

BSU

Honors Program

Lindsey Becker

**HOW CAN SUMMER CAMPS INFLUENCE
CHILDREN SOCIALLY, EMOTIONALLY,
PHYSICALLY, AND COGNITIVELY?**

Elementary Education

24 April 2017

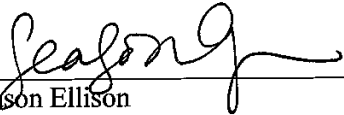
Bemidji State University
Honors Program
Department of Professional Education

How Can Summer Camps Influence Children Socially, Emotionally, Physically, and
Cognitively?
Lindsey Becker



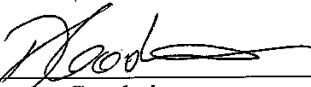
Porter Coggins
Associate Professor
Thesis Advisor

Date: 10 April 2017



Season Ellison
Assistant Professor
Director of Honors and Liberal Education

Date: 10 Apr. 2017



Timothy Goodwin
Associate Professor
Thesis Reader

Date: 10 April 2017

How Can Summer Camps Influence Children Socially, Emotionally, Physically, and Cognitively?

Lindsey Becker

The following is a study of the ways in which experiences at summer camps influence children in four different categories: socially, emotionally, physically, and cognitively. There is a lack of interest and dedication to the outdoor experience one gets at an institution that operates any form of nature exploration and teaches skills needed to survive in or to understand the natural world. Though the author collects evidence from across the United States, the primary focus is near the Twin Cities of Minnesota at a camp at which the author was employed. Some of the evidence is her personal experience, some is from the writings of her co-workers, and a majority is taken from the works of professional writers who have reflected on the topic of the outcomes summer camps have to offer. The author's research leads her to conclude that summer camps are places in where a child grows a closer relationship to nature and becomes more excited to be outdoors.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I dedicate this thesis to every child that I have had the pleasure of counseling during my time at Voyageur Environmental Center.

I would like to thank all the counselors and other staff who have had an influence on me as well as an influence on what I decided to say in this piece.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter	Page
1. Introduction	
Background	1
Statement of the Problem	1
Research Question(s)	2
Statement of the Research Hypothesis/Hypotheses	2
Significance of the Research Problem and Study	2
Limitations and Assumptions	4
Definition of Terms	4
Summary Statement	5
2. Method	
Introduction	6
Methodology	6
Human Subject Protection (IRB) Information	8
Summary Statement	8
3. Review of the Literature	
Introduction	10
The Indoor Problem	10
What do children miss out on by being primarily indoors?	11
How might participation in summer camps support the social, emotional, physical, and cognitive growth of a child?	12
What kind of changes do camp staff see in children who have attended a summer camp from the time they arrive to the moment they depart?.....	13
What might children dislike about the camp experience?.....	15
Summary Statement	16
4. Analysis	
Introduction	17
The Indoor Problem	17
What do children miss out on by being primarily indoors?	18
How might participation in summer camps support the social, emotional, physical, and cognitive growth of a child?	21
What kind of changes do camp staff see in children who have attended a summer camp from the time they arrive to the moment they depart?.....	25
What might children dislike about the camp experience?.....	28
Summary Statement	30
5. Results	
Introduction	32
Results	32

	Summary Statement	33
6.	Discussion and Conclusion	
	Introduction.....	34
	Discussion.....	34
	Conclusion	34
	Summary Statement	35
	References	36
	Appendix A. Survey Questionnaire	38
	Appendix B.IRB Letter of Approval.....	39

Chapter 1: Introduction

Background

Nature summer camps have been a large part of my life. As a child, I looked forward to my week at camp every year in Mankato, Minnesota. I made friends, learned skills, and got to leave my problems at home. Camp was a magical place. As an adult, I thought it was just my child's mind over-exaggerating a simple thing, until I saw camp the same way while working at a camp as a counselor. Now I see that magic working in the lives of the children I watch over during my summers. It astounds me how they grow physically, emotionally, cognitively, and socially in less than a week. It is a privilege to be able to see that growth as it occurs.

Statement of the Problem

Some people may look at summer camps as only a vacation. These same people may not give experiences at camp merit and may suggest that camps are just a way for adults to get a week away from their children. Adolescents may also look down on the camp experience if they have never done it. Many youths of this generation prefer to stay indoors with all the comforts they take for granted during the summer. Parents and children might not utilize all that camps have to offer even though most camps have something for almost every child. Parents and children could be more willing to look at the camp programs offered around their home and at least consider the ways camp might influence children.

Research Question(s)

1. What do children miss out on by being primarily indoors?
2. How might participation in summer camps support the social, emotional, physical, and cognitive growth of a child?
3. What kind of changes do camp staff see in children who have attended a summer camp from the time they arrive to the moment they depart?
4. What might children dislike about the camp experience?

Statement of Research Hypothesis / Hypotheses

The aim of this project is to use literature and personal narrative to explore why children may benefit from experience in nature in some way such as a summer camp and to expose the way nature and time at camp nurture a child physically, socially, emotionally, and cognitively during his or her months off from school. Exploration of the ways camping can be an uncomfortable experience for campers is included as well.

Significance of the Research Problem and Study

Many children miss out on the wonder and excitement of being outdoors. Richard Louv, a writer and journalist who has spent his career combating what he calls nature-deficit disorder (a lack of connection with the natural world) states in his work, *Last Child in the Woods* (2005), “Today, kids are aware of the global threats to the environment – but their physical contact, their intimacy with nature is fading. That’s exactly the opposite of how it was when I was a child” (p. 1). He writes of his childhood, with long walks through the woods and time spent catching fish using unusual methods

and he feels saddened by the fact that many children in the last two or three generations cannot say that they make the same types of memories.

I am not convinced that all children are deprived of an intimacy with nature, but I do see the massive decline in the number of children with meaningful connections to nature. In my nine years working with numerous diverse groups of children, I have found it to be difficult to get some children excited about leaving their house during the summer. The children I have cared for have even resorted to crying and screaming to avoid spending even an hour out of their house. With bikes, playgrounds, trees to climb, and other children to interact with, they still cannot seem to find the fun in nature and become easily bored. These same children can watch five straight hours of uneducational, unbeneficial television and tell me that they have had a great day. What upsets me about their behavior is that the amount of time spent outside during the day is so substantially lower than time spent inside. Neither is necessarily better, yet I believe there should be more of a balance.

