

Examining the Impacts of and Barriers to School Sponsored Outdoor Educational Experiences

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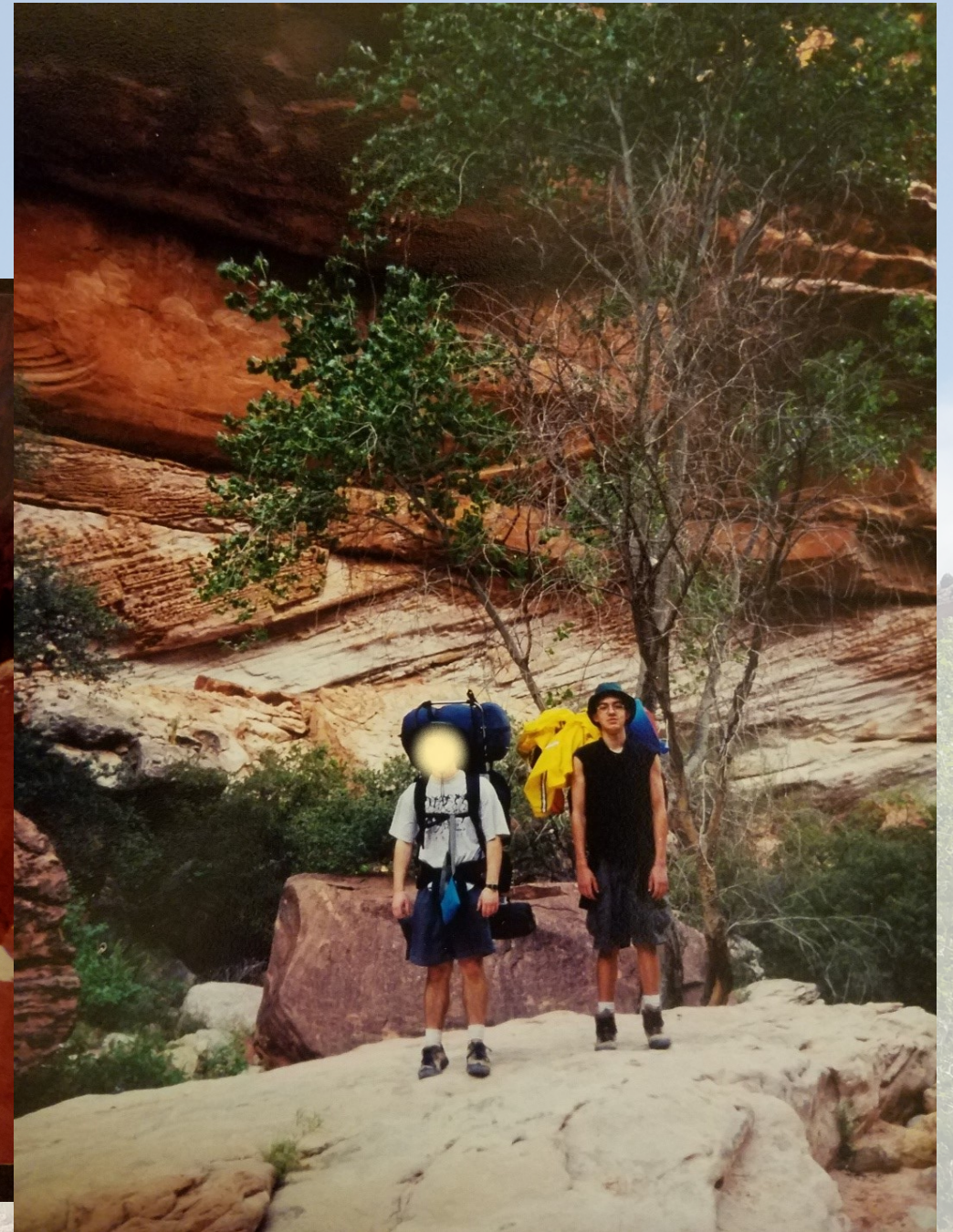
Teacher Education and Leadership

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My Journey



My Journey

- I attended Intermountain West Junior High 6th -8th grade.
- I went on the Havasupai trip. My first official backpacking trip.
- There were about 45 students who went on the trip.



My Journey

- Months of planning and preparing. I was so excited and nervous to go.
- It was a struggle for my family to come up with the fee and the money for food and supplies. I still have the boots my dad bought me.
- I had to grow up in a lot of ways on this trip. My mom noticed this in myself and in my brothers who all went their 8th-grade year.



My Journey



- It rained the whole trip on and off, but I still loved every minute of it.
- I'll never forget the trip, the scenery, the social interaction.
- I went back to Havasupai for my senior trip. I will take my family there when my youngest is ready.

My Journey

- I have a strong connection to and love for Havasupai because of these trips. I am reminded of that every time I see pictures of the falls.
- This OEE changed my life in a very real way.
- I have talked to many people who have gone on the trip that feel the same way.



My Journey

- I became a teacher with the goal of teaching at IWJH and helping to take students on this trip.
- My dream came true in 2007.
- I taught at IWJH for 7 years total, split by a few years.



My Journey



- I helped to get many students ready for and to go on the Havasupai trip, and the Southern Utah Parks Trip (SUPT) when we had to switch locations.
- Each year I saw fewer and fewer students go on the trip.
- I also saw that not every group of students at the school were represented by who was participating in this OEE.
- This problem lead to my current research interests.

Introduction

- IWJH has taken 8th-grade students on a week long OEE for over 50 years now, first Havasupai, now SUPT.
- Students spend months preparing, raising funds, and learning prior to the trip.
- The year of this study, we went to 2 national parks and 3 state parks.
- We had morning debriefings, a main hike, and several learning experiences/ assignments each day.

