

## **MS Thesis Defense**

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**Title:** HOW DOES AN ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATOR ADDRESS STUDENT ENGAGEMENT IN A MEANINGFUL WATERSHED EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCE (MWEE)?

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### **ABSTRACT**

Children represent the future and thus by providing them with effective environmental educational experiences, educators may be taking a critical step in preventing “the probable serious environmental problems in the future” (Gökhan, 2010, p. 56). The Meaningful Watershed Educational Experience (MWEE) is an excellent example of one such education program. MWEEs aim to educate and enhance the students’ relationship with the Chesapeake Bay Watershed through an integration of classroom activities and fieldwork. As environmental educators and role models, field interpreters are a major component and significant influence on the local MWEE programs, however their perspective as to how they have impacted the programs has yet to be examined. Through a qualitative analysis and specific focus on the behavioral, emotional, and cognitive dimensions of student engagement, the researcher intended to address this void. The focus of the study was to examine how the local MWEE field interpreters understood and addressed student engagement in a field setting. This was measured via data collected from observations of and semi-structured, one-on-one interviews with each field interpreter involved with the local MWEE programs. Data analysis uncovered that field interpreters demonstrated a strong awareness of student engagement. Furthermore, they defined, recognized, and addressed student engagement within the constructs of the emotional, behavioral, and cognitive dimensions. Ultimately, the individual experiences of each MWEE field interpreter provides insight into the phenomenon, however further research is required to strengthen the awareness of how, if at all, their perspectives of student engagement directly impact student outcomes.