ADDRESSING RACIAL INEQUITIES IN ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION
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Abstract:

Race demographics in environmental education (EE) organizations impact the diversity of perspectives reflected in EE programs, and thereby who is represented in the communities being served. This is especially important in that many EE programs are run by majority-white organizations, whose mission and goals are to serve a diversity of populations. The purpose of this study was to understand the primary barriers to racial equity in EE programs, and the subsequent gateways to accessing these programs. To do this, I studied the existing literature on the intersections between environmental education and multicultural education. I also interned with IslandWood, in which, through eight informational interviews and my own observations, I was able to understand the organization’s way of addressing racial inequities from the point of view of the people carrying out that work. I then analyzed the intersection of the literature review, interview notes, and my own work and observations at IslandWood to find the primary barriers—including representation, levels of awareness of race issues, and teacher limitations—and gateways—hiring practices, building relationships and safe spaces, and intentionality in programming—of existing programs. The broader systemic disparities that affect racial equity can begin to be addressed through understanding how the findings of this study practically apply to existing organizations. If the vision of environmental education is to inspire the next generation of environmental stewards, addressing racial disparities at various levels in EE, as well as finding specific solutions, must be a priority.