2020

Opportunity and Access to Informal STEM Learning Environments

Abigail Fowler
University of Kentucky, agfo224@uky.edu

Caitlyn Yost
University of Kentucky, Caitlyn.Yost@uky.edu

Margaret J. Mohr-Schroeder
University of Kentucky, m.mohr@uky.edu

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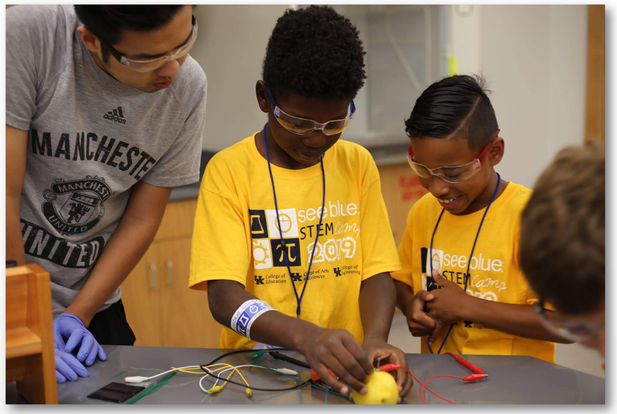
Purpose and Goals

The UK STEM Experiences is a collaboration amongst the UK Colleges of Education, Engineering, and Arts & Sciences. Our goal is to expose students to a variety positive learning experiences and career options in the STEM fields. Additionally, the summer experiences…

- Target rising elementary and middle grades students (grades 5-8) especially females, students of color, and students disinterested in STEM
- Provides authentic, hands-on, engaging STEM learning environments on the University of Kentucky campus
- Provides opportunities for preservice teachers and graduate students from STEM disciplines to assist with camp and gain valuable content knowledge and experience in an informal, low-stakes environment
- Partner with area school Youth Service Coordinators to recruit and retain underrepresented populations
- Area preservice and inservice teachers assist with the camp gaining valuable STEM laboratory experience and ideas that they can incorporate into their own classrooms

The week-long day camps are designed to help students explore and integrate the STEM disciplines through authentic hands-on projects and real-world applications.



Students in the elementary camp discover they can use a lemon to create a simple battery to power a LED light bulb.

In the Students' Words…

"I want to become a doctor when I grow up, and to do so I need to know a lot about anatomy. Dissecting animals really helps me learn more…"

"It is hard for me to learn as fast as other people because I am more of a hands-on person. So, when there is a hands-on activity, I am really happy because I get (to) learn. I get to see. I get to feel. I get to touch, and I like how STEM camp incorporates that in a fun and awesome way…"

"I would say STEM camp, it kind of just, it kinda gives you a little bit of everything."

"Like I see those robots at the hospital carrying, uhm, things that humans would be carrying...that would make the world a better place."

"If I have a chance, I could probably make some kind of combination of a car that can use hydropower, but at the same time use solar energy to use a new source of fuel, instead of gasoline."

Creating Opportunity and Access for Each and Every Student

- Goal is 50/50 sex ratio and at least 25% students of color
- Over the past 5 years, total of 55% or more underrepresented students have participated
- Partner with area Youth Service Center Coordinators, area school districts, and community centers to help recruit and retain underrepresented populations
- Vary topics and presenters from year-to-year to help peak interest and exposure
- Recruit presenters of color and females in STEM fields to work with and mentor students
- Involve our area inservice and preservice teachers, and graduate and undergraduate students

Middle school students test the voltage of their solar panel they created using pomegranates.

Elementary students conduct a reflex investigation on crayfish.

Impact

- The benefits of participating in the STEM summer learning experience also extended to student's perceptions of classroom STEM learning.
- Students acknowledged the access they received to hands-on activities in authentic STEM settings and the opportunities they received to interact with STEM professionals were important components of the summer informal learning experience.
- When provided the opportunity to access STEM, students were engrossed in the learning and eager to experience the activities.
- The pedagogical approach of the STEM summer learning experience balanced guided learning and student exploration through activities that the students attest are an essential element to their rich learning experience.
- Schools are often limited in the access they can provide to in-depth content and authentic settings. Unfortunately, this disproportionately affects Black and Latinx students, which is something STEM camp specifically attempts to counteract.
- When students see how solving authentic problems through STEM can make their lives and the world a better place, they are more interested in pursuing STEM careers.
- The activities during the summer learning experience either expanded or broadened students' interests in STEM careers.
- Many students were influenced by their desire to help others and make the world a better place, and some even recognized how their STEM learning experiences could be applied to improve the world.
- The students interacted with STEM professionals in authentic ways, which also heightened and piqued their interest in STEM and STEM-related careers, and some even described specific desires to pursue STEM careers.

This research was funded, in part, by NSF 1348281 & 1560013 and AstraZeneca. Any opinions, findings, and conclusions or recommendations expressed in this material are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the National Science Foundation or AstraZeneca.

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