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Why Children Should Attend Summer Camp: The Benefits of Residential Summer Camp and Outdoor Education

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Why Children Should Attend Summer Camp:
The Benefits of Residential Summer Camp and Outdoor Education

by
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A capstone project submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Imagine this: You are twelve years old again and about to do the scariest thing you have ever done. You are standing on top of what seems like an incredibly small platform a million miles up in the air with nothing to hold onto but the tree the platform itself is mounted to. It is a bright, warm day with a slight breeze in the air, which normally you would love because it would help cool you down in the middle of the hot day, but right now you really wish there was no wind at all because the tree you are holding onto seems to move every time it blows. It is just after lunch and you only know this because you feel like you could hurl that lunch back up any second. You can hear your friends down below you shouting. It sounds encouraging, but honestly, you are trying to block them out in order to concentrate on not falling off the platform. And there's someone else up there with you which is somewhat terrifying since the platform feels as if it is about the size of a paper plate. "I promise you're safe and you're not going to fall! Look, let me show you." says the young man who you have already seen several times this week. He played basketball with you and your friends this morning and taught you how to kayak yesterday. He takes his time and calmly points out all the gear you have wrapped around your waist. A harness made of a thick blue material that sits very snugly around your waist and legs and a big heavy carabiner with a tether that connects that harness to the line above you. He encourages you to pull on the carabiner and tether with all your strength to see if it will break. You do and it does not.

He sits on the edge of the platform and asks you to sit with him. He holds onto a handle on the back of your harness and promises to not let go. You trust him and you sit with your legs dangling over the edge of the platform two million miles above the air. He points to a spot three million miles away where there is another person jumping up and down and waving excitedly at you. It is the same guy who showed you how to use a bow and arrow for the first time yesterday. The man sitting next to you instructs you to hold onto the tether above you then explains that all you have to do is scoot off the edge of the platform. He promises, again, that it is completely safe. You trust him and scoot very slowly off the edge of the platform until you feel gravity take over and suddenly you are falling! Then flying! Faster than you ever thought you could go! You are zipping through the trees like lightning and everything is going by in a blur. Through the rushing wind, you faintly hear all your friends and the two counselors yell and scream with encouragement. Then, after the longest and most exhilarating ride of your life, you gently come to a stop and the counselor who helped you with the bow and arrow grabs your harness and unclips the carabiner that had kept you safe the entire ride as promised. “You did it! How was it?” he asks excitedly. “Awesome!” you reply with the same amount of excitement. “I’m so proud of you for conquering your fears!” he says. “Me too!”

Research Statement

If you have never been to summer camp before, this situation might be hard to imagine. Trusting someone enough to push you off a seventy-five foot (not one million mile) high tower takes a lot of faith in the people and equipment around you and a lot of confidence in yourself. These are the types of things summer camps all around the nation try to teach children through outdoor education. Outdoor education is a unique concept to

some. Some people may have never experienced it before while others stake their entire career and reputation as educators on it. However, the power of outdoor education has been proven time and time again. Outdoor education can be defined simply as “education in, about, and for the out-of-doors” (Ford, 1986.) This definition seems simple but is actually quite broad seeing that outdoor education can encompass almost any type of learning that occurs outside such as archery, water ecology, and skull and track identification just to name a few. Depending on the type of learning occurring, it can also be referred to as environmental education, adventure education, experiential education, or conservation education (Ford, 1986.) In this paper I plan to explore the topic of outdoor education and the benefits of learning outside of the classroom. Specifically, I plan to explore the benefits children gain and the skills they learn at outdoor education focused summer camps and how necessary those skills are as they develop and grow. In this first chapter I want to explain my personal and professional connection to the topic and why this topic is important to me.

