demographic, I designed an Instructor Survey and Questionnaire: Assessing YAI Training, also in the form of a Likert Scale. I combined this with open-ended questions to assess potential needs for additional training (Appendix E). This was issued to both current and past instructors who have taught urban youth groups and underserved youth programs.

The Likert Surveys targeting the instructors were issued via the Survey Monkey website in January of 2016. I set the parameters for the surveys to show me the respondent's e-mail address. Although I kept the information anonymous through the use of a coded system, I felt it was important to know where the responses came from in order to put their opinions into context. I did not do that for my trial survey, but I changed this for the final product. I believe it improved the richness of this data to know their individual personalities and number of years of experience.

To discern how the group leaders feel about how current programming, I designed a Group Leader Questionnaire, which consists solely of open-ended questions designed to address all of my research questions (Appendix F). This was issued to group leaders who have brought students to Yellowstone in the past year, and have worked in the field with the Institute Instructors.

To evaluate our programs from the student's perspective, and to evaluate their perception of the YAI instructor's ability to meet their needs, I designed a Student Survey

and Questionnaire, which also uses a Likert Scale and has open-ended questions which provided me with more qualitative data to compliment the quantitative data of the Likert Scale. This was issued to the students post-program via their group leaders who brought the students here to Yellowstone and delivered by e-mail (Appendix G).

In an attempt to explore the views of experts in the field of urban youth education, and ascertain how other organizations prepare their instructors working with diverse ethnic groups, I created an Interview for Best Practices. I used this instrument to interview current and former YAI staff via the telephone, as well as five of the leading experts in the field of outdoor education (Appendix H).

In order to ensure validity and reliability in my research, the instruments were designed to survey four significant audience groups; the YAI instructors, group leaders and students who participated in our current programming, and leading experts in the field of outdoor education for urban youth (N= 40). This triangulation method used both qualitative and quantitative items to address each of my research questions (Table 1). Each of the instruments were peer reviewed before issuance, and allowed me to successfully gain an accurate measure of the training needs for YAI instructors.

Sample

The Yellowstone Association is a small organization and our staff numbers are quite low. As a result, I sent the Instructor Self-Assessment Survey and the Instructor Survey and Questionnaire to 11 people on January 4, 2016. This included the three other full-time instructors (excluding myself), as well as four seasonal instructors currently on staff who have taught these programs, one program manager, and four additional outside sources who have worked with us in the past.

The instructors I surveyed range in experience from 35 years on the job, to a fairly new seasonal instructor who has only been with us for two seasons. All of the instructors are of Caucasian descent (myself included), ranging in age from 23-65. Most of which are in their mid-twenties, and many of them grew up in rural communities across the U.S. All of the respondents are in good standing with the organization and are valued educators.

The Student Survey and Questionnaire and the Group Leader Questionnaire were sent via e-mail on February 7, 2016, to all of our inner-city and underserved youth groups from this past year, and included cities such as Pittsburgh, PA, Cincinnati, OH and Tacoma, WA. I had previously been in contact with the group leaders and they assured me that they would distribute these survey to their students and staff. It included eight programs, each containing an average of two chaperones or group leaders and an average of ten students, from cities as varied as Pittsburg, Pennsylvania to Charlotte, North Carolina.

The Interview for Best Practices was sent to five of the leading experts in the field of outdoor education for urban youth, including Outward Bound, in Colorado, the SITP Program in San Diego, CA, a staff member from the Boys and Girls Club of South Puget Sound, a staff member from Boulder Creek Academy, a therapeutic boarding school in NW Idaho, along with a woman who works with urban youth in Washington D.C., referred to me by my Director. I sent the questions via e-mail to allow them time to review them or respond before we communicated further. I also interviewed four current and former instructors and program managers via telephone.

The research methodology for this project received an exemption by Montana State University's Institutional Review Board (Appendix I).

DATA ANALYSIS

As stated in the Introduction, this study examined the training needs for continued growth in urban youth and underserved youth programming at the Yellowstone Association Institute. This section details the information gained through surveys of four significant audience groups; the YAI instructors, group leaders and students who participated in our current programming, and leading experts in the field of outdoor education. This research identifies the qualities that support a successful program and the barriers that will need to be overcome in the future.

Instructor Surveys

The Instructor Self-Assessment Survey was designed to assess the instructor's views on how prepared instructors feel to teach urban youth (Appendix D). Eight of the eleven instructors responded to this survey (N=8), using the online web tool "Survey Monkey."

To analyze the data obtained in this survey, I graphed the results of the Likert style items, such as agree, disagree etc., and then looked for trends in the open-ended follow-up questions that complimented each survey item. To compile the data, I converted the individual number of responses to percentages and graphed the results of the Likert items (Figure 1). I paraphrased each survey question in the following figures, and I will discuss them in the order as they appear in the corresponding figure to make it easier for my readers, and to avoid the need to refer to the Appendix repeatedly.

To analyze the data of the open-ended questions, I read through each survey and questionnaire in full to get an overall sense of their climate and attitude. I then read each individual question from each respondent, highlighting any pertinent information that pertained to my action research questions. For example, I read all of the number 1's, then all of the number 2's, etc., highlighting areas that addressed my research questions. I then re-read them one last time, but this time, I compiled a list of reoccurring categories and kept track of numbers of similar responses.

This pattern of analysis will be repeated for all of the open-ended follow-up questions in the Likert surveys and will be repeated for the questionnaires in this chapter.

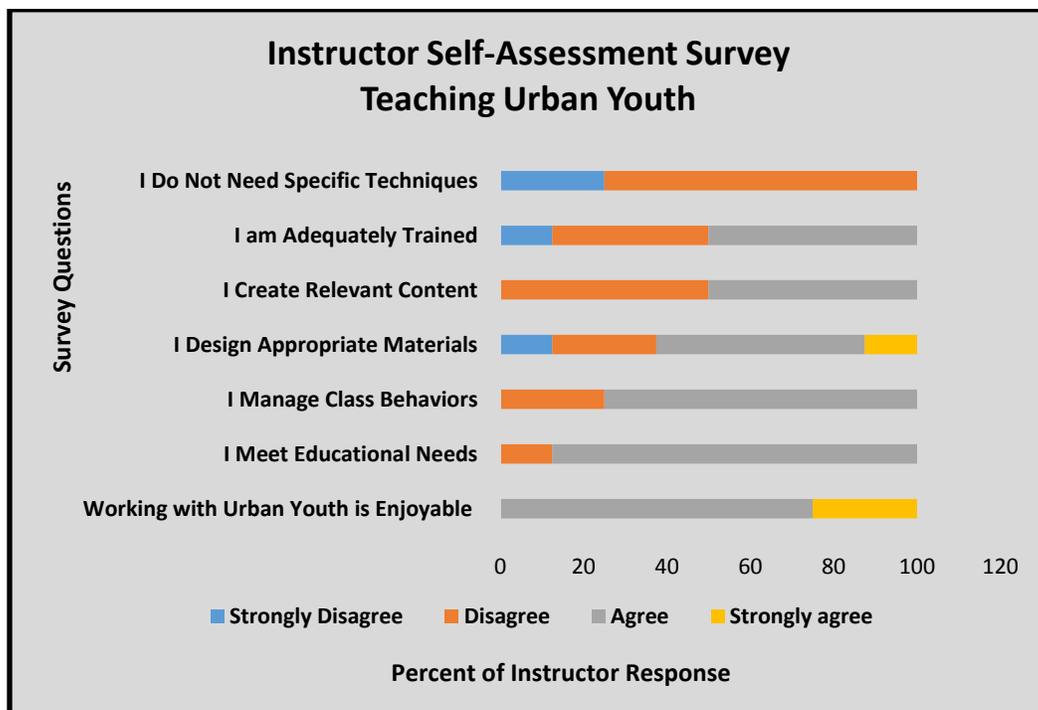


Figure 1. Instructor self-assessment survey graph, (N=8).

I did find a few trends in the open-answer responses that are worth discussing further.

When reviewing the survey question, *“I do not need specific teaching techniques to work with this population of students,”* I found that 75 percent of the respondents disagreed with this statement and their follow-up responses were helpful in the development of the training module (Appendix A); *“This demographic has needs that are very different from other youth groups, and especially from the more common YA model of kids attending with parents or grandparents,”* or *“this is a special group and to make the most of their time in YNP, it is important to connect quickly and to involve them immediately. It is important to value them even if their behavior does not follow our idea of proper. That is why we need training to open our own minds to them.”*

As I look at the results pertaining to the survey question, *“I am able to successfully incorporate culturally relevant content when teaching urban youth groups and underserved youth groups,”* I discovered that 50 percent of the instructors disagreed with the statement, and 50 percent agreed. Two instructors who agreed with the statement *“use music”* and label themselves as *“a pop culture gurus and keep up on all the latest trends in order to find common ground.”* An instructor who disagreed stated, *“I think I make things relevant, but I’ve never really had the chance to ask the kids if it was relevant to them.”* While another dissenting voice said, *“Honestly, except for the universals, their culture often felt foreign to me. I have never lived in an urban area so my ideas might be assumptive or cliché and not really aligned to what is actually relatable.”* While, 37.5 percent of the eight made mention that they do not have enough time to research culturally relevant content, nor do they get *“paid time to find/develop it myself.”* They also felt that they could accomplish this if they knew more about *“the students ahead of time to consider how best to reach them.”*

The replies to the survey question, “*I am able to design instructional materials and lesson plans specifically geared for teaching urban youth and underserved youth groups,*” were of particular interest as they were quite varied, running the full spectrum of possibilities. In response to, 12.5 percent strongly disagreed, 25 percent disagreed, 50 percent agreed, while 12.5 percent strongly agreed with the statement.