There are people who do not see the imbalance between time spent in the indoors and the outdoors as a problem. It could be said that children are not hurt by spending more time indoors, playing on their electronics, lounging around on couches, and living their lives without knowing what it is like to develop an intimacy with nature. However, it could also be said that never gaining the intimacy that Louv discusses will be a loss for children. Limiting children's exposure to nature means less time is given to building an intimacy with and understanding nature. Sending children to summer camps is one way to get children excited about nature and more willing to spend time outdoors.

Limitations and Assumptions

My limitations include a review of the literature on outdoor summer camps for ages six to eighteen that have a stated purpose of connection to nature and outdoor activities. I also chose to interview my co-workers at the camp where I work. The low number of responses I received from my coworkers at Voyageur Environmental Center in Mound, Minnesota upset the progress of my work. The decreased amount of participants changed the direction of this paper.

Definition of Terms

Summer Camp: Typically, summer camps run anywhere between 24 hours and two weeks. Summer camps can include activities such as canoeing, fireside songs and plays, hikes, snowshoeing, talent shows, high ropes or teambuilding courses, cooking experiences, dance, tent-camping, and outdoor movies. These activities are often new and exciting for children. Camps get adolescents out of the environment they are accustomed to and take them to a new place. In this new environment, campers learn skills that broaden their horizons and maybe even change the way they look at life and relationships with peers or the environment.

ODLS: Outdoor Living Skills. At the summer camp where I was employed, any staff designated to a position involving outdoor education led this class. ODLS class focuses on teaching campers fundamental lessons about how to survive in the outdoors. One critical message we share during ODLS classes is the concept of PMA.

PMA: Positive Mental Attitude. Children at camp are taught that a positive mental attitude is needed every three seconds in a survival situation. In addition, campers use their newfound knowledge of PMA in everyday situations. When campers remain

positive by trying new things that may not initially look pleasing to them, they often find that camp is more enjoyable because they engage in play.

Summary Statement

The camp experience means a lot to me. At camp, children stay overnight and participate in outdoor activities designed to foster a fondness for nature and being outdoors. There are children who do not have a meaningful connection to nature simply because they have not yet had the chance to explore the outdoors, or because they choose to spend significantly more time indoors than outdoors. Summer camps are one way children get to experience nature firsthand in order to gain an appreciation for nature. When children appreciate nature, they are more likely to spend more time exploring the outdoors as they age, which is important because there are benefits, explored further in this paper, to spending time in the outdoors.

Chapter 2: Methods

Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to use literature and personal narrative to explore why children may benefit from experience in nature at a summer camp and to expose how nature and time at camp nurture children physically, socially, emotionally, and cognitively during their months off from school. Exploration of the ways camp can be an uncomfortable experience for campers is included as well.

Methodology

For this thesis, I collected and analyzed survey data and reviewed literature that I found related to my research questions. I researched the benefits of sending adolescents to summer camps through every outlet I could: utilizing books, websites, journals, and the people around me who also feel a fondness for this subject. I had to disregard literature focused on children who went to summer camps that were dedicated to any medium that was not nature-based, such as art, music, and the martial arts. Though I believe these types of camps to have merit as well, writings on them were not consistent with the data on nature camps as these camps are not as invested in building an intimacy with nature. Age was also a limitation as some summer camps have programs for adults only and therefore would not fit the focus of this thesis.

To gain personal testimony, I used my position as a counselor at a summer camp in Mound, Minnesota called Voyageur Environmental Center. While working at Voyageur, I made observations, conducted surveys, and compiled information. The collection of this information helped me build into my academic study a personal, face-to-face component. At first, when I decided to survey my co-workers at the camp where I

am employed, I believed I would receive replies from at least ten people. As the summer went on, I realized that a lack of time, not a lack of interest, kept my co-workers from participating. Because of the low number of participants, I updated my expectations to better accommodate my subjects. I informed my co-workers who wanted to participate that they, not only had more time to get back to me, but that they also did not have to feel obligated if they simply could not complete the survey. The decrease in my sample size put a limitation on my research and changed the structure of my thesis project. Each person who had the time to respond had two or more years of experience working as an administrator or the administrator's assistant, two positions that see the everyday functions of camp and have the best view of the development that takes place in the lives of the children who attend camp.

Though I planned to speak with at least ten of my co-workers, the summer was too full of fun and busy schedules for many to get back to me. The interviews that were completed helped me to develop an understanding of what the people who work with children during the summer see as benefits to the children's social, emotional, cognitive, and physical health. Participants were asked to think about:

1. The kind of changes they see in children from the moment they arrive to the time they leave.
2. The ways children grow from their camp experiences.
3. The social aspects of camp
4. The way team building is used at camp and what it does for children.

These surveys were conducted with the consent of the participants and in a private location. They took place the summer of 2016 at the campsite where the participants felt most comfortable. Once subjects gave their consent to participate and I notified participants of the purpose of this study, they received a prompt stating simply: “Please describe in what ways you have seen the children involved in the camp program grow or decline physically, socially, emotionally, and cognitively.”

Each participant was given a survey sheet and directed to write their answer out on their own time and get their responses back to me before either their last day at Voyageur Environmental Center, or my last day, as participants had different end days. Once participants answered the prompt to their liking, I collected their responses and read each once then set it aside. After some time, I revisited each of the responses and went through them to highlight themes. I found common themes that supported both my observations and those written about by the authors I quote in this study as well as themes I had yet to consider. These interviews led to new discoveries and insights that helped lead and support my research.

Human Subject Protection (IRB) information

I have complied with the requirements of the IRB to obtain testimonies from my co-workers. The letter of approval is attached in the appendices.