Personal Interest

I spent my entire childhood outside. I used to beg my parents everyday after dinner to let my brothers and I play in the yard. We would play make believe and imagine we were knights in shining armor in our tree house or create a whole world around our pet duck in which he was king and we were his loyal followers. We would play with the neighbor kids every weekend, have bike races up and down the dirt roads, ride horses when the neighboring ranch would let us, and offer to wash people’s cars or mow their yards when we needed a little extra cash. I remember going on countless fishing, camping, and hiking trips with my dad where he taught me the importance of leaving no

trace and being prepared for any situation. Growing up in a very middle-class family, I also had the privilege to spend every summer from eight to fifteen years old at a summer camp. When I turned sixteen, I started working there. Not because it was a job, but because I loved it. Back then, I did not really care that I was spending time outside, but I was invested in these activities because I did them with my family and friends. I met some of my best friends through camp and grew closer to my family as we spent time outside together. I also learned valuable lessons such as how to care for the environment, how to be courageous and try new things, and how to work hard and put in the effort to accomplish projects.

Professional Significance

Looking back at the times I spent outside and the memories I made, it seems almost obvious that I would pick a career that lent itself to being outdoors all the time. However, despite growing up in the outdoors, in college I never thought I would pick an outdoor career. I received my Bachelor of Science degree in psychology in 2018 with the intent on getting a master's degree in social work and going into the social work/counseling field. However, in a last ditch effort to find a summer job after my junior year, I became a summer camp counselor for a small zoo in my hometown. In all honesty I applied for this job for two reasons: 1) I had worked at camp for years and figured I knew all there was to know and it would be easy, and 2) the zoo was about seven minutes from my house and it was extremely convenient. The second reason worked out really great for me, the first reason, not so much. It was one of the hardest summers I had ever experienced. This camp was very different from what I was used to. I knew absolutely nothing about animals and did not realize when I applied just how much

of the camp's focus would be on animals which seems silly now because it was at a zoo. It was longer hours and more work than I expected and I finished off the summer exhausted and swearing that I would find a new job next summer. Then next summer came and I did not find a new job and I was apparently a good enough camp counselor that they asked me to come back. I agreed and I made a promise to myself that this summer would be different. I was not new to this position anymore and the work ethic that my parents and past experiences instilled in me said that I had to put more effort into it this time. I made a better effort to connect to my campers each week. I spent hours studying about the animals in the zoo and learned how to tie in my new animal knowledge with games and lessons for the campers. I learned how to handle and care for the animal ambassadors so I could use them to teach with.

I also made more of an effort to be friends with the other camp counselors and one of those camp counselors became my mentor and best friend. She took me under her wing and showed me everything there is to know about summer camp and how fun it can be to educate children in the outdoors. She taught me that this summer camp job was meant to be fun, engaging, educational, and inspirational for not only the campers but for the adult counselors as well. I also benefited from the fact that most of the staff members who worked at the zoo were female and it inspired me that I could work in a field that was once male dominated. Suddenly the long hours and 100 degree temperatures did not feel so bad anymore. That summer is still one of my favorite memories and that counselor is still my best friend. To this day I credit her with teaching me everything I know about running a summer camp.

Conclusion

That summer changed the way I looked at summer camp and my entire career path. I stayed on after the summer and worked part time in the education department of the zoo. I learned more about environmental education and wildlife education and the impact they can have on children in different settings. I learned that hands-on experiential education in a setting like the zoo offers children a whole new wide world of learning that often is not presented to them in the classroom. Granted, I believe that is why a lot of schools and teachers choose to take field trips to places like the zoo and why parents send their kids to summer camp. Most adults would agree that children should play outside and use their imaginations, but outdoor education should not be a one time a year event. It should be prevalent in children's lives. Like the story at the beginning of this chapter, outdoor education at summer camp is meant to challenge children in a safe and friendly environment. A philosophy you often hear in outdoor education is "challenge by choice." The camper will always be given the choice to participate, but it is the instructor or counselors' job to challenge them to participate. Like the boy in the story, the counselor encouraged him and demonstrated the safety procedures and challenged him to trust and take a leap of faith. The boy could have turned around and said no and climbed back down the tower, but instead he trusted in the person who he had been developing a trusting relationship with all week long and took the leap.

