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EXPLORING THE GAP

EXPLORING THE OPPORTUNITY AND ACHIEVEMENT GAP: THE CAPACITY OF
INCLUSIVE OUTDOOR ADVENTURE PROGRAMMING IN ALLEVIATING YOUTH
EDUCATIONAL INEQUITY

by

Sarah E. McDonald

An Alternate Plan Paper Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of

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EXPLORING THE GAP

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EXPLORING THE OPPORTUNITY AND ACHIEVEMENT GAP: THE CAPACITY OF INCLUSIVE OUTDOOR ADVENTURE PROGRAMMING IN ALLEVIATING YOUTH EDUCATIONAL INEQUITY

Sarah E. McDonald

This Alternate Plan Paper has been examined and approved by the following members of the student's committee.

Dr. Afroza Anwary
Advisor and Committee Chair

Dr. Saiful Islam
Committee Member

Kellian Clink
Committee Member

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

JUST AS THE CALENDAR BEGAN TO SAY SUMMER

I went out of the schoolhouse fast
and through the gardens and to the woods,
and spent all summer forgetting what I'd been taught –

two times two, and diligence, and so forth,
how to be modest and useful, and how to succeed and so forth,
machines and oil and plastic and money and so forth.

By fall I had healed somewhat, but was summoned back
to the chalky rooms and the desk, to sit and remember

the way the river kept rolling its pebbles,
the way the wild wrens sang though they hadn't a penny in the bank,
the way the flowers were dressed in nothing but light.

-- *Mary Oliver*

The journey to this paper's completion was long, meandering, and not without the support of many amazing humans in my life. First and foremost, I would like to thank my family for their support and patience. To my parents, specifically, thank you for never ceasing to believe in my capabilities and for instilling in me an admiration for nature and adventure at an early age. Our camping excursions and trips to Ely are some of my most memorable childhood experiences and are the embers of my being. Mands, thank you for always being my calm and collected confidant. Your pragmatism, wit, intelligence, and sense of adventure are unmatched, and I am fortunate to have such a force in my orbit. To my regal feline, Marla, thank you for having been a constant in my life for 13 years and for keeping me company through the writing process. Even though you weren't able to see this through to the end with me, your companionship was rejuvenating and carried me through.

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EXPLORING THE GAP

the language to hopefully make a difference in it. Dr. Vicki Hunter, your Social Problems course felt like the mothership was calling me home, and I knew immediately my academic trajectory had become clearer. Dr. Sarah Epplen, your Sociology of Work course helped me to understand the value of my time as a worker and exercise boundaries. I hope this class will someday become part of the core curriculum – if there's one thing that binds us all together it is that we're all workers. And that is powerful. Dr. Dennis Waskul, thank you for your patience, keeping me curious about the social world, and for always being a champion for students – your leadership is invaluable.

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EXPLORING THE GAP

ABSTRACT

The United States education system is purported to be an equalizer for students in terms of providing education, socialization, skills, and opportunities. It is, however, rife with inequality as youth socioeconomic status is largely a predictor for future economic success. Socioeconomic status further constrains their participation in enriching supplemental activities that foster meaningful development. Through a content analysis of published research, this paper specifically examines the value of outdoor adventure programming as a supplemental educational device to that of the classroom experience, particularly for low-income youth. Findings suggest that outdoor adventure programs are associated with positive social outcomes and successful programs develop and implement policies and practices attuned to diversity, inclusion, cultural competence, and equity.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER ONE: Introduction.....1

CHAPTER TWO: Theoretical Framework.....5

 Functionalism.....5

 Conflict Theory.....8

CHAPTER THREE: Literature Review.....13

 Brief History of Education.....13

 Consequences of Education.....16

CHAPTER FOUR: Methods.....25

CHAPTER FIVE: Presentation of Findings.....26

CHAPTER SIX: Discussion.....38

REFERENCES.....43

APPENDIX.....52

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Social institutions are the cultural monoliths of society, providing structure to citizens' everyday lives. They also impose implicit expectations for behavior that align with broader cultural values, norms, and beliefs. While institutions are the ubiquitous products of collective human behavior, at their very base, they are purported to exist to fulfill the needs of society and ensure some level of functioning. For example, institutions can only exist if there are people to uphold them, so such institutions as medicine and the family, in theory, ensure the propagation and well-being of the individuals necessary for their survival and to support the needs and activities of society. In practice, institutions are complex and intersect in unique ways with race, class, and gender. For example, the institution of education is argued to promote social inequality through tracking, standardized testing, and the hidden curriculum (Jackson 1968, Oakes 1985[2005]).

The compulsory education system in the United States, specifically, is arguably one of the most prominent social institutions, structuring the daily lives of 53.1 million kindergarten-12th grade students annually (U.S. Census Bureau 2019). The U.S. is among the first countries that set a goal of mass education. By 1818, all states have passed mandatory education laws requiring children to attend school until the age of sixteen. In 2016, 89.1% of all adults 25 years old had completed high school (U.S. Census Bureau 2017). The daily lives of students are structured by daily attendance, completing homework, completing examinations, or participating in extracurricular activities. Given the compulsory nature of primary, intermediate, and secondary education, there are few people who have not encountered or been impacted, positively or negatively, by some variation of formal schooling.

The United States boasts 130,930 public and private schools (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES] 2018a) and over 10,000 charter and magnet schools (NCES N.d.; U.S. Network for Education Information [USNEI] 2008a). Public schools are publicly funded and widely attended by youth; private schools are privately funded by donors and through charging student tuition (Broughman, Kincel, and Peterson 2019). Charter and magnet schools expand school choice and provide alternatives to traditional public schools. Charter schools are publicly funded but operate independently and have more flexibility in terms of operations and curriculum. They may be started by any individual, community group, or nonprofit organization so long as the charter committee includes 1 or more teachers (The Center for Education Reform N.d.; National Charter School Resource Center [NCSRC] N.d.). Collectively, charter schools in the U.S. predominantly serve low-income and minority students in urban areas and tend to have higher graduation rates than those of public schools (NCSRC N.d.; Thomas B. Fordham Institute 2016). Magnet schools are specialty schools with curricula developed around particular themes or interests (e.g. STEM, fine arts, leadership, immersive languages) and are run by local school districts (Magnet Schools of America [MSA] N.d.). Because they are run by local school districts, they are subject to the same state requirements (MSA N.d.).

Additionally, the education system serves a diverse body of students in terms of race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status (Bauman and Cranney 2020) across a variety of communities. As of 2018, nearly 70% of students attend schools in either cities or suburbs (NCES 2018b). The U.S. education system is overall decentralized and lacks a formalized national curriculum, however states are mandated by federal law to develop state-wide standards to guide instruction (USNEI 2008b). Theoretically, this provides opportunities to meet the unique educational needs of regions and communities. Though districts, states, and national

education associations have such latitude to vary curricular standards, they are still subject to meeting guidelines to receive federal funding (USNEI 2008b). They are also subject to evaluating student performance standards, as evidenced by the work of the National Education Standards and Improvement Council.

Research suggests there are more variations in teaching across classrooms than across schools themselves (Rothman 2009). Variations across classrooms and not across schools suggest an implicitly dominant national curriculum, which can be problematic for a diverse student body bringing with them varying cultural capital to the classroom (Cole 2008). Though the student body is becoming more diverse, the majority of teachers have remained predominantly white, female, and middle-class, and pedagogical strategies have been lacking in cultural competence, which disproportionately disadvantages low-income and minority students (Byrd 2020).

Furthermore, public school curricula provide textbooks featuring a core set of content—and debatably values and beliefs—written by educators and professionals in their respective fields, further suggesting an implicit national curriculum. For example, the state of Minnesota requires students to demonstrate competencies in six core content areas, including English language arts, math, science, social studies, physical education, and the fine arts (MN Department of Education 2020), all subjects of which are reflective of historical and modern curricula (Urban and Wagoner 2014).