Summary Statement

The research I conducted works in tandem with testimonies from my place of employment in Mound, Minnesota to act as evidence for the support of my claims. These additions came from the people who have dedicated large periods of time to camp life and who gave personal testimonies about how children seem to be influenced by the time

they spend at camp. Participants answered the author's research questions in writing over the summer of 2016. By combining these testimonies with the existing peer-reviewed research, I am able to better evaluate the potential growth associated with camp activities and experiences and guided interaction with the natural world.

Chapter 3: Review of the Literature

Introduction

This section addresses a review of the existing literature to provide background on my sources and why these sources are relevant to this thesis. Through this review, it should become evident to the reader that the literature used for support is both reliable and relevant to the research. I addressed a variety of topics such as:

- The Indoor Problem
- Support of Social, Emotional, Physical, and Cognitive Growth
- Changes in Children who have Attended a Summer Camp
- What children might dislike about the camp experience.

The Indoor Problem

The indoor problem is the hypothesis that children spend significantly more time indoors than they spend outdoors which is an imbalance that causes children to miss out on what the outdoors has to offer. The literature in this section provides evidence to support the proceeding hypothesis. The sources show data on children's changing likelihood to play outdoors.

Rhonda Clements, a professor of Education at Hofstra University of New York conducted a study in which researchers polled eight hundred and thirty mothers in the United States to determine if today's youth participate in active, outdoor play as much as their mothers did in their own childhood. The poll found that mothers reflected that their own childhoods included more outdoor play than their children currently get. This article helps me to make my case that there is a decline in the amount of time children spend

outdoors. The evidence supports the theory that children, when given the choice, make the choice to stay indoors significantly more often than they participate in outdoor activities.

A survey collected and analyzed by Fairbank, Maslin, Maullin, Metz & Associates (D) and Public Opinion Strategies (R) reflects the findings that outline the amount of time children spend in nature and the connections they make with the environment. The study finds that fewer than two in five American children are active outside in a natural area on a weekly basis. This team of researchers determined through this study that there is a preference for indoor activities. Their work supports the theory that children need to get outdoors and connect with nature on a more regular basis in order to engage in all the outdoors has to offer.

What do children miss out on by being primarily indoors?

Because of the indoor problem, there are children that fail to participate in the incredible effects nature can have on a child. The stresses of life can get children down. However, if more children utilize nature for what it has to offer, they may find some peace through the environment.

Before showing how nature is a moderator of stress, I have to first establish that children are stressed. Patricia Shiono Ph.D., the director of research and grants for epidemiology at the Center for the Future of Children, and Linda Sandham Quinn Ph.D., a research associate at the Center for Future of Children, provide evidence I show that parent's divorce causes stress in the lives of children. Their article centers around the recent rise in the rate of divorce and how the rise negatively affects children. Christopher Munsey supplies evidence to show how school is a stressor for contemporary children in his article on the factors that are causing stress in the lives of children. In this article,

Munsey states stress, whether it is caused by schools or another stressor, is a large concern for children and adults. Finally, Victoria Tennant adds information involving the stress socialization has on children. In her article, she describes how the complexity of our expanding world contributes to causes of stress. She also illustrates what we can do to help alleviate these stressors for children. Tennant affirms Munsey's perspective and agrees that divorce and school add stress to children's lives.

Corraliza, Collado, and Bethelmy (2012) show how children who are near or in contact with nature tend to live less stressful lives. Urban children are more likely to have little to no connection with nature due to the diminishing number of natural areas in their communities. This article supports that many children, especially those from urban settings, need exposure to nature provided by the typical summer camp to give them an outlet that will reduce their stress and help them to be more relaxed.

How might participation in summer camps support the social, emotional, physical, and cognitive growth of a child?

As children age, they have the potential to show social, emotional, physical, and cognitive growth. It is this growth that helps prepare adolescents for adulthood. At camps, many activities and protocols challenge campers to grow in these areas. Through team building and nutrition monitoring, campers receive support for their social, physical, emotional, and cognitive growth.

Charlotte Fisher, a coordinator at the Western Pennsylvania School for Blind Children, writes that team building is a positive way to build trust, teamwork, and communication between groups of students or co-workers. As team building at camps is a

large part of my argument that children grow in their developmental areas, this article supports my claim that team building helps influence children's social growth.

Ventura, Anzman-Frasca, and Garst (2014) establish how participation in summer camps helps campers to develop better nutritional habits. The authors display strategies used to get children to eat healthy food options that summer camps utilize. The authors of this piece suggest one way that camps help children physically, when they wrote that good nutrition is a priority at most camps.

Children at camp will deal with emotions in several different areas of camp life. One of the toughest areas on emotional growth is participation in team-building exercises. Hansen, Larson, and Dworkin (2003) provide insights on the ways adolescents learn to manage their emotions while participating in team building activities. These researchers support the claim that children grow emotionally through these experiences.

What kind of changes do camp staff see in children who have attended a summer camp from the time they arrive to the moment they depart?

Camp staff have the unique perspective to see the ways children can change from the moment they step off the bus or out of their parents' vehicle. The staff in charge of watching over the campers see how they rise and fall throughout their stay at camp. Watching a child for 24 hours allows staff to see even the slightest changes that may occur in this environment and away from their parents.

Dresner and Gill (1994) explain how participation in summer nature camps puts children into a setting in which they raise their self-esteem, create interpersonal relationships, and foster connections with the natural world. In their article, the authors give insight to the mental benefits of exposure to the natural world through summer

campers. They answer this section's question by stating how time spent at summer camps challenges adolescents to grow in self-esteem, create interpersonal relationships with campers and staff, and form a connection to the natural world that will inspire these children to care for nature. They provide ample evidence to show the changes that take place in each of these areas.

Two men who care deeply for the natural world, Richard Louv and Timothy Goodwin, have taken the initiative to warn the world about the potential dangers of a world where children have little connection to nature. Louv's book, *Last Child in the Woods* is his contribution to encouraging outdoor play. Goodwin's book, *Within These Woods* serves as a collection of essays on the plants and animals he has studied and his thoughts and feelings on the relationship between the woods and his family. These books, written by men of the woods, show just how deeply the connections between these men and nature have affected their lives. Their connections to the woods started during their childhoods, and they both show a longing for their children to attain the same reverence for nature. These men are examples of people who were changed for the better by nature during their childhood.

