

# Year Round Outdoor Environmental Education Camp Programs and Youth Development



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## INTRODUCTION

Social trends have altered the motivation for a child to enjoy the outdoors. Limiting the opportunity to participate in outdoor programs is budget cuts in school systems. The first cut to be made in schools are often out-of-school trips. Out-of-school trips are an opportunity for students to learn about the outdoors through trips to the zoo, state parks, and participating in outdoor education programs.

This study tested for impacts on youth development of an outdoor environmental education program. The specific research questions included: Does participation in an outdoor environmental education program have an impact on the positive identity of youth? Does participation in an outdoor environmental education program have an impact on the social skills of youth? Does participation in an outdoor environmental education program have an impact on the critical thinking skills of youth?



## ABSTRACT

Social trends have altered the motivation for a child to enjoy the outdoors. Specifically, school systems have been facing budget restrictions that limit monies spent on out-of-school trips. The purpose of this study was to explore the impact of such an out-of-school trip on youth development elementary school students attending an outdoor environmental education program at a youth camp in Michigan. The program's curriculum was designed to build self-confidence, teaching outdoor skills that include flora and fauna identification, outdoor safety, environmental protection, and basic camping skills. Data were collected from approximately 150 students enrolled in the program. This program offered an environment where participants could build self-confidence, try activities that are different than those participated in at home, and learn to work well with others. The findings documented a significant positive impact on positive identity, willingness to try new activities, and working out problems with peers.

## METHODS

To examine program impacts, students enrolled in the program completed a self-report data collection instrument during a pre and post test. The instrument used was the American Camping Association Camper Growth Index (CGI) (2001), which assesses participant's positive identity, social skills, positive values, and critical thinking skills. A pretest-posttest design was used for this study.

O1	X	O2
pretest	program participation	posttest

Data were collected from approximately 150 students enrolled in the program. Only those students who gave their assent and whose parents consented participated in the study.

## RESULTS

Results concluded that the program had a significant positive impact on:

### Positive Identity

- Self confidence ( $p \leq .001$ )
- Self-worth ( $p = .001$ )
- Security ( $p = .024$ )

### Social Skills

- Working well with others ( $p = .041$ )

### Physical and Critical Thinking Skills

- Willingness to try new activities ( $p > .001$ )



## HOW THIS RESEARCH CAN HELP ME

This program offered an environment where participants could build self-confidence, try activities that are different than those participated in at home, and learn to work well with others.

-Variety in activity options could allow participants to try many new activities

-Being away from home and in an unfamiliar environment could help build self-confidence

-Group activities and team challenges could help teach participants to work well with others