Noticeably absent from these academic standards are deviations from the classroom-centric pedagogical techniques or any mention of experiential education. Does a state-sanctioned, one-size-fits-all approach to education and an informal national curriculum meet the needs of a diverse population of students in terms of their socioeconomic status and personal

development? What role, if any, does the modern education system play in reducing or reproducing inequality?

This paper will address competing narratives about the function and problems of the United States mass education system through the lenses of functionalism and conflict theory. This paper will also explore how education has evolved with and emerged from temporally and culturally situated social conditions characterized by varying degrees of social organization, class relations, and its intersection with other social institutions in an effort to understand the extent of the U.S. mass education system's socializing and oppressive effects.

Furthermore, this paper will examine how learning and experiential deficits are present not only in the classroom but are adjacent to and extend beyond it. Can outdoor adventure programming further meet the needs of a diverse student body? What are the implications of educational inequality in terms of youth socialization, achievement, and opportunity? Through a content analysis of published research, this paper will specifically examine the value of outdoor adventure programming as a supplemental educational device to that of the classroom experience.

In the concluding chapters, this paper will discuss insights and offers solutions to educational inequities by highlighting outdoor adventure programming's capacity to provide meaningful and challenging wilderness experiences for low-income youth. Recommendations for program development and implementation will also be discussed.

CHAPTER TWO: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The institution of education, culturally monolithic and respected as it is, has not been immune to the scrutiny of academic praxis. Educational systems have evolved with and emerged from temporally and culturally situated social conditions characterized by varying degrees of social organization, class relations, and its intersection with other social institutions. Such dynamics have provided ample opportunity for sociological, economic, and political scholarship to examine the institution of education through a variety of lenses. This chapter seeks to unveil the function and problems of education across multiple levels of analysis.

Functionalism

Early functionalist theories are oriented towards social order and emphasize a stratification system predicated upon a necessary and universal system of positions (Davis and Moore 1945). When applied across multiple units of analysis, functionalist theories often emphasize such concepts as social order, stability, socialization, integration, and productivity of institutions. At the micro level, functionalists assert that individuals are socialized into roles where they develop skills and cultivate their human and social capital. Skills and human capital are necessary to participate in macro levels of society (such as the economy and labor markets) and meet various societal needs. Because such macro structures have evolved to be very complex, social roles have become highly differentiated and specialized, albeit integrated. Roles are also interdependent upon one another and reliant on the interplay of complementary role categories to maintain positive societal functioning of a system (Parsons 1982). Such a dynamic is apparent in shifts in household production over time. Early economic production within kin-based groups was characterized by production of their own resources (such as food) to meet their needs. As society has become differentiated in terms of specialized occupations and tasks,

household economic production occurs primarily in the markets; within these markets, individuals perform specific jobs in exchange for wages which allow them to purchase goods and services to meet their needs (Bidwell 1991). For example, the farmer no longer simply cultivates enough grains to feed livestock and bake bread for the nuclear family. The farmer typically produces large yields of grains to sell in the market where individuals purchase it to feed their own livestock or make baked goods.

Furthermore, functionalists assert that as individuals perform their roles, their activities and interactions produce collectivities of organized action systems shared by a “common system of ultimate ends” (Parsons 1982:87). Activities and interactions produce social norms (i.e. patterned expectations for behaviors and action of group members) and values. Group norms and values not only emerge from social activity but, in turn, guide the behavior and pursuits of those in the group. Norms and values also delineate the relations of group members to one another, as well as to those external to the group (Parsons 1982).

When the norms and values of such integrated systems become consistently defined and widely supported, they become institutionalized. Institutionalized norms and values have the capacity to guide social interaction and socialize individuals on a larger scale through the dissemination of acceptable practices, cultural norms, and values (Parsons 1982). It is through such norms and values that social control and order may be maintained. Individuals are socialized into value systems, which (theoretically), guide them to behave in ways that are socially appropriate. It is through norms where individuals are sanctioned for their behaviors. Primary sites of socialization are often the family, but as society has become increasingly differentiated and specialized in the modern sense, the role of the family in socializing youth has shifted, as well. With individuals fulfilling roles external to the household and being dependent

on other roles and sectors to meet their needs, primary control is no longer solely relegated to the family. Bidwell (1991:91) argues primary control has been allocated “to the control of formal organizations and their increasingly professionalized staffs.”

As such, it can be argued that the institution of education, specifically, is a locus of socialization, integration, and social control. Schools impose upon youth the norms, values, and skills to function in society in ways that maintain social stability, indoctrinates them with a common set of values and beliefs to guide their understanding of the social world and how they interact in it, and establishes first-hand experience with one’s placement within the existing social order (Dreeben 1968). American values are presented in a variety of ways within the school structure, including emphasizing achievement, cultivating deference to authority (e.g. teachers), patriotism (e.g. reciting the Pledge of Allegiance and singing the national anthem at sporting events), competition for grades and winning in activities, and timeliness (e.g. being punctual and completing tasks by deadlines). Such values of which, once indoctrinated, translate into desired and marketable characteristics for participation in the adult labor market.

Functional theories further expound on the social placement of individuals in social systems by arguing that human capacities and resources are purposefully allocated within systems to maintain positive social functioning and integration. Access to roles is achieved through the appropriate credentials, and both rewards and prestige are similarly allocated (Parsons 1982). This process of obtaining prestige predicated upon rewards and credentials obtained mirrors the modern classroom structure of measuring student aptitudes and competencies and rewarding them accordingly. These allocative components of functionalist theory are apparent in the U.S. modern education system in which students are then later

allocated to adult roles, depending on the number of years of schooling completed and the degree awarded (Meyer 1977).

While the functions of socializing, social placement, and allocating rewards may appear to have positive outcomes for individual actors and society at large, absent from the functionalist perspective is insight as to what role, if any, education plays in inequality. It is apparent in the United States education system that even though public education is free and compulsory, educational resources and opportunities are unequally distributed. It is even more apparent that even though high school graduation rates continue to increase, educational outcomes have not resulted in a more equalized distribution of incomes (Bowles and Gintis 1976[2011]). One of the hallmarks of functionalist theory is that it overemphasizes homeostatic systems comprising interdependent configurations of actors and roles and overlooks how such social systems may be sources of inequality.

Conflict Theory

While the functionalist school of thought emphasizes the symbiosis of social roles in maintaining a stable, homeostatic social order, the conflict perspective offers a more dynamic view. It is acutely attuned to stratification as a structure of inequality, as well as the role of power in social dynamics. Whereas functionalist perspectives assert that social cohesion and stability are achieved through shared values, conflict theorists argue that social order is maintained through power and coercion. From this perspective, societies do not tend towards stability and equilibrium but are characterized by struggle and are subject to change as a result. As such, the conflict perspective can provide valuable insight into the ways in which mass education reproduces inequality and exercises social control.

Education has long been revered as a mechanism to bolster youths' personal development and likelihood of future economic success. This is achieved through nourishing their cognitive capacities and providing them the technical skills to later participate as competent, self-actualized citizens in the labor market. Theoretically, providing the same educational opportunities to all should result in future gainful employment for all and a more equalized distribution of incomes. However, Bowles and Gintis (1976[2011]) argue the U.S. education system has failed to meet these objectives, and conversely, the school's role in remedying inequality is overexaggerated. In fact, they argue the education system has been instrumental in reproducing inequality, and it is not the sole predictor for economic success or positively associated with meaningful personal development (Bowles and Gintis 1976[2011]).