With such an array of replies, I had to look to the follow-up question, “*Describe what experience you have had in this area.*” Only 87.5 percent of the respondents answered the follow-up question, with the majority of answers indicating little or no experience. One respondent who strongly agreed, and has ran these types of programs with me in the past, expressed, “I’ve designed a lot of programs and I’ve used them with these demographics, but I’d love to know if what I’m doing really works, or just simply appeals to the group leaders.”

I surmise from these responses the YAI would benefit from specific teaching materials for this population

I found some practical information within the survey question, “*I am able to identify and meet the educational needs of urban youth groups and underserved youth groups.*” Although 87.5 percent of the respondents agreed and one disagreed with this statement, I found it more helpful to read their follow-up responses to my question, “*What do you feel is your strongest attribute in this area?*”

Answers to the follow-up question had a similar theme of being observant of their students, reading their body language, using humor as a teaching tool, and genuinely caring for them. One of the respondents who agreed with the statement said, “I am gentle and compassionate with the kids. I want them to know that I really like who they are and

they can relax and have fun away from things that might usually bother them.” While another who agreed with the statement answered the follow-up question with this response, “I’m unsure. I think some of my college classes helped to prepare me..., but if I hadn’t had those courses and had to rely on YA training for this demographic, I would be more intimidated.”

The Instructor Survey and Questionnaire: Assessing YAI Training was designed as an attitude scale with a series of Likert items and open-ended questions (Appendix E). The goal was to assess how the instructors feel about the current training at the YAI and gain insight as to what elements they would like to see included in a new training module for urban youth and underserved youth groups. The survey was sent to the same 11 instructor group via Survey Monkey.

Eight of the eleven YAI instructors responded to the Instructor Survey and Questionnaire: Assessing YAI Training (N=8), although they were not the same set of eight as the previous survey. I emailed the two outlying instructors to gather more information. One instructor expressed that she felt comfortable filling out this survey because “it was assessing YAI training, but the other survey was assessing my abilities in teaching to this demographic, and I have never taught them before.” The other instructor simply forgot to do this one. She was in the process of moving across the country and would not have time to do it before the due date.

To analyze the data obtained in the survey portion of the Instructor Survey and Questionnaire (Appendix E), I graphed the results of the Likert style items by converting the individual number of responses to percentages and graphed the results of the Likert

items (Figure 2), and then looked for trends in the open-ended follow-up questions that complimented each survey item.

Again, I paraphrased each survey question in Figure 2 and will discuss them in order as they appear in the figure.

In analyzing this data set for the instructor survey portion, I found many common threads that helped me in the design of the training module outline. I will begin by discussing the common trends found in the Likert survey items (Figure 2).

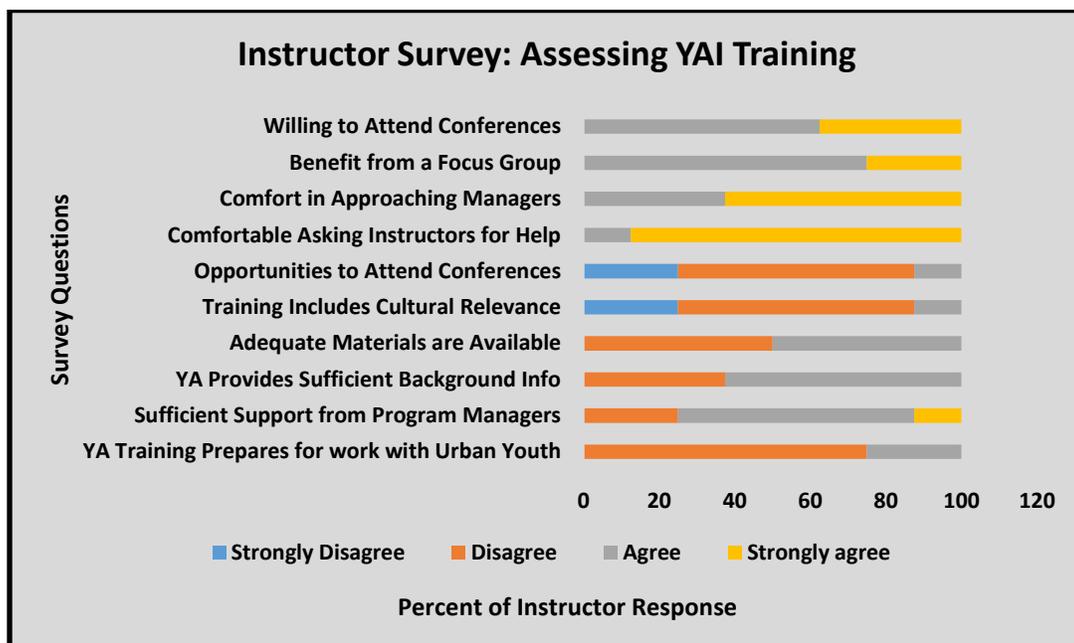


Figure 2. Instructor survey: assessing YA training, (N=8).

One of the first things that became apparent was found in the responses to the survey question, *“I am comfortable in asking other instructors for help and advice when teaching urban youth and underserved youth programs.”* The response to this item was overwhelmingly positive, with 87.5 percent in strong agreement and 12.5 percent agreed with this statement. In response to the follow-up question, *“What helps you to feel comfortable?”* respondents replied with statements such as, *“I know that the other*

instructors are kind, helpful, and non-judgmental, and will offer honest, valuable, productive insight and ideas,” or “My co-workers are all very talented and open to sharing those talents...It is the culture we have defined for ourselves.”

I also found some very useful information in the response to the survey question, “*YAI’s seasonal training provided me with the tools to produce culturally relevant content for urban youth groups and underserved youth groups.*” The results for this item were mixed, 25 percent of the respondents strongly agreed, while 62.5 percent disagreed and the other 12.5 percent agreed. When asked to “*Explain why you answered the way you did and provide an example of how you make the content relevant for students,*” 37.5 percent of the respondents answered this with a common theme ranging from, “This is something we don’t focus on in our seasonal training,” or “Never in training have we talked about working specifically with urban youth. I would not know how to be culturally relevant to these groups,” and “Not sure YA has ever addressed tailoring a program to such a specific demographic.

While three others, 37.5 percent mentioned an uncertainty concerning relevant content materials such as, “I don’t know what materials that are culturally relevant to these kids would look like, but I sure want to learn,” or, “how could they provide me with culturally relevant content for every different group,” and another respondent stated,

Our training assumes that our participants already know the importance of nature and connecting to the outdoors. It doesn’t talk a lot about how to keep them connected and doing stuff back home or in the future, and it certainly doesn’t provide tools to produce relevant content for minority youth groups.

In response to the survey question, “*YA provides me with sufficient background information on each group to help me design my programs successfully,*” 62.5 percent

agreed, while 37.5 percent disagreed. This led me to investigate their answers to the follow-up question, “*What information would you like to see included prior to meeting the group.*”

Only 87.5 percent of the survey respondents answered this question with 43 percent stating a common theme of wanting to know the individual student better, the student’s expectations and any challenges the instructor may face, such as, “any info as to the behavioral issues, or emotional needs. Any hints on how to work successfully with the group,” and another respondent pointed out,

Perhaps it would help to know from the leaders who work with the kids any behavioral concerns...along with techniques to help kids get through their personal challenges. I want to know how to be sensitive when necessary for certain, or all kids. I want to understand their needs.

Another 43 percent wanted to know more about the group leaders’ goals and expectations for the trip, as well as what these students had already been exposed to before coming to Yellowstone. They want to know, “Specifics about what their teachers had covered and what they would still like to cover,” or, “It would be great to consistently get an idea of the group’s goals and level of intimacy with conservation issues,” and, “I would like to know why each individual is here and what they expect from the trip. The program will be delivered differently if they are required to attend said program, than if they had to work to be there.”

Last, I gained an incredible amount of insight from analyzing survey question, “*YAI’s Seasonal Training has prepared me to work successfully with urban youth and underserved youth groups.*” The results were split with 75 percent of the respondents disagreeing with this statement, while 25 percent agreed. All of these respondents also

answered the follow-up question, “*What are the greatest attributes of YA’s training?*”

They all made references to the YAI’s commitment to Yellowstone content and a training that includes techniques to “improving our own personal naturalist skills,” and that “content updates are always appreciated, as well as challenging instructors to grow in pedagogical methods.”

Looking back, I wish I had included another follow-up question here that asked, “*What are the greatest shortcomings of YAI’s seasonal training,*” but, I did catch much of this in the open-ended questionnaire section.

In reviewing the questionnaire portion of the Instructor Survey and Questionnaire: Assessing YAI Training (Appendix E), I found some interesting trends and exploitable information here as well.