It is stories like this that inspire my passion for outdoor education summer camp. There are many things learned in the classroom, but bravery and confidence do not tend to be some of those things. For that reason I want to focus this project on exploring the topic of outdoor education and the benefits of learning outside of the classroom.

Specifically, I plan to explore the benefits children gain and the skills they learn at outdoor education focused summer camps and how necessary those skills are as they develop and grow. I will explore topics such as the history of summer camps and outdoor education, the importance of experiential education and its worth, the social-emotional benefits children gain at camp, the impact counselors have on campers, and the challenges summer camp faces including the impact of Covid-19, financial strains on families, and accessibility challenges. In the next chapter I plan to dive into the current research available on outdoor education and summer camps and explain why they are beneficial to children.

CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review

Introduction

In this chapter I will dive deeper into my research questions and what experts have to say on the subject. For this paper I plan to explore the topic of outdoor education and the benefits of learning outside of the classroom. Specifically, I plan to explore the benefits children gain and the skills they learn at outdoor education focused summer camps and how necessary those skills are as they develop and grow. Since the beginning of summer camps, experts have looked at summer camps and their benefits so it seems appropriate to start this chapter with the history of summer camp. Along with this topic, I also plan on digging into the history of outdoor education, the importance of experiential education, social-emotional skills gained at camp, the impact camp counselors have on campers, accessibility challenges at camp, the financial challenges of affording camp, and covid-19 impacts on summer camps and outdoor education. The following topics are arranged in such a way that explains the basics of history and research and then dives into the specific areas I believe support the most important parts of outdoor education and summer camp. These topics all reference back to my research question and help explain the importance of outdoor education and summer camp.

History of Summer Camp

Jean-Jacques Rousseau said in his book *Emile* that “nature wants children to be children before being men” (Parry, 2015, para.1), stressing the fact that children are meant to be outdoors and enjoy all nature has to offer. Today summer camps are a much loved tradition that allow children to explore the outdoors in a safe environment with

caring and knowledgeable people while getting away from all their modern technology. During the inception of summer camp in the 1860s and 1870s the world looked much different then it does today, but the mission of summer camps was still the same. During a growing industrial period in United States history, people around the country were realizing the harm this was doing to children and that they needed a way to reconnect with nature and get back to their roots. The Civil War had just begun and life was hard. Life was also taking on a more industrial and urbanized nature. The industrial revolution was in full swing and cities were growing ,which meant people were leaving their lives of agriculture and farming behind. However, it did not take long for people to realize that life in the city was not all it was cracked up to be and they longed to show their children a simpler and more nature-filled way of life; thus what is considered to be the first organized camp was born in 1861, the Gunnery Camp. Of course, like many practices during this time, this camp was only for boys so the Gunn family opened up their home to a group of boys in Washington, Connecticut. The boys were homeschooled at their home and took two week long camping trips every summer. That first summer, the boys and the Gunns hiked over forty miles to a location, set up camp, fished or trapped animals for their dinner, and then learned to cook it over an open fire. The boys loved the experience so much, the Gunns decided to carry on the tradition of these camping trips for the next twelve years. Originally the Gunns actually started this camp because the Civil War was beginning and they wanted to prepare schoolboys to be soldiers and be able to survive in the outdoors if necessary. However, they also wanted them to learn to appreciate nature and enjoy spending time outside in the increasingly urbanizing world. (American Camp Association [ACA], n.d.; Rillo, 1964). After that, the camping world took off. The

Philadelphia Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA) opened the first camp for girls in 1874. In 1885 the Young Men's Christian Association opened Camp Dudley in Newburgh, New York and is the longest running summer camp in American history. In 1910 the Boy Scouts of America was established and began running summer camps, and the Girl Scouts of America and their summer camps were established 1912. By 1918, there were more than one thousand summer camps in the US and the movement had not finished growing (ACA, n.d.; Gershon, 2016).