Like the functionalist approach, Bowles and Gintis (1976[2011]), acknowledge the socializing and integrative activities of education but highlight its contradictions. In terms of human development, the conflict perspective articulates how the education system constrains personal development through its 'hidden curriculum,' which requires youth to relinquish autonomy and defer to the power and authority of teachers (Jackson 1968). As a result, implicit expectations for conduct are established, and conformity and subordination are awarded accordingly, most often through high grades and teacher approval (Bowles and Gintis 1976[2011]). Such allocation of rewards celebrates certain personality traits and encourages their expression while further galvanizing the social order. Students are, for example, "rewarded for exhibiting discipline, subordinacy, intellectually as opposed to emotionally orientated behavior, and hard work. . ." independent of ". . .scholastic achievement" (Bowles and Gintis 1976[2011]:40). Such reward structures for behaviors and attitudes deemed prosocial mirror that of the adult workplace environment. Schools, therefore, may be viewed more as sites of

socializing and processing individuals to produce a compliant workforce than of cultivating individual capacities (Collins 1977).

Bowles and Gintis (1976[2011]) further argue another contradiction of the school system is that its cultivation of cognitive skills is not the primary predictor of future economic success for students. Rather, the economic status of parents plays a large role in their children's educational attainment and future earnings. Low-income youth are less likely to graduate school or attend college as compared to students of a higher social class. Specifically, "a student in the ninetieth percentile in social class background. . . is likely to receive 4.25 more years schooling than an individual from the tenth percentile with the same IQ" (Bowles and Gintis 1976[2011]:32). Jencks (1972) articulated additional disadvantages low-income youth face in terms of their education and estimated that youth in the bottom fifth of the income distribution receive less than half of the monetary resources than those in the top 5th receive.

Kozol (1991) highlighted the palpable consequences of limited resources being funneled into schools in low-income districts, as well as the influence the economic environment imposes on childhood. In the United States, property taxes are often the source of revenue for public schools, meaning the amount of money in a community funds the local schools. As demonstrated by Bowles and Gintis (1976[2011]), incomes are unequally distributed across the social landscape as evidenced by varying social classes. This results in wealthier districts having nicer schools and better curricula and poorer districts having less resources for their schools. Kozol (1991) provided firsthand account of how low-income families (specifically in urban settings) disproportionately experience educational inequities as a result of their community's economic circumstances.

Inadequate funding in poor school districts has a negative impact on school curriculum and infrastructure. Limited funds make it difficult to recruit and retain teachers when wages are low; it is also difficult for teachers to perform their jobs when they lack the material resources to teach. Kozol (1991) cited a shortage of textbooks, workbooks, chalk, and paper; science and biology labs lacking necessary equipment and instruments (even running water); and vocational courses lacking the machinery for experiential learning. Inadequate funding further makes it difficult to offer extracurricular activities. Teachers in Kozol's (1991) book cited being unable to properly maintain or replace sports equipment, such as jerseys.

Administrators also cited infrastructure issues as depleting the per-student budget. Dilapidated buildings result in expensive maintenance, and principals highlighted reallocating funds to mitigate heating and cooling issues, old windows, leaking roofs, and plumbing issues (Kozol 1991). When schools do not have the means to simply maintain the buildings and are situated in districts supplying little-to-no revenue, students' opportunities are similarly limited if not wholly inaccessible. Teachers reported few students attending college and many dropping out by 9th and 10th grade (Kozol). Similarly, teachers reported Home Economics classes merely preparing its students for employment in the fast-food industry (Kozol 1991).

It is clear the mass education system is intrinsically linked to social class. While the functionalist perspective highlights education's positive socializing capacities and its role in maintaining and integrated, cohesive society of interdependent social roles, it overlooks the inequities education is argued to reproduce. Conflict theorists have argued that the mass education system's curriculum and socializing capacities are, instead, coercive in relegating youth to the social classes from which they came. Bowles and Gintis (1976[2011]) and Kozol (1991) have highlighted how opportunity is not equally accessible for students of lower social

classes and the mass education system does little to ameliorate inequities. Arguably, mass education appears to reinforce one's class position when opportunities are constrained by the economic circumstances of one's environment and community. It seems unrealistic that a student from an affluent neighborhood would take a Home Economics class with the goal of obtaining marginally gainful employment at the local fast-food chain. Even more unrealistic is that this would be one of few life trajectories for an affluent student. The mass education system offers little by way of meaningful personal development and self-actualization, especially for those of lower social classes.

This literature review examines the extent to which school curricula meet the needs of a diverse population of students in terms of their socioeconomic status and personal development. It seeks to answer the following questions: what role, if any, does the modern education system play in reducing or reproducing inequality? How does social class impact learning and experiential deficits? In light of a standardized curriculum, can outdoor adventure programming meet the unique needs of a diverse student population? Can outdoor adventure programming mitigate the inequities of the classroom by providing meaningful and challenging wilderness experiences for low-income youth? What impact, if any, does outdoor adventure programming have on youth personal development and social outcomes?

CHAPTER THREE: LITERATURE REVIEW

A review of the literature illuminates how education has evolved with and emerged from temporally and culturally situated social conditions characterized by varying degrees of social organization, class relations, and its intersection with other social institutions. This chapter will provide a brief historical review of education within global and U.S. contexts, and empirically support the theoretical arguments about mass education's socializing and oppressive effects.

Brief History of Education

From a historical and global perspective, education has not functioned as an independent institution but has been embedded in other institutions. It has also resided at the intersection of temporally and culturally situated social dynamics and arrangements that have made different demands of it. Education has been practical, relational, stratified, and it has been imbued with power.

Early global context. In tribal societies, education was not formally established as it is in the modern sense but arose from within the family system where children learned practical skills and about adult work through apprenticeships with their parents or relatives (Collins 1977). Rarely did education occur outside of the family. As these early societies evolved, so too did the demands for education as a tool for developing practical skills. Skills included not only the technical skills associated with a craft or trade but also of literacy, which was useful for obtaining administrative positions, specifically within temples or government (Collins 1977).

Literacy training was particularly valuable for bureaucratic endeavors, such as diplomatic and government correspondence, inventory, maintaining astronomical records, and administering taxes (Chiera 1938; Collins 1977). Though literacy training was often located outside of the family in sacred, omnipotent temples or with private practitioners, they were aligned more so

with apprenticeships than the modern model of education. Here students learned the trade in an applied format where they were often assistants to professional scribes.

Education evolved notably with the development of city-states, particularly in ancient Greece and Rome, which were highly stratified in terms of social class. As such, education was characterized by a departure from practical training to that of an aesthetic quality, which included such activities as track and field, festivals, and the arts (Marrou 1956). Participation in these activities and artistic scholarship (e.g. singing, reading, writing, and poetry) was an indicator of elite social class because it was accessible only to wealthy, upper class families. This aesthetic curriculum persisted for centuries, and as European boarding schools and universities developed, they continued to attract only those of wealthy families (Collins 1977).

Those of the middle classes have not, historically, had access to the same educational opportunities or curricula as those of elite families. It took the emergence of middle-class English families in the 16th and 17th centuries to usher in educational reforms as they advocated for educating their children (Bidwell 1991). During this time, education was still situated within the household, and middle-class families lacked the economic and spatial means to participate in education in this manner. Advocacy efforts resulted in the accelerated development of grammar schools and a formalized version of education external to the household (Bidwell 1991). Despite this early educational reform, inequities continued to persist well into the 18th and 19th centuries. Middle class education was not marked by the aesthetic education afforded wealthy families but was, instead, punctuated by religious, scientific, and technological training (Ben-David 1971; Collins 1977). This further marked a class delineation in education between the aesthetic education of the elite leisure class and the practical, technical education of those in the lower echelons of society.