The percentage of respondents varied for each question in this form, as some skipped certain questions entirely. I will continue to state the percentage of those who filled out the questions that warrant further discussion. It should be noted that when analyzing open-ended questions such as these, the total percentages for each discussion area may not always add up to 100 percent. For example, 43 percent may have mentioned co-teaching, while 28.5 percent of the same respondents mentioned needing more time, and 71 percent may have mentioned the need for increased training. This is because the same person may have mentioned more than one trending theme in a single answer. This pattern will persist throughout all of the open-ended survey item discussions throughout this section.

I felt that the responses to the question, “*What is your greatest concern/fear when teaching to this demographics, and what are some of your ideas in terms of how we could*

help you with this,” would be of particular interest to the YAI program managers and staff. Of the 87.5 percent of the instructors who answered this question, 43 percent mentioned that they were, “afraid of coming off as a naïve middle class white person with little understanding of their background,” or they were, “concerned about being unable to connect with them because of my age and color,” and another stated that, “My greatest fear is that I won’t be able to connect with them because they are from such a different background that I am. I would like to know how other instructors address this.”

Another 28.5 percent were concerned with time and stated, “My greatest fear is not helping them connect in the small window I have to do it,” and how to “connect with them on a personal level with huge expectations in just a short amount of time.”

I feel that two of the statements described my own fears over the years, as 28.5 percent stated, “This will be a fairyland without relevance to the rest of their lives,” and worrying about “making it interesting for them and not feel like I am just lecturing them.” Thus, we need a solution to these fears. One instructor brilliantly suggested a few “things that might be helpful could be tools for discussion or teaching that are geared to high school kids, or participation in citizen science type projects where they are discovering things on their own and also making a contribution to the Park.”

A strong trend was found in the response to the question, “*Could co-teaching these programs increase success for new instructors? Explain.*” All seven of the respondents answered this with a resounding, “Yes!” I think this is important for managers to recognize the unmeasurable benefits of allowing instructors to shadow another instructor, or to co-teach with another instructor before ever teaching one of these programs on their own. The YAI does offer as many shadowing days as the budget will

allow, but I think the benefits will outweigh the cost. Seventy one percent responded with messages concerning the much needed support that comes with co-teaching such as, “Having a second opinion or got-to for any problems or challenges that develop, co-teaching takes out a lot of the stress of how do I deal with this one challenge or issue without letting it effect the entire group,” and another stated, “New instructors can learn skill and subtleties that are difficult to convey in training,” and a third expressed the importance of shadowing by stating,

A new instructor can learn from watching and talking with a seasoned instructor. It would help prevent flailing around and making mistakes, and having a poor experience for both student and instructor. It would also help a new instructor start out positively, rather than hate the idea.

In addressing the question, “*How could YAI improve your ability to work successfully with urban groups and underserved youth groups?*” 43 percent of the 7 total respondents stated that they would like co-teaching and/or shadowing opportunities, while 28.5 percent wanted additional time allotted for these programs. One respondent stated, “Definitely team teaching with a format where there is time for question and discussion between the instructors. They should have time to debrief, to discuss concerns, to get feedback, even if they have done these programs before.” Another said they would like,

More training, co-teaching and/or shadowing, and increased prep time for seasonal instructors. Resident instructors have a lot of prep/office time and seasonals essentially have the little bit of paid time it takes to go through a packet and clean a bus. Having some paid development/planning time prior to these programs would help.

Another common theme amongst the respondents was that 71 percent mentioned the need for additional training and mentoring. Respondents replied with comments such

as, “A short training session specific to working with this demographic would be a great start,” or they wanted us to add a “day long clinic,” and that we provide them with, “the chance to work these programs.”

Last, I will analyze the responses to the question, “*What key elements would you like to see included in seasonal training to prepare you for working with urban youth and underserved youth groups?*” Again, only 87.5 percent of the respondents answered this question, (n=7). Forty-three percent responding with a theme focusing on seeking out “best practices” and “bringing in other teachers who work with urban/underserved youth groups.”

Another 43 percent asked that we include tool and techniques to ensure that we are meeting the educational needs of the students, and that we should include “demos of how to teach our everyday stuff with a different spin,” through the use of “modeling activities and facilitated discussions,” and one respondent stated,

Helping instructors understand that they need to vary their presentations to meet the needs of the student. It is the instructor’s fault if the kids don’t respond well—meaning that the instructor’s attitude should always be: How can I improve this for these students? What can I do differently? Rather than blaming the students.

While another made an interesting point, that “Having it addressed at all would be a start.”

Group Leader and Staff Questionnaire

The Group Leader and Staff Questionnaire was designed to target group leaders and chaperones that brought students to Yellowstone within the last year (Appendix F).

Completion of the questionnaire by the program leaders and distribution to the additional chaperones was difficult. One program leader who did fill out the form said

she had “talked with her group leaders and chaperones, and that she would speak for them,” These staff members were from 4 separate cities, leaving me with only one survey to go on from that entire group of schools. In the end, the forms were distributed to 5 schools instead of eleven.

The surveys were created in Microsoft word and distributed via e-mail through my YAI program manager.

To analyze the data, I read through each respondent’s questionnaire in full to get an overall sense of their climate and attitude following the previously stated pattern for analysis.

In analyzing the question, “*What do you feel are the greatest barriers to learning in an outdoor environment for your students? In what ways could YA address these concerns,*” 53 percent mentioned that “bugs, heat and the general elements will be a huge distraction for our students.” While 69 percent mentioned the children’s general fear or discomfort with the outdoors, and that “many may not know how to behave in such a setting,” or “you will need to be patient with them and create a sense of safety for them,” and one group leader when on to describe their lives at home, stating,

I believe our students have limited access to quality outdoor environments and have little interest in learning outdoors. The neighborhoods where our students live are crime ridden and pretty dangerous, so they are not likely to spend a lot of time out. Schools typically do not use the outdoors as a learning environment, which limits student exposure to learning opportunities of the outdoor classroom.

Interestingly, that same group leader when answering the question, *What impact, if any, has this program had on your students,*” stated,

I believe our students have developed a new level of confidence and understanding that there is more to life than just what they know in this

city...and some students have had an interest in outdoor careers as a result of this experience.

Over 90 percent of the group leaders mentioned something similar to the above statement, along with other statements, such as, “the program has had a tremendous impact on our kids and it fully supports...helping them reach their full potential as productive, caring and responsible citizens.”

In response to the question, “*What are the top three characteristics of a good outdoor youth program,*” eighty-five percent of the respondents mentioned something similar to these statements, “they should be fun, engaging, hands-on and diverse,” and 38.5 percent said they should be “student focused, not instructor focused” and “incorporate educational pieces...while having fun, so youth don’t realize they are learning.”

I discovered one persistent negative point of view that continued to express itself in the data. In the response to the question, “*What were the least favorable parts of the program? How could that be improved,*” 30 percent of the group leaders mentioned that; “the bus rides are too long,” in response to this question, but when I took into account where the word “bus rides” appeared in the overall questionnaire, 75 percent of the group leaders mentioned their displeasure with the time spent in the bus.

I found some interesting data in the responses to the question, “*What are the ideal qualities of an urban youth and underserved youth instructor,*” that align nicely with my conceptual framework and literary search. As previously mentioned, the most important quality is “genuinely caring about the students.” Ninety-two percent of the respondents included the words, caring, sensitive, or empathetic in their answer. One respondent

stated that, “understanding that a kid may be having a first-time experience in the outdoors and bringing an empathy to the vulnerability that this presents is important in providing a valuable, lasting and ultimately positive experience.” While another 46 percent mentioned the importance of establishing trust and respect and that instructors should, “learn the student’s names and address them respectfully, and be aware of body language such as folded arms, stepping back from students, and be sure to make eye contact.”

Twenty-three percent stated that the instructor needs to be open and “down to earth” to earn the respect of the students. One respondent stated, “Be real, youth can sense a fake or know when an instructor doesn’t really have their back; the more genuine you are, the more respect you will get.”

In addition to emphasizing the importance of caring and respect, 23 percent of the respondents mentioned how important it is to never make the students “feel like a charity case,” and “don’t use labels to define young people with whom they work.... We asked our young adults how they felt about being labeled as underserved or at-risk and they said it makes them feel less than everyone else.”

This same line of thought came up again in their responses to the follow-up question, “*What advice would you give to a YAI instructor who is meeting your students for the first time?*” Fifty-four percent stated that instructors need to “get to know the kids. Don’t be afraid of starting a conversation with them,” and “ask about their hometowns, and their own goals for the experience and share genuinely about yourself to your comfort level.”

I found a continued thread of statements in response to the question, “*Did the YAI instructor have difficulty teaching to your students? If so, what would you attribute the difficulty (age, socio-economic background, attitude. Etc.)? What suggestions can you give to overcome these barriers, if any?*” Sixty-nine percent of the responses included statements such as, “even though there were obvious differences, the instructor was so personable, they loved her,” or, “they were very engaging and seemed genuinely interested in each individual and their needs,” and “they are able to somehow establish rapport with our members and break down walls with them that sometimes take our staff years of work to do.”