Erdogen's article proposes research that when children are exposed to environmental education such as the kind utilized at most summer camps, they care more about protecting nature through their own actions. These adolescents are more likely to participate in acts that support natural areas, such as recycling, planting trees, reusing everyday objects instead of throwing them away, leaving nature in the form they found it, and reducing the use of items that result in excessive waste. The author specifies what

kinds of actions children take after they have experienced environmental education. The actions, explored further in the analysis, are changes in the participant's typical behavior.

A study about how attending a session of summer camp may change a child's willingness to display ecological behavior (a respect for nature and its elements) and the factors that could cause this change is included. The authors, Collado, Staats, and Corraliza, provide background about how a love for nature is more likely to grow in a child than within an adult because children are still forming their feelings about new environments, whereas adults are more likely to have already made up their minds about nature and its impact on their lives. A central claim of this article is that, in general, children change to have a more positive relationship with nature after they spend time at a summer camp.

What might children dislike about the camp experience?

There are quite a few reasons people use to justify distancing themselves from nature. Whether it is heat, bugs or dangerous animals, nature has elements that can get under people's skin. Campers will have to deal with these elements, as well as homesickness and poor interactions with staff.

Thurber and Walton address the concept of homesickness. They define homesickness, describe the situations in which it might be a problem, and suggest ways of preventing homesickness from occurring. These medical professionals state that summer camps are a place where children are likely to feel homesick and make the point that homesickness is a common, but treatable concern in the lives of both children and adults.

Along with homesickness, problems with staff can cause children to dislike their camp experience. Camp staff is chosen with the best of intentions through an application and interview process similar to most other jobs. Candidates should show a love for children and the outdoors, as well as an ability to care for and protect both entities. Unfortunately, campers do not always see eye to eye with the staff watching over them. One of my colleagues recalls some experiences where campers were upset with their staff. Her testimony is evidence that, sometimes, it is the staff children may dislike.

Summary Statement

The proceeding literature is the foundation of my claims listed in the analysis portion. Resources include books, journals, testimonies, and articles. Each article shows evidence to answer one or more of my four research questions.

Chapter 4: Analysis

Introduction

The questions I have set out to answer center around the way a child may be affected, both negatively and positively, by time spent in summer camps. Each question can be answered by addressing social, cognitive, emotional, and physical issues and analyzing how these issues relate to each question. The following topics are reviewed:

- The indoor problem,
- What do children miss out on by being primarily indoors,
- How might participation in summer camps support the social, emotional, physical, and cognitive growth of a child,
- What kind of changes do camp staff see in children who have attended a summer camp from the time they arrive to the moment they depart,
- What might children dislike about the camp experience?

The Indoor Problem

Today's youth spend significantly more time on indoor activities than on activities that take place outdoors. Rhonda Clements, professor of Education at Hofstra University in New York, did a study in which she polled eight hundred and thirty mothers about the time their children spent outdoors and the time the mothers spent outdoors as children. Clements found that, "The results from this study support the assumption that there is a decrease in the extent to which today's children in the USA are participating in active, outdoor play" (2004). Clements' results suggest that outdoor activities are not as abundant in the lives of children today as being outdoors was in their parents' childhoods. Clements is not the only researcher to conclude that adolescents do not spend enough time outside.

A poll taken in 2011 of 602 children of varying ages, genders, geographies, and races found that fewer than two out of five American children participate in outdoor activities on a weekly basis (Fairbank, Maslin, Maullin, Metz & Associates (D) and Public Opinion Strategies (R)). In the same study, researchers found that the reasons children stay indoors fluctuate from variables like an aversion to heat or bugs, to fearing crime happening outside of their home, to simply not having access to a “natural area” (Fairbank, Maslin, Maullin, Metz & Associates (D) and Public Opinion Strategies (R), 2011). These criteria are factors that keep children indoors, however children who have braved these factors felt that the time they spent outdoors fostered their appreciation for nature. The children who were polled answered that, though they spend less time outdoors than online, “they ‘have had a personal experience in nature’ that made them appreciate it more” (Fairbank, Maslin, Maullin, Metz & Associates (D) and Public Opinion Strategies (R), 2011, p.3). When children do take the time to play outdoors, they have a higher potential to connect with and appreciate nature. Even so, the average child does not spend enough time outdoors. Children who do get outside benefit from the exposure to nature. It is the job of parents, educators, and mentors to create opportunities for children to gain an appreciation for nature. Summer camps are a great way to provide outdoor experiences, since nature summer camps provide many outdoor activities.

What do children miss out on by being primarily indoors?

Children may have many stressors in their lives. A rise in divorce can be a reason that more children are stressed (Shiono & Quinn, 1994). Some children feel more pressure to do well in school and stress about getting the grades their parents want them to achieve (Munsey, 2010). Reaching certain social statuses can be a goal that children

stress about (Tennent, 2005). Mix together all the things that could potentially stress out a child with the additional stresses caused by extra-curricular activities and it is easy to see why children today have so many worries (Tennent, 2005).

What camps, or even nature in general, can offer children under stress are releases from some of the stress they carry. Dealing with stress is an emotional issue that camps can help to alleviate. According to Corraliza, Collado, and Bethelmy (2010), the majority of natural elements present in a child's everyday environment affect their stress levels. These University educators of psychology from Madrid, Spain conclude that a larger number of natural elements present in one's life is linked to lower stress levels, while a smaller amount of natural elements present is linked to higher stress levels (Corraliza, Collado, & Bethelmy, 2010). Researchers found that, "...those children who have more access to natural areas are able to cope better with stress and therefore their stress level is lower than it would be expected if nature was not acting as a protective factor. The impact of stressful events on children is weaker when the amount of nearby nature is higher" (Corraliza, Collado, & Bethelmy, 2010, p. 262). Because nature can have a stress reducing influence on children, it is beneficial to children to have access to the natural world as much as they possibly can. When children do not have exposure to a natural area, they miss out on the stress-relieving powers of the natural world. Urban children, especially, suffer a loss, as there are few natural environments to be found in urban neighborhoods. Children without ready access to nature also will not be prepared to adapt to nature should the need arise.