United States education. Education in the United States is young relative to education within the greater historical and cultural context but has similarly evolved with changing social conditions, has overlapped with various social institutions, and has also followed the trend of being steeped in inequality. Early manifestations of education in the 17th century were not characterized by bureaucracy and regulatory oversight but overlapped with the social values and institutions of religion and the family that were prevalent at this time. As such, education was a form of “family surrogate,” providing supplemental moral training and instilling discipline, good habits, and regimentation into children who were viewed as otherwise immoral, feral, and too spontaneous – especially those of the lower classes (Bowles and Gintis 1976[2011]:38).

Though education in the 17th century was perceived as paramount in morally shaping youth, youth continued to be denied access to educational opportunities based on their status characteristics—primarily that of their socioeconomic status. During the 17th century, only about 10% of children attended school and those who did so came from wealthy families. Children of lower classes often sought apprenticeships and children of the “middling classes” were taught by family members or a neighbor if their own parents were illiterate (Urban and Wagoner 2014:35). This dichotomy of educational opportunity could not be any more apparent than in Thomas Jefferson’s proposition for a two-track educational system to prepare individuals to occupy one of the two social classes in society: the laboring or the learned (Bowles and Gintis 1976[2011]).

It was not until the mid-1800s—in tandem with the industrial revolution—when education became compulsory, and all youth of varying social classes could access free formal elementary and secondary education. The accessibility of education for all also occurred in conjunction with extensive reform resulting in increased bureaucratization through the development of state-level boards of education, which standardized overall school operations and

conducted evaluations. This new governing body “approved or recommended texts, certified teachers, sponsored normal schools, and collected information about the condition of education” (Bidwell 1991:191).

As societies have evolved and social roles have become increasingly specialized and, thus, interdependent on one another, the model of education so too has changed. The shift from education occurring within the family system to education being obtained outside of the family system has occurred in tandem within broader social changes in the way family and work are structured. Educational reform, too, has also shifted with changing social conditions. The aesthetic education including courses in track and field, music, literature, and the arts was previously unattainable to those of the lower classes. Efforts to make education free and compulsory for all have, it is argued, increased opportunities for those of lower socioeconomic status. Proponents of compulsory education argue that it prepares youth to fulfill adult social roles and procure gainful employment. The following sections will examine empirical research about elements of education that facilitate inequality.

Consequences of Education

Socialization. The capacities of schools in guiding appropriate student behaviors and shaping students’ value systems can hardly be contested. Shaping conduct and instilling values is necessary to facilitate the smooth operation of the classroom and school day. Schools are further argued to shape a future compliant workforce through reward systems that incentivize certain behaviors and personality traits that align with dominant value systems. On the surface, this may seem to be beneficial for fostering social cohesion. In practice, disseminating narrow cultural values and expectations for conduct may have negative consequences for youth development as dominant value systems do not necessarily reflect diverse student populations. Marginalized

youth are even more at-risk for approaching the learning realms with different cultural capital that may disadvantage them in the classroom (Cole 2008; Irvine 1990). Specifically, racial groups are disproportionately susceptible to having expressions of their culture (e.g. behavior, dress, etc.) stifled by educational policy (Johnson 2018).

Brint, Contreras, and Matthews (2001) examined the socialization messages conveyed by teachers, principals, and textbooks in working class and middle-class schools in southern California. Brint et al. (2001:161) found that schools primarily conveyed traditional values of orderliness, effort, hard work and responsibility, while also emphasizing relational values, such as “respect for others, participation, cooperation, self-control, and self-direction.” The researchers also found features of schooling that mimic the expectations of adult life, which is often referred to as the hidden curriculum (Jackson 1968). Token economies, group projects, and rotating between activities emerged as routinely characterizing the school day (Brint et al. 2001). Such activities, perhaps, prepare youth to exchange their labor in the market economy for material rewards, work cooperatively in groups, and move between constantly-changing tasks and demands – all of which are characteristic of adult occupational life.

Other research has expanded upon simple organizational messaging and taken a long-range approach to assessing the socializing capacities of education in shaping future social values. Kingston et al. (2003:53) examined the impact of educational attainment (i.e. years of school completed and the highest degree obtained) on social outcomes, including “attitudes toward civil liberties and gender equality, social and cultural capital, and civic knowledge.” They found that educational attainment at various levels was positively associated with positive attitudes toward civil liberties and gender equality, as well as individuals being engaged in organizational life and more informed about environmental issues (Kingston et al. 2003). This

research suggests there is the potential of education to nourish more civically engaged and socially aware youth.

Economic inequality. As history and theoretical scholarship have demonstrated, education is not simply a democratized product provided to all citizens. It is a complex institution residing at the intersection of many institutions and is a cultural product arising from human activities. Education is imbedded in issues of social class, whether it is indicative of which degree of education youth will receive based on their class position, who has the power to determine what education looks like, or how education is funded. Subsequently, education's intrinsic link to social class presents a myriad of implications in terms of access to resources and opportunities for youth.

In their study examining how family income, size, structure, and a mother's education level interact with educational attainment for youth, Duncan, Kalil, and Ziol-Guest (2017:1623) found that "income accounted for more than three-quarters of the increasing gaps in years of schooling between high- and low-income children." Of all the demographic predictors, income inequality emerged as the primary link to future educational attainment. This finding further supports the arguments presented by Bowles and Gintis (1976[2011]) and suggests that low-income youth do not start out on equal educational footing as compared to their affluent counterparts.

Income inequality not only has an immediate impact on youth opportunities within a particular family system, but it also extends beyond it and can impact entire communities. Reardon and Bischoff (2011) examined the prominence of spatial income segregation, meaning how low-income and high-income families are physically segregated and reside within neighborhoods with those of similar social classes. They found "as income inequality grows. . .

the middle and upper-middle classes become increasingly concentrated together at relatively large distances from those with lower incomes” (Reardon and Bischoff 2011:1136). This directly impacts schools given that funding is derived from property taxes. Districts with a higher concentration of wealthier families and homes with higher property values will generate more money for schools. Districts with a higher concentration of poorer families and low-income housing will generate less money for schools. Such a concentration of income (and arguably advantages and disadvantages) across school districts and communities exacerbates social inequality and its consequences by creating resource-rich learning environments for some students but not for others. Insufficient funding for schools based on property taxes underpins the very curricular and infrastructure issues articulated by Kozol (1991) earlier in this paper.

Achievement gap. The unequal distribution of economic resources across social classes has tangible consequences for investing in youth and may widen achievement gaps. The achievement gap refers to the disparity in educational outcomes between low-income and minority students as measured through standardized test scores in subjects such as math and reading (U.S. Department of Education 2004). Such disparities have been a topic of academic and policy praxis since the publication of Coleman’s (1966) seminal report, which revealed vast differences in testing and academic outcomes among racial and ethnic minorities as compared to their white counterparts. Despite the passage of time and policy efforts, disparities have persisted.

Hanushek et al. (2020) assert that achievement gaps associated with socioeconomic status (SES) have remained relatively stable since the Coleman Report’s initial publication in 1966. Echoing Bowles and Gintis’s (1976[2011]) findings on the association between socioeconomic status and educational attainment, Hanushek et al. (2020) found that students in the top quarter of

the income distribution are, on average, around three years ahead of their counterparts in the bottom quarter of the income distribution by eighth grade. Overall achievement gains in the past 50 years have been notable among adolescents as they enter high school but are reported to disappear by age 17 as they prepare to enter college or enter the labor market (Hanushek et al. 2020). Musu-Gillette et al. (2017) confirmed either minor achievement gains or no measurable differences in reading and math scores for racially and ethnically diverse elementary and middle school students between 1992 and 2015.