One of the largest organizations to promote, professionalize, and standardize summer camps is the American Camp Association (ACA), which was established in 1910 originally under the name Camp Directors Association of America. The ACA is made up of more than 12,000 professional camp staff whose goal is to set summer camps up for success and see them thrive. From its inception, the ACA has been committed to supporting camps and camp staff, providing communities with safe and nurturing places to send their children, and providing learning opportunities that involve real-life hands-on experiences. The ACA is also the leading accreditation organization for residential summer camps, day camps, and year-round camps. The first accreditation standards were adopted in 1948 and gave summer camps and their staff specific standards and guidelines to abide by in order to create safe and healthy environments for children. For the first time in history, camps actually had to submit and comply with a list of over 290 standards in order to be formally accredited. In 1956 and 1998 the ACA created and adopted specific standards for day camps and year-round camps respectively (ACA, n.d.; 2022a). The ACA has since updated and revised their standards many times, and there are over 2,500 camps in the United States now accredited by the ACA. Accreditation allows

summer camps to go through a peer-reviewed process every three years where every aspect of their camp is looked over. Accreditation ensures that everything from everyday activities to the behind-the-scenes operational side of the camp is of the highest quality. The ACA prides itself on the high standard by which it asks camps to comply with. They also pride themselves on the fact that their standards are not just about health and safety, although those are important, but also about specific camp activities such as waterfront, high rope challenge activities, horseback riding, and outdoor and environmental education. ACA partners with other youth development agencies such as the American Academy of Pediatrics and safety organizations such as the American Red Cross to make sure their standards are always aligned with the most current research (ACA, 2022b; 2022c; Camp Nicolet, n.d.).

Summer camps have come a long way since 1861. In 2010 the American Camp Association celebrated its 100th anniversary and in 2011 the birth of organized camping celebrated its 150th anniversary. Summer camps have become an icon of the American summer and hundreds of thousands of children have been served by caring and nurturing individuals at camps around the country. One of the most iconic parts of summer camp is outdoor education and all of the activities included in it, which I will explore in the next section.

History of Outdoor Education

One of the great questions posed by educators early in the history of outdoor education was whether to define outdoor education as a subject like history or chemistry in school or would it be more of a method of educating. Researchers, and people in the field today, would say that it is definitely more of an approach to education than a

specific subject matter but it does encompass both. Outdoor education is defined as "education in, about, and for the out-of-doors" (Ford, 1986, p.2). By this definition it can be assumed that almost any subject that can be taught outside or about the outside can be considered outdoor education, which leaves the field wide open to interpretation. Lloyd B. Sharp, one of the earliest contributors to outdoor education, stated that "those things which can best be taught in the outdoors should be taught there" (Donaldson & Goering, 1970, p.6).

One of the first times outdoor education was ever used and implemented in the United States was in 1925 through the Los Angeles City Public School System in California in partnership with the U.S. Forest Service. A group of students, under the direction of a teacher, went to the Angeles National Forest to complete a tree-planting project after a forest fire had broken out in the area (Smith, n.d.). However, it was not until the 1940s that the term outdoor education first appeared and the first official outdoor education programs began. Outdoor education can thank a lot of its beginnings and recognition to the summer camp movement that started about eighty years earlier. By this point in time, summer camps were a well established part of American life and drew in large groups of children due to their recreational and nature-based programming. Two of the largest contributors to outdoor education were Lloyd B. Sharp in New Jersey and Julian W. Smith in Michigan who each created some of the first outdoor education programs in the 1930s and 1940s. Despite being multiple states away from each other, both of these individuals influenced outdoor education in lasting yet different ways. Sharp focused more on bringing outdoor education to schools and started what he called "school camping." Smith, on the other hand, focused on getting children into outdoor

education outside of school and helped introduce the field of outdoor education in places like neighborhood parks, national forests, and other remote areas (Donaldson & Goering, 1970).