Children who go to summer camps that teach survival skills learn information that can help them if they ever find themselves thrust into the natural world alone. The camp

where I work has a class called Outdoor Living Skills (ODLS) where children learn how to build a shelter, how to start a fire, how to find, collect, and purify water, and what materials can help save their life in an emergency. The ODLS specialist teaches these skills in a fun and imaginative way to help avoid stressing out the children. The most common teaching method at Voyageur is to turn the skill building into a competition so the child thinks the goal is to win the contest rather than to survive.

One lesson used in Voyageur's ODLS class teaches campers how long they can live without their basic needs. Campers know that they will need shelter within the first three hours of a survival situation, so that is what they immediately need to look for. Campers are taught what places and materials will make a reliable shelter so they know what types of landforms they should find. Campers also know what natural materials they could use if they are forced to create their own shelter. Next, they are taught to find water, which they can go three days without, then food, which stranded individuals need within three weeks. We teach campers that every three seconds they need a positive mental attitude (PMA) to stress the importance of keeping calm and remembering survival skills when one is in a survival situation.

Though it is unlikely that most children will absolutely need these survival skills, it is a benefit to all children to have access to knowledge of how to survive in a natural environment. Dresner and Gil (1994) state that, "Feeling comfortable in the wilderness is an important goal leading to more responsible actions toward the environment" (p. 41). Outdoor skills help children physically and emotionally to be prepared for what may come in their future. Even if campers do not use their knowledge in a survival situation, they can build shelters or fires for recreational purposes and do so skillfully, to avoid

harming the environment. If, as adults, we want the youngest generation to respect and appreciate nature, we need to give children the skills to feel at ease in a natural environment.

How might participation in summer camps support the social, emotional, physical, and cognitive growth of a child?

There are many activities taught at summer camps that focus on helping children develop skills that will help them grow socially, physically, cognitively, and emotionally. Team building activities are one way that camps help children grow in these areas. Team building activities are tasks designed to challenge campers to work together to solve a problem. Some camps have an obstacle course specifically designed to create challenges that campers will have to work together to conquer, which they use for team building activities.

The social connection is associated with the communication required between team members. According to Charlotte Fisher, a Coordinator at the Western Pennsylvania School for Blind Children, “Participants in these games [team building] have found that they facilitate trust, teamwork, and positive, effective communication within groups” (2005, p. 79). Team building at camps can positively affect campers’ ability to trust, work as a team, and communicate in unique ways. Depending on the challenge, children participating in team building activities need to share ideas and execute plans with changing variables. Sometimes leaders take away the rights of the most vocal children in the group to share ideas so that the campers who normally fade into the background have to step up and speak out. Children could also be told they have to finish their task without anyone talking or while participants have their hands behind their back. Many times in

these team building activities, participants need to be carried or carry others to fulfill their task. Exercises in team building that focus on communication between campers help form trust between participants.

Many tasks are physically taxing. For example, one exercise includes getting everyone across an untouchable surface using a swinging rope. When I participated in the exercise, my lack of upper body strength meant others on my team had to lift me so I could plant my feet on the bottom of the rope. On the other side, strong hands had to be there to grab onto me and pull me to “safety”. There are more of these activities that include holding up your own body weight or holding up the body weight of others. Activities can include running, carrying heavy materials, building, or other physical acts that can take a toll on the body, especially if you must do them alone.

When participants have a problem to solve and a task to complete, they must first strategize and come up with the most effective way to complete their objective. As they execute their plan, they have to use cognitive skills to analyze what is working and what they need to change. If their plan is not working at all, they have to go back to step one and do some more brainstorming.

There are other cognitive benefits to these activities. Participants learn more about themselves and the skills they have to offer. One of my interviewed colleagues, who has led quite a few team building activities, wrote, “The activities also allow campers to understand their strengths and weaknesses and how that affects the team.” This contributor noticed that children naturally fall into categories of “planners” and “executers” while they work. Planners take responsibility for deciding what to do and executers are responsible for carrying out the plan. Campers can have strengths and

weaknesses in both categories, but the ability to plan and to execute that plan will be an asset in other areas of children's lives. Participation in team building activities helps children to find where their strengths lie. When facilitators notice that children have fallen into a role, they may alter the activity by forcing planners to execute and executors to plan. Thus, children get to see and work on their weaknesses as well.

Emotions play a part in teambuilding. Hansen, Larson, and Dworkin (2003) state that, "Adolescents in activities that demand high performance report having experiences with strong emotions such as anger and anxiety, and some youth report gaining insights into how to manage these states" (p.27). The tasks I have done with campers often bring out strong emotions. Campers have to fight their frustration when a task seems to be too hard or is not going the way they wish. Often, they want to give up because they feel too frustrated to move forward. Usually there is one little aspect the child is missing so camp staff try to get that child to focus on the problem and remove the obstacle. Other times, staff take the camper and walk away from the activity for a little bit. The staff and the camper come back when the camper has worked through the emotion or can express it in a positive way.

The same colleague who commented above also weighed in on how children who do not think they can complete a task demonstrate emotional growth. This colleague led campers through a high ropes course and said that there were campers who came to him and stated they could not do it nor would they try. He was patient with these campers and saw many of them accept the challenge by steps. Some were happy to achieve the minimum requirement (i.e. putting on a harness or climbing halfway up the ladder). The experience became important because the children who thought they could not do it

achieved something they could be proud of, even if they did not go as far as other campers. Team building is not the only aspect of camp that supports the physical growth of a child.

Outside of physically active team building exercises, many camps help physically influence children by teaching them about nutrition ideals. Experts in nutrition sciences and the American Camp Association did a study on the eating behaviors of campers. Ventura, Anzman-Frasca, and Garst (2014) made the connection that:

...the summer months are a time when children are more inactive, have less access to healthy foods, and show greater gains in [BMI] compared with time in school. This suggests that the contexts within which children spend their summer breaks are an important consideration for obesity prevention efforts (p. 491).