Similar to the findings of the Coleman Report (1966), learning and testing disparities across various demographic factors continue to persist. Lewis Presser et al. (2021) found that achievement gaps in reading widened across kindergarten and first graders, with low-income and racial/ethnic students performing lower as compared to their Asian and white classmates. Specifically, 55% of Hispanic first graders, 37% of black first graders, and 52% of first graders on the federal free and reduced lunch program (FRL) met the reading proficiency milestone by the end of the school year as compared to their Asian (73%), white (61%), and non-FRL (65%) classmates (Lewis Presser et al. 2021). By the twelfth grade, the white-black achievement gap in reading was larger in 2015 than it was in 1992 with black students (Musu-Gillette et al. 2017).

Measuring student proficiencies in various subjects may, on the surface, seem like an adequate means for evaluating student learning. However, worth mentioning is that some scholars assert the achievement gap not only has insidious consequences for students but is a result of the education system not meeting the needs of or providing adequate learning opportunities for a diverse student body (Byrd 2020). As the U.S. population and student body has become increasingly diverse, this has not been reflected in the racial composition of public school teachers, which are predominantly non-Hispanic white (Musu-Gillette et al. 2017). Often

lacking in teaching strategies is cultural competence and cultural responsiveness, both of which are positively related to student achievement (Gay 2015). Culturally competent and responsive teaching strategies consider the unique experiences diverse students bring to a school system that tends to disadvantage low-income and minority youth as evidenced by standardized test scores.

Standardized testing is the tool by which student achievement is not only measured but also informs the academic trajectories students will be afforded. Students are placed in classes based on their ability, as indicated by standardized test scores. This process is known as ability grouping or tracking. Through tracking, “students are divided into categories so that they can be assigned in groups to various kinds of classes. Sometimes students are classified as fast, average, or slow learners and placed into fast, average, or slow classes on the basis of their scores on achievement or ability tests” (Oakes 1985[2005]:3). Tracking has faced criticism for negatively impacting students’ identities and self-concept (Stanley and Chambers 2018), and further perpetuating disparities by constraining student performance and opportunities.

Opportunity gap. Perhaps a more comprehensive conceptualization of unequal educational opportunity is through the lens of the opportunity gap. While the achievement gap is a student-centered concept and narrowly focused on measuring performance, the opportunity gap broadens the scope of inequity. The opportunity gap illuminates how circumstances and obstacles impact the educational experiences of students throughout the life course, as well as how educational experiences have an impact beyond the classroom. Instead of simply measuring *outcomes*, the opportunity gap examines the role of *inputs* in student success. Instead of simply evaluating standardized test scores and student performance, the opportunity gap addresses conditions and opportunities (or lack thereof) preceding the test. Conditions and opportunities that impact student success may include the quality of teacher instruction and engagement, how

classrooms are structured, as well as monetary resources. Furthermore, success is not only measured by standardized testing but also considers social outcomes, personal development, and skill development that underpins student preparedness and future success as adults.

Within a developmental framework, Degol and Bachman (2015) highlighted specifically how low-income preschool youth do not start out on equal footing within the context of their social class and kindergarten preparedness. They found teachers spent very little time on teacher-directed activities and behavioral socialization practices that are beneficial to children developing self-regulation (Degol and Bachman 2015). This absence of structured activities that cultivate prosocial behaviors disadvantages low-income youth in that they are not adequately prepared to successfully participate in the kindergarten classroom and are at risk of falling through the cracks. If being sensitized to the classroom environment and learning how to behave in a prosocial manner will advantage youth in their future schooling and, subsequently, their success as adults (Jones, Greenberg, and Crowley 2015), then low-income pre-k children are particularly vulnerable at the onset of their education. Unfortunately, the prevalence of unstructured time among low-income children is hardly a new phenomenon (Lareau 2003).

Raudenbush and Eschmann (2015) similarly confirmed that the quality of educational instruction varies across social class and impacts youth skill development unequally. High socioeconomic children receive better instruction at school as compared to low-income children, and they gain skills at a faster rate. Learning rates among high school high-SES and low-SES students diverge greatly and impact their school performance and future earnings (Raudenbush and Eschmann 2015).

Income inequality also underpins youths' engagement and opportunity gaps, especially pertaining to extracurricular activities available beyond the classroom. Due to limited economic

resources, low-income families are limited in what they can spend on enriching educational materials and services, experiences, and activities that help youth to build their human and cultural capital (Kornrich and Furstenberg 2013). Access to supplemental materials and activities also disproportionately strains low-income families who would have to spend a higher portion of their income on enrichment activities as compared to those with higher incomes (Kornrich and Furstenberg 2013).

Over the past 20 years, the difference in youth engagement with extracurricular activities has grown significantly between the poor and wealthy, and class disparities in participation have been attributed to rising income inequality (Snellman et al. 2015). Additionally, the privatization of childhood and extracurricular activities has increased over the past decade, and “pay to play” (Snellman et al. 2015:203) programs have become more common, shifting the burden of paying for activities back onto the families. Low-income families have been disproportionately impacted by these programs as the families do not have the financial resources to pay for extracurricular activities.

This is particularly concerning as participation in extracurricular activities is linked to various positive social outcomes and is one less developmental tool that low-income youth can easily access. Unequal access to enriching, out-of-school time activities may limit youth development, skill acquisition, and future opportunities. Considering the inequities embedded in the modern education system, can outdoor adventure programming meet the unique needs of a diverse student population? Can outdoor adventure programming mitigate the inequities of the classroom by providing meaningful and challenging wilderness experiences for low-income youth? What impact, if any, does outdoor adventure programming have on youth personal

development and social outcomes? What strategies do outdoor adventure education programs utilize to increase participation among youth with limited economic resources?

CHAPTER FOUR: METHODS

I conducted a content analysis of the existing literature to examine the extent to which outdoor adventure programming can be a supplemental educational tool in mitigating inequities of the educational system. Content analysis is an analytic technique in which contextual meaning can be derived from large bodies of text. In this method, text is coded and organized into categories. It is “through the systematic classification process of coding and identifying themes or patterns” (Hsieh and Shannon 2005:1278) that meaning can be derived.

Peer-reviewed articles published in the last 10 years from outdoor programming and education-related disciplines were located. I used the Education Resource Information Center (ERIC) and MavScholar databases. The following search terms were used:

1. Youth OR children OR students
2. Achievement gap OR opportunity gap OR inequality OR inequity
3. Low-income OR socioeconomic status
4. Outdoor education OR adventure education OR experiential education

15 articles met the search criteria. A coding scheme was developed based on the concepts of socialization, economic inequality, achievement gap, and opportunity gap identified in the literature review. These pre-determined codes were further defined based on the literature review to keep the codes tight to the data (see Table 2, Appendix), and the literature was systematically categorized into these codes. Data that did not fit within the pre-determined codes were also identified. I developed additional codes for themes and concepts that emerged from the literature. Emergent codes were then organized into thematic categories and synthesized into a discussion.

CHAPTER FIVE: PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

After reading the 15 articles that satisfied the criteria, I organized them and focused on the sample, research method, and noteworthy findings as they related to the pre-determined codes and codes that emerged from the literature.