The field was built around the idea that children learn better in the outdoors. Not through the simple act of just being outside, but through the ideas and methods teaching in the outdoors uses. Teachers around the country quickly grabbed onto outdoor education and began implementing it due the high number of hands-on experiences, the use of concrete skills, the emphasis on social development, and the high level of connection to their school curriculum, especially science, physical education, and even mathematical standards. For the first time in 1965, schools and other organizations actually received designated funding through the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 to provide students with outdoor education opportunities (Knapp, n.d.).

The first leading professional organization in outdoor education was National Camp, created to train new educators in the field and inspire them to create or implement their own outdoor education programs at their respective organizations. In partnership with the National Camp, the Life Camp in New Jersey originally founded by Lloyd Sharp completed one of the earliest, largest, and most successful experiments in outdoor education. They conducted an experiment to determine if the hands-on experiential learning approach of outdoor education was actually benefiting students as much as the professionals stated it was. They took a group of sixty-four fourth and fifth graders on a three-week long camping trip and tested their scores on tests after returning from this trip with fourth and fifth graders who did not go on a camping trip. They found that in almost

every subject area the students who went camping scored just as well or better than the students who did not, definitively proving the benefits of outdoor education (Rillo, 1964).

The Importance of Experiential Education

Experiential and play-based learning has gained a large following in the last several years and summer camps and outdoor education facilities have taken full advantage of this recent education trend. Promoting a style of learning they have believed in from the beginning, summer camps teach campers through the untraditional idea that experiences are just as important as what can be taught through books and papers.

Experiential education can actually be traced all the way back to the 4th Century B.C. with Aristotle who also believed the philosophy that doing was a better way of learning than just speaking. However, experiential education did not emerge as a leading education method until the 1970s as outdoor education took off (University of California, Davis, n.d.). The Association for Experiential Education (AEE) defines it as “a teaching philosophy. . . in which educators purposefully engage with learners in direct experience and focused reflection in order to increase knowledge, develop skills, clarify values, and develop people's capacity to contribute to their communities” (Association for Experiential Education [AEE], n.d., para. 1). Experiential learning helps students make meaningful connections to the material they are learning. Experiential education gives teachers the unique ability to provide their students with interactions that make lasting impressions instead of just reading about in a textbook. Experts agree that learning through doing has much more powerful results than just reading or listening to lectures. One of the biggest advantages to utilizing experiential learning is the ability to prepare

students for real-life problems by teaching them problem solving and reflective skills (Center for Learning Experimentation, Application, and Research, 2022).

Another aspect of experiential learning that outdoor and environmental education have really taken advantage of is the fact that experiential learning can elicit emotional responses from students or build emotional connections. Recently research has led to the belief that emotion and cognition work hand-in-hand with each other and students are more likely to remember material or lessons when they have an emotional response to them. These reasons and others are why outdoor education has continuously pursued the idea of learning through experiences (Center for Learning Experimentation, Application, and Research, 2022).

Social-Emotional Skills Gained at Camp

Summer camp has long been the place where best friends, future spouses, and possible employees and employers meet. The relationships and social skills gained after spending a week or summer at camp is one of the major developmental skills summer camps promote and advocate for. Children gain skills such as being independent and away from parents for the first time, working in a team, overcoming challenges and developing resiliency, and building self-esteem. These are just a few of the skills children can take away from camp (Gateway Region YMCA, 2019). In the following sections I will look at the research data proving the social-emotional skills gained at camp, what parents have to say about their child's development at camp, and what campers have to say about their own development at camp.