I found some interesting responses to the question, “*Did our curriculum resonate with your students, helping them to make connections with wild places and their life at home? Can you share an example?*” One of the group leaders stated, I think the ripples from these types of programs are indelible for most of the kids,” while another stated,

I’ve seen multiple kids throughout the years who try to bring what they learned at the Park back to the clubs. Whether it be something like heading up a recycling project, picking up garbage on campus, or something like taping off a duck’s nesting area out in one of the fields so nobody steps on it, the kids really try to put what they learned in to practice back home.

Student Survey and Questionnaire

As mentioned in chapter two, a sense of place can have a profound effect on the decisions that humans make throughout the course of their lives. The Student Survey and Questionnaire (Appendix G), was designed to assess their sense of place while here in Yellowstone, both an emotional level and educational level, and what effect this outdoor experience may have had on their lives after the trip. The survey was only distributed by

three of our group leaders who had brought these students to Yellowstone within the past year. I received a total of 12 surveys from these three schools.

In analyzing the data, I followed the same methods as previously stated for the other surveys and questionnaires and I will once again discuss the survey and the questionnaire separately in this section.

At first glance, this data set for the student survey portion of the Student Survey and Questionnaire (Appendix G), has a high percentage of the responses in “agreement” (Figure 3). I changed the format of the chart for this analysis to emphasize this point visually through the use of a clustered column chart instead of a stacked bar chart, as listed in the previous sections. I will also refer to each as survey items, as they were issued as statements instead of questions.

It should also be disclosed that all of the students who filled out a survey had me for an instructor last year, and they may have been uncomfortable in answering some of these questions honestly, especially the questions that pertained to my performance or skills as a teacher. The outliers are of particular interest and worth further discussion. In areas where the response was extremely varied from the majority, I looked to the follow-up questions to establish insight on this trend. I will discuss them first and then discuss some of the other views, where I gleaned information that helped make up the foundation of the training module.

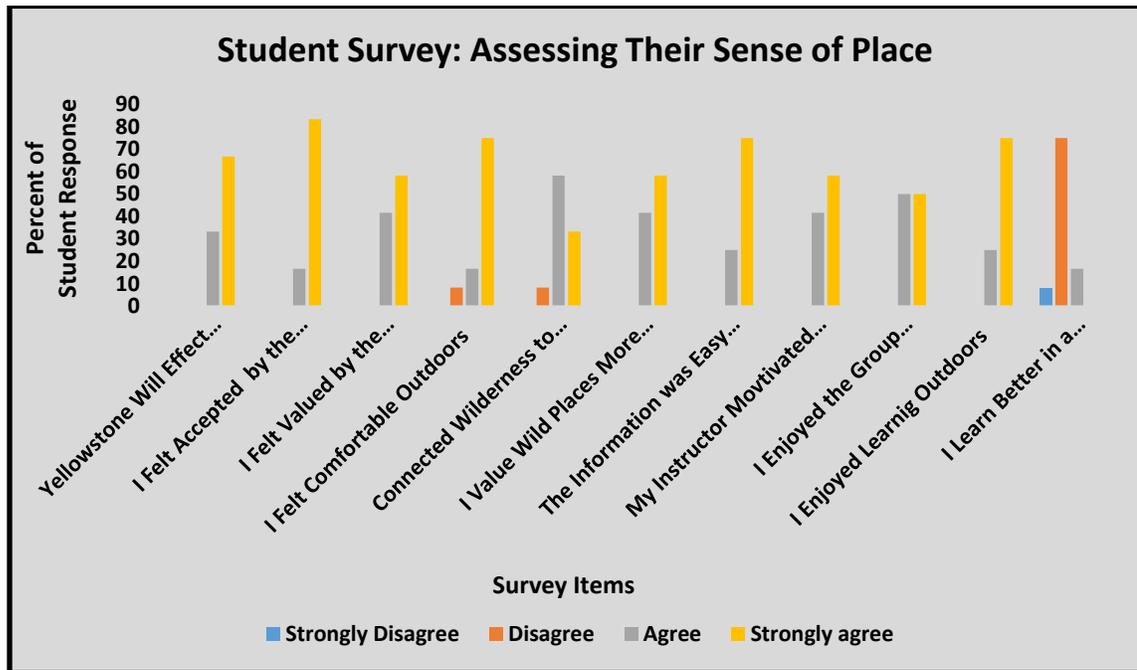


Figure 3. Student survey: assessing their sense of place, (N=12).

The one opposing view in response to the survey item, “*My instructor helped me to feel comfortable in an outdoors environment,*” was a bit harder to understand until I took into consideration who this student was. While 92 percent of the students agreed (or strongly agreed) with this statement, one student disagreed, but in his response to the follow-up question, “*Were you nervous at any time, if so can you explain,*” he answered, “No. I was already comfortable.” It may be helpful to know the background on this student, in that he was living at a therapeutic boarding school that has a diverse outdoor program, giving him previous exposure.

The opposing view to the survey item, “*The experience helped me make connections between wild places and my life at home,*” was an eye-opener. Over 90 percent of the respondents agreed with this statement, while one student disagreed. In his response to the follow-up question, “*Is there anything you do differently at home now,*”

he responded to the statement quite literally stating, “I am not at home, I am at a boarding school.” In contrast, the other students from the same school did not read it quite so literally, and responded quite differently to the item; one stating, “I look out for animals more now, I saw a bunny yesterday.”

Last, in response to the survey item, “*I learn better in a classroom setting,*” 92 percent disagreed (or strongly disagreed) with this statement, while one student, responded by stating, “Sometimes the outdoors can be a distracting place,” whereas other students who disagree with the survey item, said “I would rather be outside to learn because it is less distracting,” or “I can learn in a classroom, but I would rather be outside,” and “sometimes, I barely feel like I learn anything when I sit at a desk with a worksheet.” And another student summed it up by stating,

I answered this question with strongly disagree, because learning in an outdoor environment delivers a more hands-on, intimate, and impactful learning experience. It allows me to see what we are learning about physically, as opposed to viewing it through a picture or computer screen.

The questionnaire portion of the Student Survey and Questionnaire helped me to gain important information as to the success or failings of our current programming for urban youth and underserved youth (Appendix G). As mentioned earlier, my survey sample was small (N=12), but the responses to the open-ended questions were insightful and forthcoming. I will discuss a few of the more poignant survey items that helped me address some of my research questions.

This questionnaire was particularly helpful in giving me insight to answering two of my research questions, “*What are the best practices for delivering educational content that is culturally relevant and how do we successfully identify and meet the learning*

needs and overcome the challenges of learning in an outdoor setting?” For example, in response to the question, *“Did your Yellowstone instructor do a good job of connecting Yellowstone’s ecology, geology and history to the world you live in? If so, how? If not, why? Can you think of an example of something you especially connected to,”* 75 percent of the students only answered the last part of the question and told me what they learned about the Park, not how they connected it to the world they live in.

Twenty-five percent did answer the question with a more thoughtful answer. One student claimed that they connected to the idea that, “the ash coming from Yellowstone (during an eruption) would cover most of Texas, I am from Texas!” While another student said, “Yes. I connected to the history of the park and how it took a lot of effort to restore the Park after the land was overhunted and exploited for resources. It reminded me how important it is to preserve special places as Yellowstone.”

In response to the question, *“Did you find the information you learned in Yellowstone important to have? Explain and give an example if you can,”* 67 percent of the students responded with a statement concerning a more global connection, such as, “I found out that trees (in the mountains) are very important to the water that we drink, and without them we will have bigger droughts,” or “I think learning about man’s effect on the bison population can be a lesson on our effect on the environment to all,” and “I think an awareness by humans of the world around them is crucial, especially because in modern times, we tend to be more and more disconnected with nature.” While another 33 percent gave much more simple answers such as, “some of it,” or “yes, because next time I go I will have more knowledge of the Park,” and another stated, “I loved and learned a lot.”

Their responses to the question, *“Was there a time during your trip when the Yellowstone instructor inspired you to learn and actively participate,”* will help to guide our training for instructors in the future. Thirty-three percent mentioned they were motivated by the instructor’s personality or the way the information was delivered, such as, “I was motivated all the time by the instructor’s good attitude and enthusiasm,” or “I learned a lot...that I never knew by her telling us facts in an exciting tone of voice,” and “when she was telling us about the bear she had seen, she was so energetic about it.”

Thirty-three percent also mentioned the use of games or handouts in helping them to be motivated to learn and participate. One responded, “Yes, a lot of times. One of them was when she played a game with us where we had to name the names of different landmarks or animals in the Park,” and another stated that they were inspired to learn, “when she passed stuff around.”

Another 33 percent included the instructor’s use of story-telling as a motivator, such as, “the instructor used a lot of story-telling and engagement to help us be successful learners,” or “her cool stories helped me to learn about the wolf packs,” and “the instructor used a lot of stories and described everything in such a fun way that anyone could understand, but still made it very interesting.”

Lastly, another 25 percent mentioned learning through the quiet observation of the animals. One student responded, “When the instructor talked about what she had learned by watching. It inspired me to pay more attention and learn things for myself,” or “I guess it would be when the animals were passing by us and getting the opportunity to watch,” and another stated,

Definitely! We were encouraged to participate at all times. I was particularly inspired by our instructor's phenomenal knowledge of wildlife and I am now even considering doing something later in life that involves environmental science and protection of wildlife.