Table 1. Summary of Studies Reviewed

Author(s)	Title	Method	Theme(s)
Blanton et al. (2013)	The Feasibility of Using Nature-Based Settings for Physical Activity Programming: Views from Urban Youth and Program Providers	Four focus groups with 20 urban adolescents (11 on Free and Reduced Lunch) utilized to capture perceptions and opinions of nature-based activities; 5 interviews with programming experts	Cultural competence, outreach, activity preferences, outcomes
Bond Rogers, Taylor and Rose (2019)	Perceptions and Experiences of Diversity and Inclusion of Outdoor Educators in Higher Education	Purposive sample of the Association of Outdoor Recreation and Education (AORE) membership. Mixed methods survey of diversity and inclusion questions	Diversity, inclusion, representation, outreach
Browne, Gillard, and Garst (2019)	Camp as an Institution of Socialization: Past, Present, and Future	Case study of practices in 3 camps designed to either empower transgender youth, address cultural appropriation, or provide programs to low SES youth	Inclusion, equity
Goodman (2020)	Landscapes of Belonging: Systematically Marginalized Students and Sense of Place and Belonging in Outdoor Experiential Education	Qualitative case study with 27 interviews with Outdoor Experiential Education participants; marginalized identities included race/ethnicity, sexual orientation, and socioeconomic status	Inclusion, cultural competence
Gress and Hall (2017)	Diversity in the Outdoors: National Outdoor Leadership School Students' Attitudes About Wilderness	Quantitative survey followed by qualitative interviews with scholarship and non-scholarship National Outdoor Leadership school students	Diversity, equity, social outcomes

Ho and Chang (2021)	To whom does this place belong? Whiteness and diversity in outdoor recreation and education	Critical discourse analysis of how outdoor recreation and education has historically and culturally been defined through a lens of white experience	Diversity, inclusion, multiculturalism
Meerts-Brandsma, Sibthorp, and Rochelle (2019)	Learning Transfer in Socioeconomically Differentiated Outdoor Adventure Education Students	Semi-structured interviews with 21 students who participated in a National Outdoor Leadership School (NOLS) course; 50% were in the Gateway program and received full-tuition scholarships	Social outcomes, skills
Meier, Hartmann, and Larson (2018)	A Quarter Century of Participation in School-Based Extracurricular Activities: Inequalities by Race, Class, Gender and Age?	Analysis of survey data from 1986-2013 from the Monitoring the Future study. Measured extracurricular participation, race/ethnicity, social class, gender and age, school grades, college graduation expectations, and substance use	Social outcomes; equity; diversity and participation
Paisley et al. (2014)	Considering Students' Experiences in Diverse Groups: Case Studies from the National Outdoor Leadership School	Social network analysis of scholarship groups and one-on-one interviews with students	Diversity
Richmond and Sibthorp (2019)	Bridging the Opportunity Gap: College Access Programs and Outdoor Adventure Education	Interviews with 27 adolescents and surveys of 165 adolescents in a program for underserved youth from urban centers; measured if OAE participation impacted self-efficacy, leadership, and sense of belonging	Social outcomes
Richmond et al. (2018)	Complementing Classroom Learning through Outdoor Adventure Education: Out-of-School-Time Experiences That Make a Difference.	Semi-structured interviews with students and faculty of Outdoor Adventure Education program	Social outcomes
Richmond et al. (2015)	Social Dynamics in Outdoor Adventure Groups: Factors Determining Peer Status	237 NOLS students completed 3 sets of questionnaires over 30-day backpacking courses which measured effects of gender and SES on status	Outcomes

Warner and Dillenschneider (2019)	Universal Design of Instruction and Social Justice Education: Enhancing Equity in Outdoor Adventure Education.	Secondary literature review of universal design of instruction and social justice education concepts and strategies as it relates to outdoor adventure education	Equity, social justice; inclusion;
Warner, Martin and Szolosi (2020)	Exploring the Inclusive Praxis of Outward Bound Instructors	In-depth, semi-structured interviews with 10 Outward Bound (OB) instructors; evaluated conditions that influenced inclusive praxis among OAE	Inclusion
Warren, Roberts, Breunig, and Alvarez (2014)	Social Justice in Outdoor Experiential Education: A State of Knowledge Review.	Secondary literature review of peer-reviewed articles; examined the intersection of outdoor experiential education and social justice	Cultural competence, diversity

Findings

Social class and race intersect in unique ways, and the findings of the content analysis suggest that a discussion of providing outdoor educational programming to low-income youth may be reductive and simply not enough. A discussion about outdoor programming for those with minimal resources begets a discussion about further providing relevant programming to minority youth and meeting the specific needs of this population, given that racial and ethnic status is often closely tied to social class. The following codes about diversity, representation, inclusion, cultural competence, and equity repeatedly revealed themselves as important concepts/codes in framing participation in outdoor adventure programming as an overarching issue of social justice. Additional emergent codes included outcomes, activity preferences, and outreach and recruitment.

Social Justice

Youth participation in outdoor adventure programming may not only be limited by economic resources but may also be constrained by issues pertaining to diversity, equity, and

inclusion. Diverse, equitable, and inclusive programs facilitate full and equal participation among individuals and “recognizes and values their unique backgrounds” (Warner and Dillenschneider 2019:321). Equitable programming from the social justice lens further seeks to eliminate barriers to participation. Participation is not simply operationalized by the number of diverse bodies but is bolstered by a process of providing relevant and competent programming that meets the needs of participants in meaningful and impactful ways. Competent and social justice-oriented programming carefully considers issues of diversity and representation, equity, inclusion, and cultural competence.

Diversity and representation. Bond Rogers, Taylor and Rose (2019) found that diverse bodies and marginalized groups are not represented in the composition of outdoor adventure education leaders. Outdoor adventure education has, historically and presently, been led by predominantly white, upper-class individuals (Warren, Roberts, Breunig, and Alvarez 2014), which does not reflect the increasing demographic shifts in racial and ethnic diversity in the United States (Gress and Hall 2017). The concentration of white, upper-class bodies in outdoor leadership is particularly concerning because it continues to marginalize values and perspectives of diverse populations and, instead, perpetuates the dissemination of values and perspectives of the dominant culture (Warren et al. 2014).

A narrow range of values and perspectives can have practical consequences for organizational culture, pedagogy, and youth experiences. Warren et al. (2014) further highlighted how diversity is simply not represented in the curriculum for training outdoor leaders, which may impact how they instruct and mentor youth. The curriculum and textbooks for training outdoor leaders and instructors have historically ignored social justice education and has privileged the perspectives and experiences of white males. Instructors often emerge from

outdoor leadership training equipped with “facilitative practices that value certain individuals and voices over others” (Warren et al. 2014:95). The cycle of training instructors within a myopic curriculum reflecting their own experiences and privileges and then placing them in outdoor programs reifies the very “sociopolitical and sociocultural ideologies” that marginalize youth they may work with (Warren et al. 2014:95).

The absence of diverse bodies is not only apparent at the leadership level of outdoor adventure education but also in the composition of its participants. Meier, Hartmann, and Larson (2018) found that levels of participation in activities vary by race and ethnicity with non-Hispanic black youth having lower levels of participation over time as compared to their white and Asian counterparts. Ho and Chang (2021) similarly noted that overall rates of participation in outdoor leisure activities are lower in colonial societies, especially among people of color. Outdoor adventure programs have attempted to increase accessibility and diversity by offering scholarships to marginalized youth, which has yielded mixed results.

Research indicates the composition of participants in programs and groups warrants careful consideration. Paisley et al. (2014) found that the ratio of scholarship to non-scholarship students in outdoor adventure education programs can both positively and negatively impact group interactions. Scholarship students reported higher group connectedness and approval when they were in a nearly homogenous group of peers with the same scholarship status. When scholarship students were in groups with few other scholarship students overall (i.e. outnumbered by non-scholarship students), they experienced feelings of isolation, homesickness, and being reduced to their scholarship status. The most volatile and less integrated groups were those that were split evenly between scholarship and non-scholarship students, which resulted in clear subgroups based on scholarship status and contrasting perspectives (Paisley et al. 2014).

Scholarship students were more positive about diversity and the racial, ethnic, regional, and schooling (e.g. private vs. public) differences among students. Conversely, the non-scholarship students reported wishing they were in a group with people more like themselves and where diversity did not feel forced (Paisley et al. 2014).

