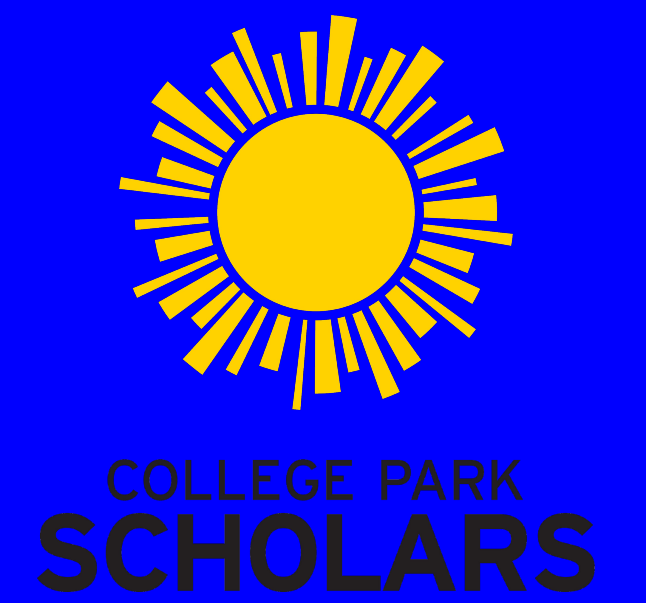




Facilitating the Transmission of Nature Science to A Younger Generation



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Introduction

I spent my practicum project as a senior camp counselor at the Lakewood Trumbull YMCA's Camp Tepee, a summer day camp for children of ranging ages. The camp director, my boss, used to be a naturalist in California and pushed us to teach our kids all about nature and conserving the environment.



This set of images was included on our camp brochure and shows the many activities and learning opportunities that kids have at this camp.

Activities:

For this project, I was able to spend 10 weeks teaching and educating 7 year old children about nature, specifically the ecosystems found on our site. We were lucky enough to have access to a pond, wooded area, fields, rocks, and so many other small ecosystems that could help facilitate learning for these children. I led hikes, boating trips, fishing periods, fort builds, and many other nature activities. Through these hands-on activities, I taught my group of kids about many things, such as photosynthesis, metamorphosis, how fish breathe, how ferns spread, how to tell how old a tree is, and answered all their other spur-of-the-moment questions.

Impact:

This project had a wide impact throughout my community and also on me. Because of my coworkers and I, over 200 hundred children had a safe place to spend their summers and be able to learn and grow in a completely outdoor setting. We are educating the next generation, not only in sciences, but also in life skills like teamwork and sociability. For me, this project helped me grow into the leader that I am now. I was responsible for the lives of 20 children each week and I had to be a role model for them. They helped me to learn more about myself, but also more about nature as well. They would ask so many questions and honestly I didn't know the answer to most of them, meaning I would spend my off-time googling and writing down answers for their questions.

Site Information:

Lakewood Trumbull YMCA

20 Trefoil Dr, Trumbull, CT

Kathleen Riley

The site mission- To foster YMCA values while caring for and educating children in an outdoor environment.



This image is from our camp-wide nature hike, where all 200+ campers observed our 10+ acres of wooded area and all the plants and animals that it contained.

Issues Confronting Site:

One issue that was very prevalent on our site was the lack of behavior management outlets for children, resulting in a distracted and not ideal learning environment. As counselors, we were not trained on how to properly approach children who had disabled learning tendencies and that resulted in some children not being able to learn from our lessons because we couldn't adequately appeal to them.

Future Work:

This project allowed me to find a love for teaching children and being able to be a role model for them. I think it is definitely hard for me to combine this skill with my major of aerospace engineering, but I do hope that somehow in my future I can incorporate the two together in some way.

Lesson Examples:

One lesson that I was able to teach my group started when we were on our daily nature hike, as most questions usually did. One of the kids was very intrigued by the ferns all over the woods and asked me how they spread. Weeks before, our camp director had told us how this happens, so I was prepared. I had them stop and look closely at the fern leaves, asking them what they saw or felt. Eventually, they mentioned the little tiny circles they saw on the underside of the leaves, which I told them were spores. I then explained how these spores were spread through the air when it was windy and how once they were spread, they would go onto the ground and grow more ferns. After this lesson, my group of children would point out every group of ferns they saw and try and teach other counselors what I had told them. It showed how that hands-on learning experience truly stuck with them and taught them something about the world around them.

Acknowledgments:

I am very lucky to have been able to experience this project and all that came with it, especially meeting the people that I did. I would like to thank my supervisor Kathleen Riley for teaching me more about the world around me than anyone else and for allowing me to complete this project. I also would like to thank Drs. Holtz & Merck for giving me the opportunity to do this project.