Along this same line of thought, when asked "*If the instructor could do one thing to increase your participation and motivation, what would it be,*" 16 percent requested that the instructor, "encourage us to ask more questions." Sixteen percent also requested that, "the instructor tell us more about themselves, more personal stuff to help us to connect to you," and "tell us how you got here," in that their students are often interested in learning about career opportunities. Sixteen percent wanted, "more of those action-packed stories," and "they could add more stories on the bus rides." Another 16 percent wanted the program to have, "more activity and less driving time."

Interview for Best Practices

While conducting the Interview for Best Practices, I was able to capture responses from three of the leading experts and I was able to conduct interviews via telephone with four YAI instructors and staff for a total of 7 respondents to this instrument, (N=7), (Appendix H).

One hundred percent of the responses to the question, "*What are the ideal qualities you would like to see in an urban youth and underserved youth instructor teaching in an outdoor setting.*" responded with similar words such, as caring, compassionate, realistic and patient. As one leading expert said, "it takes a lot of patience," while another stated, "I always look for people who could separate individuals from their behaviors and decisions. People who could meet students where they were at, rather than where they hoped they would be." While one of the instructors made the point

that, “you can’t take their behavior personally, what they are showing you on the surface, may not be at all what they are really feeling inside. Accept them regardless.”

In response to the question, “*Given that our program are only 3-5 days in length, what techniques could help our instructors to build rapport with urban youth and underserved students in a timely manner,*” 57 percent mentioned the need for more information on the students prior to the trip. As one of the leading experts stated,

I am not sure of the pre-program prep, but some ideas are to have pre-program school visits where instructors or other program staff can visit the students who are attending to answer questions. If that is not an option, doing a video introduction that could be played for the students could be beneficial - they would have familiar faces to look for.

While another leading expert said that “rapport is hard to measure as it is relationship based. The best way would be a pre-and post-trip questionnaire asking...how well connected they felt to the instructor.”

Throughout these surveys, I found many themes that have helped answer my over-arching question, “*How could a new training module for urban youth and underserved youth groups help to create more effective instructors?*” While searching for answers to my sub-questions, words such as caring, open, fun, explorative, hands-on, and meaningful were voiced repeatedly by all of the respondents. I have expressed some of the common themes in the collected responses in the table below (Table 2).

Table 2.
Common Themes

Research Sub-Questions	Common Themes
What are the characteristics of a successful training module?	Includes cultural awareness and sensitivity training. Promotes cultural competence. Includes practical advice and modeling of teaching techniques. Relies on best practices from experts in the field.
How do instructors feel about our current training?	Offer specific training, more shadow and co-teaching opportunities. Continued exposure to diverse demographic groups and paid preparation time.
What are the ideal qualities of an urban youth instructor?	Creates a culture of caring. Culturally sensitive, open and engaging. Effective communicators. Strives to know the students individually and allows the students to know them. Be human, be real.
What are the best practices for delivering culturally relevant content?	Hands-on. Explorative. Fun. Learn about their home town. Use of storytelling and metaphor to connect wilderness to their daily lives. Encourage continued 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 the outdoors. Establish precise boundaries and clear expectations. Promote quiet time for reflection. Less teaching, more sharing. Less bus time.

INTERPRETATION AND CONCLUSION

This needs assessment capstone project helps address the problems that arise from a lack of training or support to help the instructors connect effectively with urban youth and underserved youth groups. These types of programs differ from those that instructors regularly teach, and I believe that with improved training, through increased cultural

awareness and sensitivity, YAI can be successful in preparing our instructors to work with more diverse groups. This investigation has been successful in divulging what those needs are, and how we can improve upon them.

First and foremost, I discovered that the wording of a survey item can make a huge difference in the responses you receive. For example, I found that the students who were living away from home at a boarding school took me literally in the meaning of “home,” when answering survey item number 5 of the Student Survey, *“This experience helped me to make connections between wild places and my life at home.”* The response, “I am not at home, I’m at a boarding school,” helped me to realize how literal a student’s response might be and how the wording of an item can changed the outcome of the response. In this case, the use of the word “home” was a huge error on my part, I should have been more sensitive to this particular audience, as things we refer to may have a different meaning to our underserved students.

The student responses to the questions such as, *“Did your instructor do a good job of connecting Yellowstone....to the world you live in? Can you think of an example of something that you especially connected to,”* were often too long for them to answer it completely and many misunderstood the questions by telling me something they learned in Yellowstone, but not what they learned before they got here or how the instructor helped them to connect it to their world they lived in. I found that if I asked more than one question at a time, the respondents (especially the students), only answered that last part of the question. In the future, I need to separate these out to get more complete answers.

As I go back to my overarching research question, “*How could a new training module for urban youth groups and underserved youth groups help create more effective instructors,*” the research has revealed a continued need to assess the skills the instructors already have, and determine the areas still need help with, each season.

The instructor’s had a wide array of responses to their ability to design materials and lesson plans specifically geared for urban youth and underserved youth, that I can only deduce that many of our instructors would greatly benefit if the YAI could provide specific teaching materials for this demographic. This will be an element of the Teaching Techniques & Practical Advice section of the Training Module. Not only do we need to provide them with tips to connect to these students by teaching the content differently, but we also need to supply them with teaching materials that will resonate with these students.

I discovered that half of the instructors felt that they were able to successfully incorporate culturally relevant content when teaching urban youth groups and underserved youth groups. I found this fascinating, simply due to the fact that this is a group of all white instructors, many of which are from rural communities with middle to upper-class backgrounds, and only a few of which have any previous experience specifically teaching to inner-city kids. My interpretation of this is that the instructors have mixed feelings about their current skill set, but are confident in their ability to try, and are open to, and in need of more training.

Overall, the research also points to an extremely positive working environment at the YAI, where instructors are comfortable asking others for help, “It is the culture we

have defined for ourselves,” and I believe that we should continue encourage during our training sessions to nurture this culture whenever possible.

The instructors expressed a strong desire for opportunities for co-teaching. I know from personal experience how helpful it was to know that I would have another instructor with me for my first programs. As one of the respondents stated, “It should never be two newbies out there on their own, just winging it. These programs are too important to blow it!” Another instructor stated that they need “more information from the program managers as to the nature of the program placed on my schedule. I need more information than what is written on the itinerary. If it is a program with youth-at-risk students, I need to know that ahead of time.” Over the years situations have occurred where instructors, myself included, went into a program thinking it was a college program based on the school’s name, only to discover that it was a boarding school for drug and alcohol abuse, and no one had discussed this with them.

The YAI budget can have a profound effect on the training opportunities they can offer our instructors, often having a direct effect on how successful our instructors can be. We currently can only offer seasonal instructors two paid shadow days, but many of the instructors mentioned a need for “more paid prep time,” or that “Resident Instructors get paid time to prepare for these courses, while we (seasonal instructors) typically do not.”

Ideally, the instructors should be self-motivated to prepare for a program accordingly, even if they are not getting paid. This research has revealed that paying them for more preparation time would tremendously increase their dedication to the process of their own personal development as a YAI instructor.

Based on advice from my readers, I am also suggesting that YAI consider asking new instructors for a three year commitment, and change the hiring process to include “full-time” seasonal positions. This would encourage them to stay, as it would guarantee them a position each season. This could increase our retention rate, increase the knowledge base of the instructors, and ultimately increase the quality of our programs.

Our focus group explored other ideas to resolve some of the budgeting restraints to training. One of which was to increase the size of these programs to two buses, hence requiring two instructors at all times. We discussed how this could dramatically increase the cost of the program, but since many of our programs are donor funded, we all felt strongly that increasing the program size was achievable, as one focus group member stated, “reaching more kids each year, is never going to be a bad thing.”

While investigating the research questions, *“How do we successfully identify and meet the learning needs and the overcome challenges of learning in an outdoor setting, and what are the ideal qualities of an urban youth and underserved youth instructor”* my surveys and interviews helped me to get a base-line format for what our training should include, and provided me with ways to approach trainings with such sensitive subject matter.

The group leaders suggested that we need to be sensitive to where the students are coming from, and to “be patient with them” as they adjust to being outdoors, because to many of them, as one group leader said, “The outdoors is not a safe place.” We need to understand what, if any exposure they have had to the outdoors, and to be able to help them to feel comfortable.

The students themselves, were particularly helpful in assessing our success or failings in this area. They expressed an overwhelmingly positive response to learning in an outdoor environment. Just being outdoors with these students can give us an incredible advantage for success. Over the years I have found that learning in an outdoor setting allows students a chance to shine when they may otherwise struggle in their traditional classroom settings. Shy students suddenly open up and say, “I was shy, but she made everything exciting and fun,” and kids who have been labeled hyperactive or poor students in class, are suddenly calm, focused and excited to learn. As a few stated, “when I had questions about something and I would say them, my instructor would not make fun of me, even if I was wrong, she would correct me politely,” and “she encourage me to think more and ask even more questions!”

However, an instructor can't expect Yellowstone to do it all for them, there are some techniques that work particularly well for this demographic. This investigation revealed that the students were inspired by the use of story-telling, not only to teach them the subject matter, but to get them excited about it, and motivate them to actively participate in the learning process. One of my students called me a “sneaky teacher,” because they did not realize how much they had learned until the end of the week. I feel we should all strive for this outcome when teaching any type of program, but even more so for this demographic, because it seems to resonate so well with them. The ability to provide an experience where “youth are learning while having fun, so they don't realize they are learning,” as one of their group leaders said, is crucial in helping our urban youth to develop a connection to nature that will last a life time.