It is no wonder how a lack of diversity and representation of diverse youth bodies and experiences may present as a barrier to participation in outdoor adventure programming. Programs that reflect the white, upper-to-middle class status quo may not facilitate a welcoming, meaningful, and inclusive environment for diverse youth. Outdoor adventure education programs cannot simply recruit diverse youth but must also develop inclusive and culturally competent policies to support participants and staff.

Inclusion and Cultural Competence. Warner, Martin, and Szolosi (2020) assert that inclusive programming is imperative for creating space for emotional safety, open conversations, freedom of expression, common ground, and the creation of connections among youth in the group. Though outdoor education programs have attempted to develop more inclusive practices, Goodman (2020) found that outdoor education is not inclusive overall. The structure of these programs can negatively impact experiences of marginalized youth through feeling isolated and a lack of support. Warren et al. (2014) found that successful programs cultivate inclusive and diverse programming through multicultural approaches and increased cultural competency, which have the capacity to increase marginalized students' sense of belonging (Goodman 2020).

Various strategies for implementing culturally competent and inclusive programming were evident in the content analysis, primarily through collaborative efforts between participants and other agencies. Browne, Gillard and Garst (2019) specifically highlighted the importance of developing policies to include and support marginalized youth and staff. They further suggested

involving minority groups in program development, which increases historical relevance and cultural sensitivity. Ho and Chang (2021) articulated how history may be embedded in the experiences of marginalized youth and may impact their perspectives of natural spaces. Inclusive outdoor programming should carefully consider how “white environmentalism’s” (Ho and Chang 2021:6) dominant set of outdoor ideals marginalizes other cultural views and relationships to nature. Marginalized youth do not often hold natural spaces in the high, novel regard that white, affluent youth do. Perceptions of land and nature are rooted in culture and history which can be sources of intergenerational trauma for marginalized youth (Ho and Chang 2021).

Warner and Dillenschneider (2019) further articulated that inclusive and culturally competent programs do not simply arise from putting policies to paper but are underpinned by a reflexive, ongoing process of self-examination among administrators and instructors. Awareness of one’s privileges and biases can better prepare instructors to “anticipate, plan for, and respond dynamically to the unique needs of groups and individual participants” (Warner and Dillenschneider 2019:327). Blanton et al. (2013) also found that staff awareness of their privilege helped build trust and relationships with youth.

Though outdoor adventure instructors cited diverse, inclusive, and culturally competent practices as aligning with their core values (Warner, Martin, and Szolosi 2020), Bond Rogers, Taylor, and Rose (2019) caution that the onus of responsibility in ensuring such practices are implemented is on the organizations. In their study of perceptions of diverse and inclusive practices, many instructors reported valuing diversity and inclusion in programming but positively valuing such programming was only strongly associated with previous training (Bond Rogers, Taylor, and Rose 2019). Warner, Martin, and Zolosi (2020) similarly found that instructors’ use of inclusive practices was primarily influenced through structural means, such as

societal conditions, organizational conditions, and course design. Individual characteristics are not enough to bolster diverse, inclusive, and culturally competent outdoor programming, and organizations themselves are important agents of change.

Equity. Meier, Hartmann, and Larson (2018) highlighted the relationship of economic resources to accessing enriching activities external to the classroom environment. They found that middle and upper-class youth have increased participation rates in extracurricular activities over time. Low-income youth are particularly disadvantaged due to having limited economic resources available to them to access outdoor adventure programming. Successful programs can mitigate this inequity by offering scholarships to qualifying youth to increase accessibility. In Browne, Gillard, and Garst's (2019) study, 22% of camp participants receive scholarships, and the authors cited fee-free or reduced cost programming reduced barriers for youth. Gress and Hall (2017) assert that greater equity can be achieved by offering scholarships based on race, ethnicity, and metropolitan residency.

Warner and Dillenschneider (2019) assert that equity is not simply achieved by providing scholarships for youth to access programming but should be imbedded in the programming and extend beyond the program itself. To serve diverse participants equitably, instructors and administrators must reflexively examine how their privileges and biases embolden some and constrain others. Outdoor programs should be designed to provide tools to participants so they can be agents of change in their communities. Outdoor adventure programming differs markedly from the mainstream educational system in the experiences and skills it cultivates, and it is uniquely positioned to disrupt systems of oppression and empower students. Features of outdoor adventure programming that empower youth include culturally responsive programming,

developing critical thinking skills, providing opportunities for reflection, and through group experiences requiring collaboration and cooperation (Warner and Dillenschneider 2019).

Outcomes

Youth with limited economic resources often access extracurricular activities through their schools, such activities of which are positively associated with academic outcomes and negatively associated with substance use (Meier, Hartmann, and Larson 2018). Outdoor adventure programs provide additional opportunities for learning and personal growth that are unavailable in the everyday experience of the classroom since the outdoor environment is a novel learning environment. Novel environments are uniquely situated to provide youth opportunities to more deeply explore their senses of self that are not otherwise afforded them in their daily lives. These environments and experiences are strategically leveraged to yield learning outcomes in outdoor skills, leadership, confidence, and functioning in challenging situations (Meerts-Brandsma, Sibthorp, and Rochelle 2019).

Participants in outdoor adventure programs have cited a variety of positive intra- and interpersonal outcomes emerging from the shared outdoor experience (Meerts-Brandsma, Sibthorp, and Rochelle 2019). At a minimum, respondents noted feeling calm and relieved when outdoors in the fresh air (Blanton et al. 2013). Participants reported improvements in self-efficacy through dealing with adverse conditions, getting outside of their comfort zones, practicing leadership skills, and managing others (Richmond and Sibthorp 2019). Participants specifically cited gaining leadership skills through exploring new roles, student-directed decision-making, reflection, and managing adversity (Richmond et al. 2018), and it is through these novel and sometimes adverse situations that students further reported developing resiliency, positive attitudes, empowerment, and independence (Richmond et al. 2018).

Participants also reported gains in the social dimension of outdoor programming and reported building social relationships and a sense of community among the group that was absent from their school and everyday lives (Richmond et al. 2018).

These findings are particularly important for marginalized youth who approach these learning environments with little to no experience and highlight the importance of experience in skill and personal development. In their study of peer status in outdoor adventure groups, Richmond et al. (2015) found that scholarship students had lower scores in the task domain (i.e. general leadership and physical abilities), as compared to their non-scholarship counterparts. Considering marginalized youth do not typically enter outdoor adventure programming with the skills associated with these experiences, outdoor adventure programs are an important tool in helping them develop such skills.

Additional differences in approaching outdoor adventure programs and learning outcomes were also evident between scholarship and non-scholarship participants. Gress and Hall (2017) reported that scholarship students entered the National Outdoor Leadership School program with less-positive pre-course attitudes toward environmental ethic and environmental awareness than non-scholarship students. Scholarship students experienced a larger change in post-course wilderness attitudes than non-scholarship students, though, and made greater connections between the wilderness and their urban environment (Gress and Hall 2017).

Participants receiving scholarships further reported their experience of being a minority in an outdoor leadership school as preparing them to deal with the challenges of being a minority on college campus (Meerts-Brandsma, Sibthorp, and Rochelle 2019). Non-scholarship students reported gaining maturity and awareness of their privilege as a result of interacting with scholarship students (Meerts-Brandsma, Sibthorp, and Rochelle 2019). Though non-

marginalized youth are not the focus of this paper, this finding is particularly noteworthy as it aligns with the tenets of the social justice lens. Cultivating an awareness of one's privilege and unearned place in the world could potentially have a positive impact on future social change and conditions.

Activity Preferences

Because marginalized youth approach the outdoor adventure learning realms with limited experience, it is important to consider those experiences when offering activities and providing relevant programming. Blanton et al. (2013) found that youth activity preferences tended to align with what they already had experience in, such as basketball, jogging, etc. Participants in the study expressed interest in both competitive and cooperative outdoor activities and also noted avoiding activities they had little experience in, such as rock climbing to high points and sleeping in a tent. Youth did, on the other hand, express interest in activities such as mountain climbing, canoeing, swimming, kayaking, and hiking even though they did not have previous experiences with these activities.