Summer time is a period when schools do not provide healthy snacks or allot recess or gym time, so unless parents take over the job, some children eat unhealthy snacks and pass on being in motion for more than a short walk from room to room. Yet, during the summer, children need to be physically active and keep up a healthy diet to maintain the BMI they had before summer started. Camps can provide both criteria through team building and other camp activities, and by monitoring the foods that are given to campers. Camp staff are aware of the threat of obesity and have come up with strategies to not only get healthy food on children's plates, but also into their bodies.

Those who distribute food at many camps control portions. Usually, adults are in charge of serving so ideally every camper gets a portion of every item on the menu and no campers get more than they need of any one item (Ventura, Anzman-Frasca, and Garst, 2014). In my experience, it is explained to the campers that everything they need is

on their plate and they cannot get more until they have eaten everything they already have. This rule does not imply that they have to eat everything on their plate, but that they cannot get more of a food they have already eaten when there is still other food on their plate that remains untouched. Many campers complain because they want more dessert or more of the main course, but they are not willing to eat their green beans before going back in line. Children love to use the excuse that they do not have to eat “that” at home (Ventura, Anzman-Frasca, and Garst, 2014). These campers may be told that camp has different rules than home. Many campers try new things, even if just a few bites, to gain permission to get more of the food they already like.

Staff are with campers for every meal, which is not always the case at home, so camp staff are in a unique position to see the habits of children with eating disorders (Ventura, Anzman-Frasca, & Garst, 2014). There is no dog for campers to feed their food to and camp staff tends to notice if campers give away their food or try to hide their food under the table. When camp staff see that children are not eating, these leaders can notify the parents of the behavior so that, if needed, steps can be taken to find out if there is a mental problem. The situation could be that the food is not to the camper’s liking so he or she refuses to eat. If that is not the case, at least the parents know so they can address the problem at home.

What kind of changes do camp staff see in children who have attended a summer camp from the time they arrive to the moment they depart?

Children can change their ideas about who they are while at camp. Time spent at camp can “raise campers’ self-esteem”, and that time also “increases their interest in, and curiosity about, nature, and fosters outdoor skills” (Dresner & Gil, 1994, p. 40). At

summer camps, children are encouraged to explore and create relationships with nature that “increase feelings of personal adequacy and worth, and bring about changes in participants’ interpersonal skills” (Dresner & Gil, 1994, p. 41). Camps are a new environment, usually far away from the stresses and concerns waiting at home (Dresner & Gil, 1994). Without these elements being present in these children’s new immediate environment, they are free to adventure further into who they are apart from their family and their home environment (Dresner & Gil, 1994). The emotional growth children experience in the new environment helps them figure out parts of their personality that they might not have known about before attending camp.

Being given the chance see nature firsthand can cause children to be more curious about what nature is and how they are connected to it. Children often know about environmental problems, but many adolescents do not have an intimacy with nature that allows them to care about protecting and cherishing natural environments (Louv, 2005). Timothy Goodwin, an education professor and nature enthusiast at Bemidji State University also worries about the connection today’s children have with the natural environment. He says, “The world is in danger – period... This is what we can do: we can pass on the reverence for this place, these woods and this world, so the next generation can do the same” (Goodwin, 2015, p. 80). Goodwin suggests that a strong tie to the natural environment in the lives of today’s children is one step that can be taken to preserve nature. Summer camps are places where nature is available to children. Camps take the responsibility of passing on the reverence that Goodwin describes.

Dresner and Gil found that children who attend camp, “form stronger ties with the natural environment and... have been inspired with a sense of awe and wonder about the

natural world” after time spent in a camp setting (1994, p. 41). These children, the researchers found, were more environmentally responsible and better able to combat environmental problems (Dresner & Gil, 1994). The children in Dresner and Gil’s study even had an increased desire to find natural areas around their home and spend time in them (1994). Dresner and Gil’s participants liked camp so much, they brought it home with them (1994). They recorded that after returning home, several subjects talked their families into activities such as sleeping in a tent, hiking, and bird-watching (1994). The lengths children went to for a chance to relive the memories of their camp experience shows that they were not only engaged in camp activities at camp, but they also wanted to bring that developing love of nature into their home life. They transferred skills that people may consider only relevant to nature camps into their natural environment and encouraged the rest of their families to get involved in outdoor activities.

Other researchers have come to similar conclusions. A study done by Collado, Staats, and Corraliza states that “the findings... indicate that long-term exposure to nature through a summer camp is an effective way of promoting children’s emotional affinity to nature as well as their ecological beliefs, both of which support their intentions to carry out environmentally friendly behaviors” (2013). These children used what they had learned to form respect for nature. They are more likely to use the cognitive growth they experienced to serve as a reminder to recycle, plant trees, and not take part in the senseless destruction of nature as they age (Collado, Staats, & Corraliza, 2013). Mehmet Erdogan (2015) further supports these findings with his conclusion that, after participating in a week-long summer environmental education program, children “reported to change their life habits by using electricity and water less. Students’

conception of the environment changed from ego-centric to eco-centric after intervention” (p. 177). Children who learn about the environment are more likely to be willing to do something to save it. The future efforts of the children who care about preserving nature help improve the world for everyone, even if the efforts seem minor.

What might children dislike about the camp experience?

There are some factors that may cause discomfort for campers; these factors include heat, bugs, homesickness, and unpleasant interactions with the staff. The typical complaints campers have are with physical elements; most often, they have problems coping with the heat or the bugs. In extreme cases, heat-related symptoms can be a real concern at camps. Campers are reminded to carry water bottles and visit the water fountain no matter what the weather may be. Bugs are an issue in all natural environments. Most camps have sprays to help with the overabundance of annoying insects.

Homesickness is another inhibitor of fun at many summer camps. One group of researchers found that “Almost all children, adolescents, and adults experience some degree of homesickness when they are apart from familiar people and environments” (Thurber & Walton, 2007). Campers have a sudden realization that things are different than at home, or that their mom is not going to tuck them into bed and, emotionally, they crash. They want to go home regardless of how much fun they have had already. Even if staff convinces the child to stay, it still commonly seems like that child refuses to have a good time because he or she is focused on going home. There is little staff can do if a child is determined to leave. However, the average staff member will persist in finding a way to help the child feel comfortable and less stressed.