This investigation also helped me to understand the importance of sharing the outdoors with students as opposed to strictly teaching about it. The students mentioned time and time again how much they enjoyed, “just watching the animals, without anyone talking,” or as one student said, “I am very shy, and it was nice to have everyone be quiet for such long time. I wish we could do that in school, just go outside and listen to the wind, or the birds, or whatever.” While others mentioned the ability to “pick stuff up, like bones and bison hair and stuff, and not be afraid to touch it.” The instructor’s ability to create and encourage quiet time in the wilderness, and to promote opportunities for, as one of the group leaders said, “safe exploration and discovery,” is fundamental in creating a sense of place and an appreciation for nature. These techniques will be emphasized even more in the training our instructors.

Another overwhelming theme came in the group leaders complaints about the long bus rides. Yellowstone National Park is very large and travel times to certain tourist attractions can be arduous. Our program managers work hard to convince group leaders who will be attending our programs for the first time to remove the farther destinations from their itineraries. Unfortunately, until they have experienced it, many will still insist that we drive 3 hours one way to see Old Faithful Geyser, even though we can travel to other geyser basins with less drive time and spend more time enjoying and learning outdoors. I did find it interesting that many of the respondents who made mention of the long bus rides are from programs that we have been trying to change year after year, without success. If we are unable to alter the itinerary, I feel brain storming during training will help instructors to make these rides more engaging. We can share our tricks and tips and the games, discussions, trivia, music, or stories that we each use.

The group leaders had a common theme that the first step to meeting and identifying the learning needs of urban youth and underserved youth, is to “break down the social barriers.” One group leader stated the importance of instructors “accepting their students for who they are, without any labels,” while another went on to say that, “we will never have an opportunity to open the windows...if we continually label one another.”

I feel this is something to make clear during training. We may know the student’s background and where they come from, and there may be differences that exist between us, but as a group leader said, “never make them feel like a charity case.”

Another strong message from the group leaders and the leading experts was that, “instructors need to get to know their students,” and to “not be afraid to start a conversation with them, and to open yourself up to them whenever you can, and if it’s appropriate to do so.”

After reading comments such as these, I got an incredible sense of relief and a bit of validation. For years, many other organizations have preached that you never open up to these students or any share personal information with them. In contrast, I have always taught my co-workers running these program with me for the first time, to be as real as you can with them. This message should be delivered with cautionary limits of course, but as one respondent said, “If they ask you a personal question, answer it if you can, and don’t hide who you are.” I firmly belief that they need to see you as a human being in order to trust you. Contrary to our other programming with adults, where it is easier to isolate yourself a bit more and to just be their knowledgeable instructor; these young people need to feel welcomed and accepted by you if they are going to accept you. The

only way to do that sometimes is to open up to them first, whenever it is appropriate. I feel this is something that should be discussed in detail during our new training module.

I found an extremely common thread throughout the data that addressed my action research sub-question, “*How do instructors feel about the current training for urban youth and underserved youth groups?*” The instructors all felt there is a compelling need for more information on our urban youth students. This is something that I too have struggled with over the years. I have found that when group leaders provide me with a biography on each student, I am much more successful. Not only am I able to quickly build rapport when they arrive, but I can cater the program more specifically to their individual needs and personalities. I can prepare more ahead of time, instead of having to adjust on the fly after they arrive.

Currently, we do not require biographies on the students, but the YAI requires all of the youth program group leaders to fill out a Youth Program Pre-Trip Questionnaire before arriving, and this document is shared with the YAI instructor in preparation of running the program. Any improvements we can make to this document will be extremely beneficial in helping the instructor to successfully connect with this demographic.

Based on the evidence gathered in this research project, along with the help from my focus group, I am suggesting a new section with additional questions, called Personal Biographies of Students, be added to the Youth Program Pre-Trip Questionnaire such as, *Tell us about yourself: Who do you live with, (pets included)? What do you like to do for fun; sports, hobbies, etc.? What techniques help you to be a better learner? For example, do you learn best when your teacher uses visual-aids, or do you learn best by listening to*

your teacher or reading on your own, or do you learn best when it is hands-on? What is your greatest concern or fear about going to Yellowstone? The entire list of new questions can be found in Appendix B.

If YAI agrees to include these updates, it would be issued to the students by their group leaders prior to their arrival could help us to gain valuable information and could give instructors the tools they need to understand their audience more completely, to successfully meet the learning needs of the student. This form is really our first contact with these students, and could be the beginning of relationship building for us. It could be incredibly beneficial in building a rapport between the students and the instructor in the short window of time that they are together, and an important key to success.

I believe that continued meetings with the focus group will be crucial to understanding, *“How instructors feel about the current training for urban youth groups and underserved youth groups?”* As we move forward in implementing a new training module, the data suggests that we also need a way to adequately assess how our YAI instructors are doing when it comes to creating relevant and meaningful programs for these particular students. Our current observation forms, used in our mentoring program are only in play once or twice a season, when instructors are shadowed by other staff members to assess how they are doing each season. With input from my focus group, I added a few more questions to be added as a new section to this form, Observation Form: Instructor Self-Evaluation and Assessment of YAI Training (Appendix C).

Ideally, this new form would be completed at the conclusion of each class, while the experience is still fresh in their minds, but it could simply be issued to an instructor teaching an urban youth or underserved youth program for the first time and could be re-

issued at the end of the season. My one concern is that weeks or even months may have passed since the instructor ran that particular program and the information we obtain may not be as useful.

I believe this tool would also be vital to making future adjustments to the training and could ultimately create a sense of inclusion and increase morale for the staff, as this would give them an avenue to voice their concerns and be a part of the training process.

While investigating my action research question, “*What are the best practices for delivering educational content that is culturally relevant to urban youth groups and underserved youth,*” the instructors expressed, “I would not even know where to begin without sounding condescending,” and “how could they (YAI) provide me with culturally relevant content for every different group,” I found the concern as to how to address “every different group,” to be a very valid point. This would be extremely difficult given the range of cities and demographics that we work with, but it is probably unnecessary; by simply providing our instructors with better tools to help students connect to the natural world back home, we would be making a huge step towards providing students with content that would be more relevant to them, than just focusing on what is found in Yellowstone.

I feel that many of the above concerns could be easily addressed with the cultural awareness training and cultural sensitivity training included in the new training module. We do not need to provide specific content that would be relevant to individual geographic locations, but just relevant to kids from the city. I found this very informative, and feel that we should keep one question in the forethought of our mind as we continue

to make improvements to the YAI instructor training; how do we create culturally relevant programs with sensitivity and grace?

This is particularly important for students who do not have access to wild places on a regular basis, it is our job to make it mean something to them. This research revealed the importance of students gaining more than just an appreciation for the Park, but for the natural world in general, no matter where they are. We can set an example that they can follow when they get back home; giving them real and attainable goals. Whether it's as their group leaders said, "our students are now picking up trash, quartering off duck's nests," and "using less water." With our help, they can become environmentally minded stewards of their world.

Building trust was an overarching theme throughout all responses from all of the surveys and questionnaires. I think it is important for us to find way to create an environment of trust and safety amongst our urban students. As one of the group leaders stated, our instructors need to "Be real, youth can sense a fake and know when instructors don't really have their back; the more genuine you are, the more respect you will get."

This analysis leads me to further ask, does creating a sense of trust just come naturally to an instructor, or can it be taught? If not, then we may have to be very selective in our hiring process.

In searching for an answer to my action research sub-question, "*What are the ideal qualities of an urban youth and underserved youth instructor,*" I found the interviews to be incredibly helpful in laying down the foundation for what to look for when searching for ideal qualities for an outdoor instructor. As one of the leading experts testified,

Our kids don't have many positive adult role models in their lives and I think that is part of the reason that they bond so well with your staff. Kids who normally have major attitude and behavior problems at the club are totally transformed by this trip...in large part due to the relationships they form with the YA staff. We had a young lady in our group who had a reputation for being "tough" and has always struggled with letting her guard down. After 5 short days in the park - she refused to get off of the shuttle when we arrived at the airport because she "didn't want to leave Ms. S or Ms. D."

With a new training module framework in place (Appendix A), we will have gone far beyond "just mentioning the subject (of urban youth programming) in the first place" as one instructor said, and allowing the YAI to get to the heart of "*What are the characteristics of a successful training module?*"

Based on this data set, the training module will include advice to bring in leading experts in this field such as guest lecturers during training sessions, and based on conversations that have arisen during my capstone project, our program manager has already been looking into this for up-coming trainings. I will also suggest that each instructor read this paper, or at the very least, we should read some of the results during training. The direct quotes from survey participants included in this paper may prove to be an enlightening experience for a new instructor and provide an important platform for increased cultural awareness.

The training module includes a section for teaching cultural awareness and cultural sensitivity, as well as addressing national statistics and misconceptions concerning this demographic. It will include field training sessions for modeling activities with a new twist to help reach these young people, called Teaching Techniques & Practical Advice. It will also include a section where we will examine personal

experiences from seasoned instructors to discuss fears, concerns and common challenges that they have faced in the past.

