



Assessing young children’s learning within an informal setting at Disney’s Kids’ Discovery Clubs

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Program Profile	
Program Description:	The Kids’ Discovery Club (KDC) program is a conservation education program in Disney’s Animal Kingdom theme park, located in Orlando, FL. The program is comprised of 6 free-choice learning stations, situated within the park, designed for children ages 5-8 years old and their families. Each KDC station incorporates a specific wildlife-related theme, and features activities and props for young guests around that theme. The stations are operated by a team of education interns trained to engage children and their families in the activities and to deliver age-appropriate conservation messages to young guests.
Program Goals:	The purpose of the KDC program is to engage children and their families in educational activities that connect them to nature and to inspire them to protect wildlife and wild places.
Program Funding:	Internally Funded by the Walt Disney Corporation
Program Links:	http://disneyworld.disney.go.com/parks/animal-kingdom/attractions/kids-discovery-club/
Evaluation Profile	
Evaluation Goals & Questions:	<p>Goals: The goal was to determine the effectiveness of the KDC at encouraging children to learn about and help wildlife, specifically, whether these brief and engaging experiences affect children’s knowledge of wildlife and interest in conservation behaviors.</p> <p>Questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What knowledge and messages do children take away from a KDC experience? • How interested are children in initiating a conservation activity after participating in a KDC activity? • What barriers do parents encounter in assisting children with conservation activities?
Evaluation Methods:	<p>Following their participation at the KDC, children were assessed using a verbal interview that was designed to be fun and interactive so that the assessment experience would not deviate from guest’s expectations for an enjoyable experience.</p> <p>Interview Questions</p> <p>In the interviews children were asked 4 questions; 2 were multiple-choice and 2 were open-ended response questions. First, the child was asked a multiple-choice knowledge question about what they learned at the KDC followed by an open-ended response question that asked them to demonstrate comprehension of the content. The second multiple-choice question asked children which conservation-related activity they intend to engage in followed by an open-ended response question about why they chose that activity. The multiple-choice questions had children select from a set of potential answers represented by labeled images.</p>

	<p>Survey Development Each question and image was tested for reliability to ensure it would be understandable to children in the target age range. The 3 KDC stations (KDCs) included in the assessment were selected based on the suitability of their location and the number of visitors they received.</p> <p>Procedure Participants were randomly selected by being the “‘next child’ to enter the KDC area”, and parental consent was obtained before children began the interview. Each interview involved two education team members, one to ask questions and one to record data. After asking a multiple-choice question, the interviewer would read each answer aloud while placing its corresponding image on the display board and repeated the question once all the answer choices were displayed. In addition, a control group (N=132) was interviewed using the same set of questions prior to entering the park.</p> <p>Follow-Up After children chose a conservation action to take, the parents were asked if they knew of any barriers to their child following through with that activity. If barriers were identified, the child was asked to choose another activity they would like to do. Children received a postcard (self-addressed, stamped) to mail back after completing their chosen activity.</p>
Instruments:	Limited instruments are available in the report.
How were results used?	<p>Program improvement: At the Africa KDC, where kids ‘track’ a rhino, findings showed that children had good recall, but low comprehension. This KDC had more content than the others and the amount of information seemed to be too much. As a result, the focus was narrowed from 3 clues (tracks, browse, and scat) down to 2 clues (tracks, scat).</p> <p>Conservation Actions The study revealed which action messages were most appealing to children and which had parental support. This helps educators focus on actions that are of interest to children and supported by parents.</p> <p>Staff training 1) The results were used to adjust the training to focus on the most effective ways of delivering the program. 2) The results support the program’s impact on guests, which is helpful for getting buy-in and commitment from staff during training.</p> <p>Contribution to the field The study was published in the International Zoo Educators Association journal, providing accessibility to other informal educators and benefiting the field of informal education as a whole. It was important that the study be made available, as there is little published literature about informal learning in children 5-8 years old and it could serve as a resource for other informal educators in evaluating and improving their programs.</p>
Evaluation Cost:	<p>A dollar amount is unavailable, however below is a list of the expenditures that were needed to conduct the evaluation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • External evaluation consultant • Materials/Supplies: display board, printing images, printing postcards, postage • Labor: 21 days, approx. 210 labor hours (this is strictly regarding conducting the actual interviews and does not include evaluation development time or data analysis)
Evaluation Insights:	<p>What worked well? The tool created for the assessment portion of the study, images as answer options on a display board, worked very well. The approach was fun and age-appropriate, and successful within the unique setting of Disney’s Animal Kingdom.</p> <p>What would you be sure to do again? <i>Question Format:</i> Ask children the question, provide them with the answer options and follow up by repeating the question a second time. This was very important during the prototyping stage, because children were unable to remember the question after all of the answers had been read aloud. In order to show that kids are actually answering the correct question, it needed to be repeated after reading the answers choices.</p> <p><i>Pilot testing/Reliability-testing</i> Pilot test questions and images with children in the age range you will be evaluating in order</p>

	<p>to make any necessary adjustments before starting the actual assessments. Conducting reliability tests with the questions and images used in the study ensured that (1) the wording was appropriate for the target audience and (2) a majority of children could identify the images.</p> <p>What were important evaluation lessons learned? Children do experience an increase in knowledge after participating in short, fast-paced activities that are led by trained educators.</p> <p>The evaluation found that children think wildlife is important and that they want to help protect it. The activities children found especially appealing were those that engaged them in the lives of the animals (looking for animals, looking for animal clues, etc.). This information is useful considering the limited research focused on a child’s preference concerning conservation behaviors.</p> <p>Parents did not identify strong barriers to their children participating in wildlife activities so long as the activities were age-appropriate and realistic. This is particularly important because the program’s main goal is behavior change, so it should promote conservation behaviors that children can actually perform.</p> <p>Based on open-ended responses, it seems that children have an understanding about how a specific conservation behavior can help wildlife. When asked why they chose a specific conservation action, children were able to connect how the behaviors they chose have a positive impact on wildlife.</p>
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