Research Data

In the first large-scale investigation into the benefits of summer camp, Christopher Thurber, Marge Scanlin, Leslie Scheuler, and Karla Henderson discovered that summer camp had several positive effects on campers and documented those effects in their paper “Youth Development Outcomes of the Camp Experience: Evidence for Multidimensional Growth.” Thurber et al. looked at several areas of growth and found significant increases in the areas of self-esteem, friendship skills, independence, and adventure/exploration willingness through pre-camp and post-camp surveys. They even gathered data six months after the children attended camp and found that most of the growth had been maintained (Thurber et al., 2007). The Better Environmental Education Teaching, Learning, and Expertise Sharing (BEETLES) organization suggests that outdoor education facilities such as nature-based facilities and summer camps have a unique opportunity to influence the social-emotional development of children. They believe this is possible because children are in a new setting which allows them to see themselves differently, in an engaging learning environment that invites campers to problem-solve and work through situations with teammates, in an environment that allows them to conquer physical challenges, and are experiencing the stress and anxiety ridding properties of being outdoors in nature (Better Environment Education Teaching, Learning, and Expertise Sharing [BEETLES], 2020).

One of the greatest tools outdoor learning can take advantage of is student-centered learning. Student-centered learning encourages students to talk to one another and discuss concepts instead of a teacher lecturing students on concepts. It also

includes hands-on experiences and a teacher guided reflection afterwards (BEETLES, 2020).

What the Parents Say

When it comes to sending children to camp, their parents or guardians have the biggest say and may possibly see the biggest changes in their children. Therefore, summer camps absolutely want to know what the parents of their campers have to say and what they think of the programs at camp. Parents obviously want their children to have fun at camp, but they also want to make sure that their students are cared for by professional staff and have good experiences with the other campers. According to the ACA, parents have also reported that their children were more sociable after spending a week at camp and were better at making friends, had more positive attitudes toward outdoor and physical activities, were more environmentally conscious, and had higher levels of self-esteem and self-confidence. Not only did the parents see these positive changes in their children right after camp ended, but they also found these changes lasted at least two months after attending camp (Fine, 2013). The ACA highly values the comments and feedback they get from parents, and believe “Parents can be one of our best barometers for measuring the success or failure of camp programming, staffing, and associated experiences for our campers” (Fine, 2013, para. 7). One of the largest parts of summer camp is time spent outdoors and nature-based play. Tanya Ward, Sophie Goldingay, and Judi Parson conducted surveys of parents whose children experienced this nature-based play to find out what type of immediate and lasting results the children experienced. Ward et al. found that parents felt more connected to their children, saw

more resilience and confidence in their children, increased communication skills, and an increased ability to handle stressful environments (Ward et al., 2017).

What the Campers Say

Not only are parents impressed by what their children gain from camp, but the children themselves see the skills and benefits of attending summer camp. Ninety-six percent of campers say that they made a new friend at camp, 93% of campers said they were able to meet and make friends with other children who were of different ethnicity or cultural background, and 74% said they were able to break out of their comfort zones and do something they were afraid of (ACA, 2022d). A large part of the skills these campers see themselves grow in are due to the outdoor education portion of summer camp where they get to work through physical challenges that test their teamwork skills and are given the chance to conquer their own fears. Participants who have experienced this type of outdoor education report higher levels of confidence, independence, self-esteem and stronger friendships. Girls especially report higher levels of self-efficacy and emotional wellness after spending time in outdoor education settings (Helker & Rürup, 2021).

Clearly campers gain many types of social-emotional skills at camp even when they do not realize it. Research, parents, and the campers themselves agree that summer camp allows children to grow and develop in ways that may not be possible without that camp experience.

The Impact Camp Counselors have on Campers

Camp counselors come in all shapes and sizes. They can be very young or very old, come from a variety of backgrounds, and offer a wide range of skills. Yet each one has the opportunity to make a lasting impact on their campers simply through building

relationships. Campers often state that one of the best parts of camp was the caring and supportive camp counselor they had (Sibthorp, Wilson, et al., 2020). In this section I want to dive deeper into the types of impacts camp counselors have on their campers and how those impacts show up later in the campers' lives.