Problem Statement



The Problem:

1. We don't know the exact impacts of the SUPT on participants attitudes and perceptions of the outdoors and learning in the outdoors.
2. Participation in the SUPT is way down, and the participating population is not representative of the 8th-grade class as a whole.

Research Questions

1. How did participation in the SUPT outdoor educational experience effect the eight-grade students at IWJH perceptions and attitudes about the outdoors and participation in outdoor educational experiences?
2. What are the barriers that keep eighth-grade students at IWJH from participating in the SUPT outdoor educational experience?

Some of the Research Related to Study

- Charles & Wheeler (2012) Review of the research on benefits of children in the outdoors.
- Kellert (1998) OEEs can be “one of the best” experiences of a persons life.
- Warren et al. (2014) A state of knowledge review for social justice in outdoor education
- Ghimire et al. (2014) An analysis of perceived constraints to outdoor recreation.
- Many, many, MANY more.

Methodology

- Constructivist Grounded Theory design (Charmaz, 2014)
- Positionality:
 - I am a middle-class, able bodied, college educated, White, middle-aged, straight, Christian, cis-male.



Methodology

- Part 1:
 - Pre-trip demographic survey
 - Pre-trip anonymous survey
 - Field notes
 - Post trip anonymous survey
 - Journey mapping
 - Semi-structured interviews
- Two Phase coding and analysis (Charmaz, 2014)
- Part 2:
 - Journaling
 - Autobiographical account
- Two Phase coding and analysis (Charmaz, 2014)

Participants for Part 1

- This year 10 students went, 8 participated in the research.
- Over 250 students did not go on the SUPT
- All participants who responded were White and middle-class. This doesn't match the schools demographics.



Findings – Students' Experience

- *I think that it's a really cool place and that more people, like for this trip, should be able to go down and see it all. – Rachel (A participant who went on the trip)*



Findings – Students' Experience

- Emergent Themes:
 - *A feeling of excitement (in general or toward an activity)*
 - *Learning and being in a social setting*
 - *Connecting with the scenery or views of the scenery*
 - *Connecting with water*
 - *Connecting with plants*



Findings – Students' Experience



- Emergent Themes (cont.):
 - *Connecting with geology and geological formations*
 - *Connecting with cultures of the past*
 - *Connecting with animals*
 - *A feeling of wanting to protect an area or resource*
 - *Hands-on learning*

Findings – Students' Experience



- Emergent Themes (cont.):
 - *Learning about the outdoors and nature*
 - *Being physically active in the outdoors*
 - *Learning outdoor skills*

Findings – Students' Experience

- Emergent Themes (cont.):
 - *Being comfortable in the outdoors*
 - *A feeling of burn-out or impatience*
 - *A feeling of nervousness or anticipation*
 - *Meeting with challenging situations*
 - *Lack of access to supplies or experience*



From My Experience as a Teacher:

Why students don't participate

- Too expensive (Possible school sponsorship, but not well advertised). Not seen as worth the investment of already limited resources (sometimes seen as boring).
- The trip was not well advertised, so a lot of students didn't hear about it until it was too late to go.
- Not wanting to participate due to who was going on the trip.

From My Experience as a Teacher:

Why students don't participate (cont.)

- No experience going on a trip like this.
- No interest in going on a trip like this; don't like camping or hiking or even the idea of doing those things.
- Not very accessible for those with a physical disability.

Theories:



1.

The Southern Utah Parks Trip, and other outdoor educational experiences have a positive impact on each participant's attitude toward and perception of the outdoors and learning in the outdoors, helping to cause a connection to and a deeper understanding of nature.

Theories:



2.

There are several things keeping most of the students at Intermountain West Junior High School from participating the Southern Utah Parks Trip, and likely keeping other students at other schools from participating in outdoor educational experiences.

Discussion

- All participants viewed the SUPT as a positive experience.
- All participants had more positive attitudes and perceptions of the outdoors and learning in the outdoors post-trip.
- All participants had an increased desire to protect nature and the environment.



Discussion

- The main barrier to participation in the SUPT was a lack of access to necessary resources or experience.
- Next was a lack of knowledge about the trip and what the trip entailed.
- There was also the reputation the trip has gained for being boring and not worth the money.
- Another was issues with perceived comfort in the outdoors.



Suggestions for the SUPT and other OEEs

1. Reduce the costs
2. Get the word out better
3. Restore the reputation of the SUPT
4. Make the trip worth it
5. Get students outside more to give them experience
6. Trip leaders and teachers need to work together
7. District leadership need to allow these trips
8. Continue to seek out the student's reasons for going, and for not going

Implications

- Adds to the collective knowledge and existing literature on the impacts of OEEs and the barriers that potential participants may face.
- This study gives us a better understanding of the positive impacts of these types of OEEs from the students point of view.
- This study also gives us an idea of what kept students from participating in the OEE, and other OEEs in general, from their point of view.
- We can then use this information to design better, more inclusive OEEs, where participants learn and remember more, and feel as though they are part of the group.

Need for Further Research



- We need a better understanding of what is keeping underserved populations from participating in outdoor rec. and OEEs, from their own perspective and in their own words.
- We need a better understanding of what we need to do make OEEs like this more available, and what do we need to do to get everyone out and participating in trips like this one?

References:

- Charles, C., & Wheeler, K. (2012). Children & nature worldwide: An exploration of children's experiences of the outdoors and nature with associated risks and benefits. *Minneapolis: Children & Nature Network*.
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- Warren, K., Roberts, N. S., Breunig, M., & Alvarez, M. A. T. G. (2014). Social justice in outdoor experiential education: A state of knowledge review. *Journal of Experiential Education*, 37(1), 89-103.
- Many, many, MANY more, available on request if you would like.