Outreach and Recruitment

Reaching marginalized youth about available programming and opportunities was another finding that emerged from the data. In addition to the financial and cultural barriers discussed previously, outdoor education professionals reported inadequate recruitment techniques as a barrier to participation among diverse populations (Bond Rogers, Taylor, and Rose 2019). Successful outreach practices included collaborating with other community diversity and inclusion programs and building marketing strategies and relationships with them. Other agencies focusing on diversity and inclusion not only help to identify the target population, but they can serve as a gatekeeper and lend legitimacy to the outreach efforts of the partnering

outdoor program organization. Blanton et al. (2013) similarly recommended leveraging networks to saturate outreach in target communities.

CHAPTER SIX: DISCUSSION AND PROGRAM RECOMMENDATIONS

This paper examined the education system within two theoretical perspectives: functionalism and conflict theory. Functionalism emphasizes socialization, social order, integration, and stability – all of which have often been identified as positive attributes of the education system. The dominant narrative of the education system defines it as a purposeful, equalizing institution that provides youth opportunities to be successful through learning and training. Schools are purported to be sites of socialization and integration and confer upon youth the values and norms that facilitate positive social functioning into adulthood. Yet this equalizing capacity of compulsory education for all youth is hard to reconcile given the increasing class disparity in the United States.

The conflict theory differs markedly from the functionalist approach and is equipped to address functionalism's deficiencies, primarily the issue of social inequality. Conflict theory illuminates how stratification, social organization, and institutions can be sources of and reproduce inequality. The reproduction of inequality could not be more apparent than in the education system failing to result in a more equalized distribution of incomes and reducing class disparities. Conflict theory also does not emphasize homeostasis and equilibrium. Rather, it asserts that order is maintained through power and coercion, and institutions that guide and shape the daily lives of its citizens may do so in ways that are oppressive and constrain individuals. This perspective defines the socializing and integrative capacities of education as a locus of social control as it constrains personal development by rewarding conformity and subordination.

Outdoor adventure programs are uniquely positioned to provide experiences that may cultivate additional social outcomes for youth, which differ markedly from those developed in the mass education system. The routine and order of the mass education system socializes and

equips youth with skills and values (such as order, hard work, responsibility, respect, participation, and cooperation) (Brint et al. 2001) that will, in theory, make them desirable, competitive candidates in the labor market as adults. The level of education attained has also been positively associated with having liberalizing effects on youth, in terms of their perspectives on civic engagement, the environment, and gender (Kingston et al.), which may positively impact society overall. What is concerning about the mass education model, though, is the dissemination of a narrow range of values onto a diverse and vibrant student body. Arguably, the mass education system may also be adept at constraining personal development and shaping a compliant workforce. Indoctrination, whether intentional or unintentional, does little by way of offering youth the latitude to become self-actualized adults.

The novel environments of outdoor programs are well-suited to provide youth additional opportunities for skill development and personal growth. These spaces represent a complete departure from everyday life and everyday experiences, which can often feel regimented and stagnant. The outdoor environment provides not only the additional space and contexts to utilize skills learned in school but to expand upon them while further exploring facets of their self-concept. While the school day is characterized by routine and order, the outdoor environment allows youth to explore their sense of self within the dynamic context of variability, adversity, and challenging conditions. It is through these challenging conditions that youth cited becoming more resilient, empowered, and independent, all while working together and forging social relationships and a sense of community (Richmond et al. 2018; Richmond and Sibthorp 2019; Warner and Dillenschneider 2019).

The realm of outdoor programming is not without its faults, though. The issues of equity, diversity, inclusion, and cultural competence that are apparent in the mainstream education

system are mirrored in outdoor programs, as well. In developing and implementing outdoor adventure programs, special consideration must be given to: who has access, why do some have access and others do not, and what does meaningful participation look like for those who are excluded so that they will want to participate? Outdoor programs have historically been dominated by white, affluent youth and have not reflected the dominant values and perspectives about one's relationship with natural spaces (Ho and Chang 2021). Outdoor programs have also marginalized youth with limited economic resources, thereby limiting their participation and opportunity. Equitable and inclusive practices, therefore, provide a solid foundation from which to provide quality outdoor programming and experiences for *all* youth.

It is imperative that outdoor program administrators develop policies that 'meet youth where they are at' to reduce barriers to participation. One significant barrier to participation is simply having limited economic resources. The opportunity to participate in outdoor programming is a class-based issue as the materials (e.g. camping equipment, recreational equipment, etc.) needed to spend time in the wilderness are costly, getting to wilderness spaces can be a barrier in terms of time and transportation, and a lack of experience may eliminate the opportunity all together. Outdoor programs can increase accessibility and participation by subsidizing low-income youths' participation fees through providing scholarships. Accessibility and participation can further be saturated by expanding eligibility criteria and also providing scholarships based on race, ethnicity, and metropolitan residency (Gress and Hall 2017).

Efforts to increase diversity should also be a program priority if participation is to further be saturated. Minority youth are not well-represented not only in the composition of participant groups but also at the leadership level. Participation of minority youth can be increased by providing scholarships but also in diversifying leadership. Representation of minority groups at

the leadership level can help youth feel supported in their wilderness experiences, as well as help them feel like they, too, belong there. Increasing diversity among youth participants and in leadership may also have the added benefit of eliciting a culture shift in outdoor programming overall by providing additional perspectives and texture to the outdoor programming landscape. The current state of white, male perspectives and experiences dominating leadership and facilitative practices can be detrimental to youth and does not meet diverse youth where they are at. If outdoor leaders are only teaching and mentoring to the abilities, needs, and experiences of white, affluent youth, then outdoor programming runs the risk of disadvantaging diverse youth similar to the ways in which school tracking constrains performance and opportunities for youth.

Researchers further advocate for not only increasing numbers of minority youth and staff, but they call for a radical paradigm shift in program and policy development by directly involving minority groups in the decision-making in these areas. Involving minority groups may ensure that programs and policies meet the needs of youth in ways that are culturally sensitive, inclusive, and relevant (Brown, Gillard, and Garst 2019). Incorporating diverse perspectives and exploring minorities' experiences with the outdoors into program development ensure that youth are being met where they are at and ensures culturally competent programs are offered.

Additionally, it is especially important to offer activities that youth are interested in within the context of a multicultural lens by sourcing the information directly from them. The current body of research could be enriched by examining, specifically, outdoor programs, if any, that have included youth in program development and design. Insights and elements from these programs could be valuable in guiding other outdoor programs' journeys to becoming more inclusive, culturally competent, and relevant.

Access to enriching activities, such as outdoor adventure programs, and the opportunities they present in terms of personal development and future social outcomes for low-income and minority youth are issues of social justice. Nature is for everyone, but wilderness spaces have long been reserved for those with the economic means to access them. Outdoor programs can do better in providing meaningful opportunities for marginalized youth to grow and think outside the classroom.

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APPENDIX

Table 2. Coding Scheme

Code	Definition	Subcodes
Socialization	Dissemination of dominant <i>value systems/values</i>	Values Messages Dominant
	Shaping <i>conduct, behavior</i>	Behaviors
	Social Outcomes	Attitudes
Economic inequality	Differential access to resources based on social class	Income Low-income Socioeconomic status Resources Class Wealth Poor
Achievement gap	Disparity in educational outcomes between low-income and minority students as measured through standardized test scores	Performance Test scores Learning Achievement
Opportunity gap	Circumstances and obstacles impact the educational experiences of students throughout the life course and beyond the classroom	Earnings Enrichment Preparedness Development Skill development Outcomes