Sometimes a bad camp experience is related to a staff member. No staff is perfect, and, despite the wishes of the administrators who do the hiring, there is the potential that a worker may not even try to be a positive influence. For some people, the camp experience is only about receiving a paycheck, and these people often ruin the otherwise supportive and safe feeling of summer camps. Camp staff are equivalent to teachers for the duration of a camp session. A negative staff member can be emotionally detrimental to a child because most of the children look to staff for guidance. They do not want to feel like they have been left on their own. They most certainly do not want to feel like someone they look up to dislikes them. Even staff who care about the children can leave a bad taste in the mouths of campers. One staff member I questioned shared the following with me:

There are often weeks when staff members struggle to connect with the teens. In the midst of a heated argument I was mediating, after listening to the campers, I said “In the same way that I’ve listened to and heard you all, I need you to do the same for your counselors and staff.” One camper sighed, rolled her eyes, and said “Why? It’s gonna be negative anyway. They don’t even like us.”

There are mix-ups and disagreements between staff and children. People view situations differently and all staff can do is their best to keep campers from feeling like staff dislike them.

Fortunately, this same participant also had many positive things to say about staff, including, “There are some cabins where counselors know everybody by name, and campers know counselors by name...if staff do well, campers walk away from camp as a new, better person. Some cry getting on the bus because they don’t want to leave.”It is

also possible for staff to be so great with children that the children feel loved and respected, so much so that they come back to camp year after year. The overall generosity, caring, and excitement shown by the average camp staff member tends to take the focus off of the negative voices and keep camp a mostly accepting and positive place.

Summary Statement

Spending time in summer camps can benefit children socially, emotionally, physically, and mentally. The indoor problem is that less than half of the population of today's youth spends time doing activities that take place outside during the duration of a week. What children miss out on because they do not get enough outdoor experience, are the stress-reducing and physical fitness aspects of being around nature. Camps can give children a break from the stress of their everyday lives while also preparing them for survival situations. The aspects of camp that help support the growth of a child are a focus on team building and nutrition. Team building helps children create lasting bonds with fellow campers by encouraging them learn to communicate and trust each other. To help children stay physically healthy nutrition is monitored, which can also impede obesity.

Camp can change children. Time spent at camp helps children open up to new experiences, new friends, new feelings, and new goals for their lives. Campers grow in their self-esteem and in their connections to nature. These connections help children learn to do what they can to keep the environment in its best form. Despite that, there are many benefits to the camp experience, things such as bugs, heat, homesickness, and negative staff can be harmful to children when they attend nature camps. These elements can be present at any camp, but many camps do their best to stifle these negatives and focus on

the positives. Steps are taken to make sure campers do not overheat in the sun and get plenty of fluids. Most camps have an abundant supply of bug spray to ward off pests. Camp staff does their best to have positive interactions with campers to avoid developing homesickness or hurt feelings. Most camp staff want camp to be a positive experience and work hard to make it so.

Chapter 5: Results

Introduction

Summer camps, when appropriately utilized, provide not only a fun atmosphere, but also one of learning, socialization, physical growth, and emotional growth. Camps are places where the outdoors becomes the focus and children can build an intimacy with nature. At camp, staff are prepared to do everything they can to make the whole experience positive.

Results

During time spent at summer camps, children are free to just be young and full of life! They get to experience the stress-reducing powers of the natural world and learn the skills for surviving in that environment. Teambuilding takes place when planned and other times when children have opportunities to work together and solve problems that happen naturally. The camp experience includes checks on adolescent nutrition. Children's nutritional intake is closely monitored while at camp to keep campers on a healthy diet.

At summer camps, children work on their self-esteem, their connection to nature, and their commitment to respecting wildlife. In this new environment, campers are free to define themselves in any way they wish, without the influence of their family, so they can explore parts of themselves that they may not have known existed. Children who have created an attachment and appreciation for nature are more likely to do more to preserve and protect it. Efforts to recycle, plant trees, clear garbage, and designate areas of wilderness to be protected are of more importance to the children who have an intimate relationship with wilderness.

In a natural environment, there are problems that can affect camp processes in a negative way. Natural elements can be harmful. For instance, heat and bugs might negatively affect a child's health. Poor staff choices can also cause harm. Any staff member who is not dedicated to the best interests of the children causes a negative impact on the lives of those children. Camp is a new and challenging place. Some children might not be ready for this type of experience. These children succumb to homesickness, which is not a pleasant experience for anyone involved.

These problems, heat, bugs, homesickness, and undedicated staff, are planned for and usually stopped by dedicated staff members. When camp staff is proactive, heat, bugs, homesickness, and staff who are in it for themselves have less of a chance to ruin the positive camp experience. Dedicated staff know the risks of camp and actively do everything they can to keep these problems from affecting children.

Summary Statement

The accumulation of research supports that camp experiences can affect campers positively by giving children a safe, relaxing space to explore who they want to be, a new social group of other campers, good nutrition, and a closer relationship to nature. The results also propose that the negatives of summer camps, such as health altering natural occurrences and one or more staff members who are not around for the right reasons, though they can occur, are rarely a concern, as camp staff members actively prepare to avoid them.

Chapter 6: Discussion and Conclusion

Introduction

The camp experience is one with much potential. Though there are things that may go wrong, there are also many things that can go right.

Discussion

Summer camps need more attention and dedication from parents and other supporters. Camps help excite children about nature and convince them to spend more time outdoors, which can make them physically, socially, and sometimes emotionally healthier. The calming effects of nature can improve children's self-esteem as they can develop problem-solving skills and experience the freedom to explore who they are when they are not dependant on their parents. These children develop survival skills that will help them in nature; yet, those skills translate to their daily lives as well. Although a child could be negatively affected anywhere, at camp, staff are aware of the risks and try to prepare for them. Camp staff plan to handle even the most unlikely outcomes that could hurt a child.

