Connecting a Disconnected Youth to the Outdoor World

Daphne Sewing
University of Nevada, Las Vegas
Public Lands Institute

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Connecting a Disconnected Youth to the Outdoor World

North American Association for Environmental Education
2006 Conference
October 10-14, 2006

Daphne Sewing
UNLV Public Lands Institute
Presentation Outline

• Nature-deficit disorder: What it means and why we should be concerned.

• The Discover Mojave Outdoor World Program: A prescription for nature-deficit disorder.

• Program effectiveness.

• What we can do as environmental educators.

• Questions/discussion.
Session Objectives

• Understand the components of an effective program that connects youth to the natural world.

• Develop ideas for integrating these components into your existing programs.
Nature-Deficit Disorder

- Phrase coined by Richard Louv, author of *Last Child in the Woods: Saving Our Children from Nature-Deficit Disorder.*
- The cumulative effect of withdrawing from nature:
  - increased feelings of stress;
  - trouble paying attention;
  - feelings of not being rooted in the world;
  - lack of physical activity.
Wired In and Tuned Out!
Las Vegas area leads in growth

Census report cites boom in South, West

The Nation

With a dozen of new census
figures out and census-taking
under way, it seems likely
that the Nevada desert
will continue to grow.

In the past few years, the
Las Vegas area has seen
a population growth of
about 15 percent.

The growth has been
most noticeable in
the southern part of the
state, where the
population has
increased by
about 20 percent.

A major factor in the
growth has been
the influx of
people from
other states.

The Las Vegas
area is attracting
people from
across the
country.

The city has
a population
of about
130,000.

The growth has
put a strain
on the
city's
economic
infrastructure.

The city has
been
spending
heavily
on
public
works.

The state
has been
spending
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growth.

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Rapid Growth Impacts Public Lands
Discover Mojave Outdoor World

Program Goals:

- Introduce economically disadvantaged urban youth, ages 8-12, to outdoor recreation and education.
- Foster a belief that outdoor recreation plays an important and positive role in the health and fitness of America’s youth.
Watch This!
Discover Mojave Outdoor World program delivered by UNLV’s Public Lands Institute.

On behalf of the Southern Nevada Agency Partnership:
- Bureau of Land Management
- National Park Service
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
- U.S. Forest Service

Funding is provided through the Southern Nevada Public Land Management Act.
Participating Groups

- RecMobile and Rural Recreation programs, Clark County Parks and Community Services.
- 5th grade after-school club, Paradise Professional Development School.
- Spring Mountain Youth Camp
Program Effectiveness

Assessment plan and tools developed by:

Dr. Gregory Schraw
Dr. Lori Olafson

Center for Evaluation and Assessment
University of Nevada, Las Vegas
1. **Knowledge**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PRE-ACTIVITY</th>
<th>POST-ACTIVITY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What do you know about using binoculars?</td>
<td>What did you learn about using binoculars?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What do you know about watching birds?</td>
<td>What did you learn about watching birds?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
2. Skill Performance

- Rubric completed by instructors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Demonstrates Skill</th>
<th>Does Not Demonstrate Skill</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participant uses binoculars to find and focus on a bird</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant uses binoculars to describe something specific about a bird</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3. Attitude

- 5 specific attitude-related items:
  - Bird watching is fun. (Pre-activity)
  - Bird watching was fun. (Post-activity)
  - I would tell my friends to do this bird watching program. (Pre- and post-activity)
Tools, cont.

Added in the second year:

- Teacher rating scale
  Example: This student is confident that s/he can succeed in learning science.

- Parent rating scale
  Example: My child is confident that s/he can succeed in learning science.

- Interviews with participants and parents
Results

1. Knowledge – Dramatic Increase!
   204 participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pre-activity</th>
<th>Post-activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>46%</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partial</td>
<td>Partial</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>49%</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More Complete</td>
<td>More Complete</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5%</td>
<td>73%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Canoeing and Kayaking – largest increase.
## Results, cont.

### 2. Skill Performance – Successful!

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Some</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Most</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All</td>
<td>95%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fishing</td>
<td>97%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canoeing</td>
<td>96%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bird watching</td>
<td>91%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kayaking</td>
<td>90%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3. Specific Attitudes

- Increased substantially from pre- to post-activity.
- Very favorable for all events.
- Some events rated as more favorable than others. Example: Kayaking received the most positive rating by participants.
- Participant interviews: 90% mentioned that science was more interesting to them as a result of participation in the science club.
4. Teacher and Parent Feedback

- Teacher rating scale: significant improvement regarding science knowledge and performance in the classroom.

- Parent rating scale: agreed strongly that their children were more confident in succeeding in science and better able to perform science activities.
And There’s More!

Research shows that:

❖ Children with symptoms of ADD are better able to concentrate (Taylor, et al. 2001).

❖ Play is more diverse with imaginative and creative play (Moore and Wong 1997; Taylor, et al. 1998; Fjortoft and Sageie 2000).

❖ Cognitive development is improved (Pyle 2002).
And More!

- Important to children’s development of independence and autonomy (Bartlett 1996).

- Stimulate social interaction between children (Moore 1986; Bixler, Floyd, and Hammutt 2002).

- Positively linked with development of imagination and the sense of wonder (Cobb 1977; Louv 1991).

- Wonder is an important motivator for life-long learning (Wilson 1997).
Let’s Write a Prescription!

What are the key elements to connecting kids to the outdoors?
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key Elements</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Opportunity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive Experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good Role Models</td>
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<tr>
<td>Unstructured Play</td>
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<tr>
<td>Physical Activity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quiet Time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diversity of Settings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban Planning to Include Green Space</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Let’s Deliver the Prescription!

What can we do, as environmental educators, to deliver the prescription?
It’s important for us to erase “nature-deficit disorder” for the health of our children and our society.

Research provides us with a glimpse of what children gain by connecting with the outdoors.

We know some of the key elements for addressing nature deficit disorder.

It’s important for us to facilitate these important connections.
THANK YOU!