The new training module will help to guide YAI's development of urban youth and underserved youth instructors, and help to improve their high standard of excellence in outdoor education.

VALUE

This project strengthens my resolve to help instructors like myself, to succeed in teaching to a wide range of demographics with varied ethnic backgrounds. It has expanded my knowledge of my own misconceptions concerning teaching to urban youth and underserved youth groups, and has served to increase my own cultural awareness and sensitivity.

I began this project believing that we needed to provide culturally relevant content. Now, I understand that the relationship formed with the student can have a strong influence on their success in learning, as one of my readers stated, "Content is content, but contact may be equally as important." I am encouraged that this information will help other instructors in their growth and professional development as valued educators.

It has challenged me to continue this action research into the future as we work to modify our training module, and it has brought up many areas that I would explore further. For example, my focus group discussed the possibility of creating a more defined post-evaluation system for students to assess the instructor's performance during their program, but we have yet to figure out how to get the retrieval rate we would like. We have found it is difficult enough to get the group leaders to fill out the pre-trip

information. This same scenario may prove difficult for us if we try to add in the pre-trip biographies from the students. Ultimately, it will be up to the program managers and the instructors to help encourage the group leaders to buy into this way of thinking to help improve program quality. I am also curious how we will get increased involvement from the instructors if we ask them to do a self-evaluation and assessment after each program, instead of just once or twice a season. Another option would be for instructors keep an on-going personal journal for self-evaluation. I hope that they will see the importance of this endeavor and the potential growth and success that could result from doing so.

Yellowstone National Park is an amazing place, but it cannot teach for you. Students do not automatically find a connection to it without a thoughtful and provocative guidance system from the instructor. With this new training module in place, YAI can provide that guidance to help our instructors succeed in making outdoor education a life-changing experience for our urban youth.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

INSTRUCTOR TRAINING MODULE: FRAMEWORK

1. Introductions and State the Purpose for the Training

2. What is Cultural Awareness and Cultural Competence? Define this as:

Being more than just aware of groups, cultures, ethnicity and customs, but being able to function effectively in other cultures by valuing, respecting and being sensitive to cultural differences (Cultural Sensitivity Power Point, 2007).

- a. Activity One: “Misconceptions”: On a note-card, recall a time where you made a cultural assumption about a particular ethnic group. What was the assumption and how did it effect the situation? Now recall a time when someone made an assumption about you, how did it make you feel, and how did it effect the situation? (Cultural Sensitivity Power Point, 2007).

3. Achievement Gap: Facts vs. Myths:

- a. The Achievement Gap *is the apparent disparity of educational success or performance between a “group of students, such as students grouped by race/ethnicity, gender” or socio-economic status, which is outperformed by another group*” (National Center for Education Statistics, n.d.).
 - b. What the Numbers Say: Read National Statistics: (National Education Association. February, 2011).

4. Why Consider Culture when Teaching? *Culture shapes a student’s experience with education. Culture shapes all of our identities.* (A Practical Guide, n.d.)

- a. Activity Two: “Who am I?” See web site for how to implement this at:
www.edchange.org/multicultural/activityarch.html.

5. Qualities of a Culturally Sensitive Teacher:

- a. Culturally Responsive: Gain consciousness about your own socio-cultural identity and know the issues and possible inequalities facing your students.
 - i. No Labels
 - b. Hold all students to a high standard: Respect their strengths and encourage critical thinking.
 - c. Effective Communicators
 - i. Active Listening
 - ii. Discuss how different ethnic groups communicate: ex: Call Response from African American youth (Gullan, R.L., Hoffman, B., Leff, S.S. 2011).
 - d. The Culture of Caring: If they feel valued, they will enjoy learning!
 - i. Learn their names and say them correctly
 - ii. Talk to them as individuals—Ask them about their lives
 - iii. Open up about yourself more often—Show them that you are human
 - iv. Make eye individual contact—watch your body language—be inclusive to all
6. Best Practices for Teaching Urban Youth:
- a. Bring in Leading Experts in the field
 - b. Personal Accounts from Seasoned Employees: Discuss:
 - i. Fears
 - ii. Concerns

iii. Challenges

7. Teaching Techniques & Practical Advice:

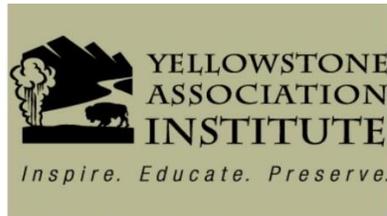
- a. Discuss the principles of brain-based learning: “1) where there is meaning, there is learning; 2) there is no learning without emotion; 3) movement facilitates learning; and 4) making multiple connections between new information and prior knowledge enhances memory” (Mathison, C., Wachowiak, S. Fieldman, L. 2007, p. 205).
- b. Promote Exploration: Show don’t Tell! These kids need/crave to have safe self-exploration. Let them go explore more and bring stuff back to you to talk about—Ask them Questions—Let them talk!
- c. Be a *Sneaky Teacher*: Make it fun, so they learn without knowing they are learning...lots of activities and games...discussions are fine, but no lectures!
- d. Teach through Story Telling: use exciting stories to teach the content you want them to learn: Ex: wildlife stories to teach about behavior, hunting or survival strategies.
- e. Promote Quiet Time: these kids are often inundated with city noise and technology:
 - i. Encourage quiet journaling or painting time, or just quiet-sit times. Tell them you will ask them to share what they “found, heard or saw” out there when they come back, if they are comfortable.
 - ii. Build this in everyday, maybe multiple times a day...ask them to spread out and go off and find a place to sit (or they will talk to one

another). I don't even mind if they just go sit on a rock and soak up the sun. They are still learning and enjoying the natural world.

8. Modeling Activities: Field Lessons with Seasoned Instructors
 - a. How to teach the same subjects with a new twist
 - b. New materials geared for urban youth
 - c. Metaphors: examples to help students relate to the subject

APPENDIX B

YAI's YOUTH PROGRAM PRE-TRIP QUESTIONNAIRE



This is a brief excerpt from the YAI Youth Program Planning document featuring some of the questions already asked of our groups. The italicized section on the following page are suggested changes to be added to this document.

1. Information in Part I will be needed at time of registration.
2. Completed planning document should be returned with signed contract and deposit.
 - I. Logistical Information: School/Group Name, Address, Phone, etc. Program Type Requested, Participants age, grade, sex ratio?
 - II. School and Participant Details:

School Information: Grades, School's Philosophy, Curriculum?

Participant Information: Hiking abilities, fitness, and special accommodations needed, challenges/strengths that the instructor may want to know?
 - III. Curriculum Planning Information: curricular goals, science content previously studied, experience with scientific method, or conducting field research, will they want to go gift-shopping during one of our field days?
 - IV. Pre-and-Post-Trip Connections: Curricular, behavioral or physical preparations to take place before the trip to YNP? Common outdoor

experiences of your students? What excited your students most about their trip to YNP. What follow-up activities are planned after you visit YNP?

V. *Personal Biographies of Students: please distribute this section to your students to answer individually. Please return it to us before you arrive in YNP.*

1. *Tell us about yourself: Who do you live with? Do you have any pets? If so, tell us about them too.*
2. *What do you like to do for fun; sports, hobbies, etc.?*
3. *What is your favorite subject in school? Why?*
4. *What techniques help you to be a better learner? For example, do you learn best when your teacher uses visual-aids, or do you learn best by listening to your teacher or reading on your own, or do you learn best when it is hands-on?*
5. *Tell us what you already know about Yellowstone.*
6. *What do you hope to see or learn about while you are in Yellowstone?*
7. *What is your greatest concern or fear about going to Yellowstone?*
8. *What are you most excited about for your trip to Yellowstone?*

APPENDIX C
OBSERVATION FORM: INSTRUCTOR SELF-EVALUATION
AND ASSESSMENT OF YAI TRAINING

The following are suggested questions to be added to our current instructor observation forms.

1. What worked well for you this week?
2. What did not work well this week? What would you do differently?
3. What activity or game or lesson plan seemed to really resonate with the students?
What would you do differently?
4. Did you have enough background information on the students before the program began?
5. What strategies worked well to help you to build rapport with the students? What would you do differently?
6. Did YAI provide you with enough time to prepare for this program, and what strategies did you use to prepare yourself?
7. How can YAI support you in teaching these programs? Is there anything different we can include on our training module?

APPENDIX D
INSTRUCTOR SELF-ASSESSMENT SURVEY:
TEACHING URBAN YOUTH

1. Working with urban youth groups and underserved youth groups is enjoyable.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Agree Strongly Agree

Please explain why you answered the way you did in the above question.

2. I am able to identify and meet the educational needs of urban youth groups and underserved youth groups.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Agree Strongly Agree

What do you feel is your strongest attribute in this area?

3. I am able to manage and understand the behaviors of urban youth groups and underserved youth groups.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Agree Strongly Agree

How much experience have you had in this area?

4. I am able to design instructional materials and lesson plans specifically geared for teaching urban youth groups and underserved youth groups.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Agree Strongly Agree

How much experience have you had in this area?

5. When teaching to urban youth groups and underserved youth groups, I am able to successfully incorporate culturally relevant content in order to help students better connect to Yellowstone.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Agree Strongly Agree

Why did you answer the way you did in the above question?

