



## Using an Art Project to Stimulate Youth Interest in Soil

Eric C. Brevik (1), Corinne E. Brevik (1), Joshua J. Steffan (1,2)

(1) Department of Natural Sciences, Dickinson State University, Dickinson, ND, USA (eric.brevik@dickinsonstate.edu), (2) Department of Agriculture and Technical Studies, Dickinson State University, Dickinson, ND, USA

Dickinson State University organizes four Family Science Day events each fall during the months of September, October, November, and December. Activities are geared toward elementary-aged children to increase student engagement in the sciences. Offered on Saturday afternoons, each event focuses on a different science-related theme. Families can attend these events free of charge, and the kids participate in a large variety of hands-on activities that center around the event's theme.

An important part of generating enthusiasm for a subject is making it interesting, and with young children art projects provide a great avenue to generate interest and enthusiasm. Such projects are fun and involve creativity, allowing the children a chance to express themselves. To this end, each of the Family Science Days includes one or more arts and crafts projects that result in a fun learning experience the children can take home. In November 2015 the art project involved creating a soil profile. The children were given a paper handout showing a soil profile sketch lined up beside a color photograph of a soil profile. They were also supplied with glue and several containers of different colored soils from surface and subsurface horizons. To create their art project, the children glued samples of soil onto their profile sketch, attempting to create a profile that looked similar to the color photograph. The handout also included fundamental information about each of the horizons shown.

The children received this project with great enthusiasm. There were nine other science-based activities available at the Family Science Day when the soil art project was offered, and the art project was one of the most popular stops in the room. The children typically spent a good deal of time working on their art project, including asking questions about the various colored soils available to them and the basic properties of soil. Whether the popularity of the project came from the chance to be creative, the challenge of trying to recreate the photograph, or just a general interest in getting their fingers dirty, it is our hope (in the bigger picture) that the art project created more awareness of soil and, in at least a few of the young participants, that it might stimulate interest in soil later in their lives.