Conclusion

Positive and negative variables await children who attend a summer camps. What needs to be understood is that the positives are worth the risk. Hands-on teaching is the most effective practice, and at camp, everyday is hands on. A camper needs to be able to demonstrate social, cognitive, physical, and emotional skills every day in order to be successful in the day's activities. Camp staff see how campers grow in each of these areas of development with each activity.

Summary Statement

Camps can supply children with more than just memories. The social, emotional, cognitive, and physical benefits provide many reasons to send children to summer camp. At camps, children seem to grow in each of these developmental capacities. Summer camps are one solution to the indoor problem. Camps can help children gain an appreciation for nature and motivate them to spend more time outdoors, so they continue to develop intimacy with nature when they return to their homes.

References

Clements, R. (2004). An investigation of the status of outdoor play. *Contemporary Issues in Early Childhood*, 5(1), 68-80.

Collado, S., Staats, H., & Corraliza, J. A. (2013). Experiencing nature in children's summer camps: Affective, cognitive, and behavioral consequences. *Journal of Environmental Psychology*, 33, 37-44.

Corraliza, J. A., Collado, S., & Bethelmy, L. (2012). Nature as a moderator of stress in urban children. *Procedia: Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 38, 253-263.

Dresner, M., & Gill, M. (1994). Environmental education at summer nature camps. *Journal of Environmental Education*, 25(3), 35-41.

Erdogen, M. (2015). The effect of summer environmental education program (SEEP) on elementary school students. *International Journal of Environmental and Science Education*, 10(2), 165-181.

Fairbank, Maslin, Maullin, Metz & Associates and Public Opinion Strategies. (2016). *Kids these days: Why is America's youth staying indoors.*

Fisher, C. (2005). Team-Building Challenge Games. *Re:View*, 37(2), 79-84

Goodwin, T. (2015). *Within these woods: A collection of Northwoods nature essays, with original illustrations by the author.* Bemidji, MN: Riverfeet Press.

Hansen, D.M., Larson, R.W., & Dworkin, J.B. (2003). What adolescents learn in organized youth activities: A survey of self-reported developmental experiences. *Journal of Research on Adolescence*, 13(1), 25-55.

Louv, R. (2005). *Last child in the woods: Saving our children from nature deficit*

disorder. Chapel Hill, NC: Algonquin Books of Chapel Hill.

Munsey, C. (2010). The kids aren't alright. *Monitor on Psychology*, 41(1), 22.

Shiono, P. H., & Sandham Quinn, L. S. Q. (1994). Epidemiology of divorce. *Children and Divorce*, 4(1), 15-28.

Tennant, V. (2005, September). The powerful impact of stress.

Thurber, C. A., & Walton, E. (2007). Preventing and treating homesickness. *Pediatrics*, 119(1), 192-201.

Ventura, A. K., Anzman-Frasca, S., & Garst, B. A. (2014). Mealtimes at residential summer camps: What are camp staff doing to promote healthy eating behaviors? *Journal of Nutrition Education*, 46(6), 491-498.

Appendices

Appendix A. Survey Questionnaire

Survey for Voyageur Staff for Lindsey Becker's Thesis

Please answer the following question as thoroughly and accurately as you can using examples of real occurrences at the camp. (Do not include names of campers or staff, just vague descriptions)

“Please describe in what ways you have seen the children involved in the camp program grow or decline physically, socially, emotionally, and cognitively.”

You may pick your own topics or explore one or some of these:

1. The kind of changes you see in children from the moment they arrive to the time they leave.
2. The ways children grow from their camp experiences.
3. The social aspects of camp
4. The way team building is used at camp and what it does for the campers

Write your answer here. Other paper will be made available to you if you run out of room or want a lined paper to start with.

Please check this box if you wish to give me permission to use your direct quotes.

Appendix B. BSU IRB Documentation

APPROVAL FORM AND ALL ATTACHMENTS MUST BE TYPED!

Bemidji State University/Northwest Technical College
Human Subjects Committee
Human Research Approval Form

Title of Study: How Can Summer Camps Influence Children Socially, Emotionally, Physically, and Cognitively?

Date Submitted: March 21st 2016 Project starting date: June 2016 Project ending date: August 2016

Principal Investigator(s): Lindsey Becker BSU Student ID#, if applicable: 11957389

Please indicate if you are: BSU/NTC Faculty BSU/NTC Student(s) (x) Non-BSU/NTC

Have all Principal Investigators listed completed the training for Human Subjects research? (x) Yes No

Street Address: 8525 Irvine Ave NW Telephone: 320-296-2659

City, State, & Zip Bemidji MN 56601

E-mail Address: byesdnll@hotmail.com

Co-Investigators: N/A

Faculty Advisor/Sponsor: Porter Coggins

Request: [x] Expedited Review (include reasons below) [] Full Review [] Exempt (include reasons below)

Participants in this study will all be older than the age of 18. Information received does not pertain to any sensitive information about the participant. There is minimal risk of harm to any participant.

Is the submitted document in draft form yet to be pre-tested? [] Yes [x] No (If Yes, a final copy of the survey instrument must be re-submitted upon completion.)

Can the title of this study be made public before the completion date? [x] Yes [] No
Are you using BSU and/or NTC students for this study? [] Yes [x] No

The student's faculty advisor must first approve all student research. Signature denotes the advisor's approval of the project and must be obtained prior to forwarding to the HSC in the School of Graduate Studies.

Signature of Advisor/Sponsor [Signature] Date 30 March 2016

Has the Advisor/Sponsor completed the training for Human Subjects research? [x] Yes [] No

For office use only: PH

-----HUMAN SUBJECTS
COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATION:

Exempt Review [] Approved [] Revise and resubmit [] Not approved

[x] Expedited Review [] Approved [] Revise and resubmit [] Not approved

[x] Approved [] Revise and resubmit [] Not approved

Full Review [] Approved [] Revise and resubmit [] Not approved

[] Approved [] Revise and resubmit [] Not approved

[Signature] 4/17/16