6. I have been adequately trained to work with this demographic.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Agree Strongly Agree

What source of training do you rely on the most; training from YA, previous educational endeavors or previous employment?

7. I do not need specific teaching techniques to work with this population of students.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Agree Strongly Agree

Why did you answer the way you did in the above question?

APPENDIX E
INSTRUCTOR SURVEY AND QUESTIONNAIRE:
ASSESSING YAI TRAINING
PART I
INSTRUCTOR SURVEY

1. YA's seasonal instructor training has prepared me to work successfully with urban youth groups and underserved youth groups.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Agree Strongly Agree

What are the greatest attributes of YA's training?

2. My program managers provide me with sufficient support when I have urban youth groups and underserved youth groups.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Agree Strongly Agree

Please explain why you answered the way that you did for the above question.

3. YA provides me with sufficient background information on each group to help me design my programs successfully.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Agree Strongly Agree

What information would you like to see included prior to meeting the group?

4. Adequate instructional materials are available to me for teaching urban youth groups and underserved youth groups.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Agree Strongly Agree

What materials are most helpful to you as an instructor?

5. YA's seasonal training provides me with the tools to produce culturally relevant content for urban youth groups and underserved youth groups.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Agree Strongly Agree

Explain why you answered the way you did for the above question and provide an example of how you make the content relevant to your students?

6. I am offered opportunities to attend conferences/workshops on teaching students with diverse socio-economic backgrounds.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Agree Strongly Agree

7. I am comfortable in asking other instructors for help and advice when teaching urban youth groups and underserved youth programs.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Agree Strongly Agree

What helps you to feel comfortable?

8. I can approach my managers with concerns about teaching urban youth groups and underserved youth groups.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Agree Strongly Agree

What helps you to feel comfortable?

9. I feel a separate focus group designed to address working with urban youth groups and underserved youth groups would benefit me.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Agree Strongly Agree

10. I am willing to attend additional workshops/training (with or without pay) to broaden my knowledge about educating urban youth groups and underserved youth groups?

Strongly Disagree Disagree Agree Strongly Agree

PART II

INSTRUCTOR QUESTIONNAIRE

1. What is your greatest concern/fear when teaching to this demographic?
What are some of your ideas in terms of how we could help you with this?
2. How do you measure success when teaching to urban youth groups and underserved youth groups? Please be as specific as possible.

3. Can you describe a moment when you felt you were truly successful at meeting the educational or personal needs of youth in this demographic?
4. Do our programs incorporate elements of wilderness therapy? If so, please give an example, and how involved do you think our programs should be in wilderness therapy?
5. Could co-teaching these programs help increase success for new instructors? Explain.
6. How could YA improve your ability to work successfully with urban youth groups and underserved youth groups?
7. What key elements would you like to see included in seasonal training to prepare you for working with urban youth groups and underserved youth groups?
8. Is it necessary to offer two separate training sessions to train instructors to work with these two demographics of urban youth and underserved youth? Please explain.

APPENDIX F
GROUP LEADER QUESTIONNAIRE

1. What are the top three characteristics of a good outdoor youth program? Why?
2. What are the ideal qualities of an urban youth groups and underserved youth instructor?
3. What do you feel are the greatest barriers to learning in an outdoor environment for your students? In what ways could YA address these concerns?
4. What advice would you give to the Yellowstone Association instructors to help them successfully identify and meet the learning needs of your students? What advice would you give a YA instructor who is meeting your students for the first time
5. Did the YA instructor have difficulty teaching to your students? If so, what would you attribute the difficulty (age, socio-economic background, attitude, etc.)? What suggestions can you give to overcome these barriers, if any? Please be as specific as you can.
6. What techniques do you remember the instructor(s) using to build rapport with your students? Were they successful? Why? If not, how could they improve?
7. Did our curriculum resonate with your students, helping them to make connections with wild places and their life at home? Can you share an example?
8. How could we make these programs more culturally relevant to your students?
9. What were the top three highlights of the program? Why?
10. What were the least favorable parts of the program? How could that be improved?
11. What impact, if any, has this programs had on your students? What would you would like to see us emphasize in the future?

APPENDIX G
STUDENT SURVEY AND QUESTIONNAIRE
PART I
STUDENT SURVEY

1. My experience in Yellowstone will have a profound effect on my future.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Agree Strongly Agree

Please explain why you answered the way you did in the above question.

2. The instructor was accepting of all the students.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Agree Strongly Agree

What helps you to feel accepted?

3. The instructor valued our opinions and input.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Agree Strongly Agree

What makes you feel valued?

4. My instructor helped me to feel comfortable in an outdoor environment.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Agree Strongly Agree

Were you nervous at any time, if so can you explain when?

5. This experience helped me make connections between wild places and my life at home.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Agree Strongly Agree

Is there anything you do differently at home now?

6. My trip to Yellowstone helped me to find value in wild places.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Agree Strongly Agree

Has your opinion of wild places changed since your trip to Yellowstone?

7. My instructor made the information about Yellowstone easily to understand.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Agree Strongly Agree

Can you tell me one thing you learned about Yellowstone?

8. My instructor helped to motivate me to learn and participate in the activities.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Agree Strongly Agree

Please explain why you answered the way you did in the above question.

9. I enjoyed the group activities and games taught by the instructor.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Agree Strongly Agree

What activity or game, if any, did you enjoy the most?

10. I enjoyed learning in an outdoor environment.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Agree Strongly Agree

Please explain why you answered the way you did in the above question.

11. I learn better in a classroom setting.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Agree Strongly Agree

Please explain why you answered the way you did in the above question.

PART II

STUDENT QUESTIONNAIRE

1. Did your Yellowstone instructor do a good job of connecting Yellowstone's ecology, geology and history to the world you live in? If so, how? If not, why? Can you think of an example of something you especially connected too?
2. Did you have enough background information from your previous schooling to understand the content provided by your Yellowstone Instructor? If not, did your instructor described the content so that you could easily understand it? Explain.
3. What techniques, methods or style of teaching did the Yellowstone Instructor use that helped you to be a successful learner?
4. Was there a time during your trip when the Yellowstone Instructor inspired you to learn and actively participate? If so, when was it and what motivated you?

5. Did you find the information you learned in Yellowstone important knowledge to have? Explain and give an example if you can.
6. What were the highlights of the program for you? Why?
7. What were your least favorite points of the program? Why?
8. How could Yellowstone Instructors improve their programs to make them more relevant to you?
9. If the instructor could change one thing to increase your participation and motivation, what would it be?
10. Is there anything else that you would like to see included in a Yellowstone class in the future?
11. Is there anything else you would like to tell us about your Yellowstone experience?

APPENDIX H

INTERVIEW: FOR BEST PRACTICES

1. What are the ideal qualities of an urban youth groups and underserved youth instructor?
2. What do you feel are the greatest barriers to learning in an outdoor environment for urban youth and underserved youth? In what ways could YA address these concerns?
3. What advice would you give to the Yellowstone Association instructors to help them successfully identify and meet the learning needs of urban youth and underserved youth? What advice would you give a YA instructor who is working with these students for the first time?
4. How can we best prepare our instructors to understand the socio-economic barriers to learning in an outdoor environment, as well as the over-all learning challenges often facing underserved youth?
5. Does the ethnic and socio-economic background of the instructors affect their ability to teach students from backgrounds different than their own?
If so, how could YA best address this in training?
6. Given that our program are only 3-5 days in length, what techniques could help our instructors to build rapport with urban youth and underserved students in a timely manner?
7. What advice would you give to instructors to help them create curriculum that will resonate with urban youth and underserved youth? How can we help them to make connections with wild places and their life at home?
8. How could we make these programs more culturally relevant to your students?

9. Given that we have a high rate of turnover for instructors, how could we increase their professional development or success when working with urban youth and underserved youth populations?
10. What key points would you like to see addressed in YA's urban youth and underserved youth training module?

APPENDIX I
IRB EXCEPTION FORM



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MEMORANDUM

TO: Shauna Baron and Walter Woolbaugh
FROM: Mark Quinn, Chair *Mark Quinn*
DATE: November 30, 2015
RE: "Connecting Wilderness to Life in the City: Can improved training impact instructor success in teaching urban and underserved youth populations in an outdoor setting?" [SB113015-EX]

The above research, described in your submission of November 24, 2015, is exempt from the requirement of review by the Institutional Review Board in accordance with the Code of Federal regulations, Part 46, section 101. The specific paragraph which applies to your research is:

- X (b) (1) Research conducted in established or commonly accepted educational settings, involving normal educational practices such as (i) research on regular and special education instructional strategies, or (ii) research on the effectiveness of or the comparison among instructional techniques, curricula, or classroom management methods.
- X (b) (2) Research involving the use of educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures or observation of public behavior, unless: (i) information obtained is recorded in such a manner that human subjects can be identified, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects; and (ii) any disclosure of the human subjects' responses outside the research could reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability, or be damaging to the subjects' financial standing, employability, or reputation.
- (b) (3) Research involving the use of educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior that is not exempt under paragraph (b)(2) of this section, if: (i) the human subjects are elected or appointed public officials or candidates for public office; or (ii) federal statute(s) without exception that the confidentiality of the personally identifiable