One thing you will hear a lot of camp staff talk about is “teachable moments.” There is not a lot of designated teaching time in camp, but there are many opportunities to teach. Teachable moments are when campers stop and ask random questions or show curiosity in something and their camp counselors take the time to explain or indulge their curiosity, therefore, using that moment to teach or pass on knowledge to their camper (ACA, 2022e). Camp counselors also have the opportunity to guide and support their campers in a way that they may not experience at home. Jim Sibthorp called these supportive counselors one of the “active ingredients” of summer camp in his article “Active Ingredients of Learning in Summer Camp” (2020). Sibthorp argues that there are specific factors (active ingredients) that produce specific outcomes in campers. After asking several hundred former campers, he discovered that one of the greatest take-aways from camp was the support they felt from the caring staff and camp counselors. A camp counselor job is to build a relationship with their campers that demonstrates trust and support. These campers may only be around these adults for one week of their entire lives, but they will be remembered because of the role model they were (Sibthorp, Willson, et al., 2020). Sibthorp also calls this “camp connectedness” in his article “Measuring Positive Youth Development at Summer Camp: Problem Solving and Camp Connectedness.” He defines camp connectedness as “the camper’s personal relationship to camp” where campers are able to build their social skills in a safe and comforting

environment (Sibthorp, 2010). He considers this connectedness to other adults and peers one of the most essential parts of youth development (Sibthorp, Browne, et al., 2010).

Accessibility Challenges

While sending your children to summer camp clearly has some great benefits, it also has some disadvantages, particularly when it comes to accommodating children with special needs and disabilities. Most summer camps are not fully equipped to accommodate children with disabilities, but they are getting better at it and are trying to better accommodate those children. In this section, I will focus on how summer camp environments can be beneficial to children with special needs or disabilities and how specific camps have adapted to fulfill the needs of those children.

It is hard to equip a fully outdoor focused summer camp to accommodate things such as wheelchairs and walkers, but summer camps also want to be all inclusive. While it is hard to physically equip camp to accommodate special needs, there are great strides being made in the way of preparing staff to work with children with disabilities or special needs. Supportive and patient camp counselors are important to all campers, but extremely important to children with physical or mental handicaps. Camps can help support these children by hiring counselors that are patient and dedicated to including all children in camp activities. Also teaching counselors how to adapt their activities and games to a level that is acceptable to every camper is important and helps children with special needs to feel included. Training involving how to incorporate sensory activities into the day and how different types of sensory activities benefit children is also helpful. These techniques are all for the purpose of making sure those children with physical or mental disabilities enjoy camp just like any other child would (Lazarro et al., 2021).

While some traditional summer camps have implemented ways to include children with special needs, other camps focus solely on catering to the needs of those children. Camp For All in Texas began in 1993 by some Houston physicians who wanted to create a space where all children with disabilities would feel welcomed and could experience camp like every other child. Camp For All allows children with all types of disabilities ranging from cancer to epilepsy to spinal cord injuries to participate in challenge courses, hikes, archery, swimming, waterfront activities, arts and crafts, horseback riding, and more. Each staff member is specially trained and several physicians and neurologists volunteer their time every summer to help the campers as needed. While some camps like Camp For All cater to all types of disabilities, others focus on catering to children with specific needs. There are camps that are designed to support just children with cancer, muscular dystrophy, HIV/AIDS, physical handicaps, and autism. Since 1943, the ACA has tried to implement programs like these at camps and support camps catering to these children. They do not believe in looking at the limitations of the children, but rather they believe that they can do anything they are given the opportunity to do (ACA, 2004; Gilmore, 2016).

Financial Challenges

Summer camp has proven time and time again the benefits it can provide to children; however, sometimes the children that can benefit from a summer camp environment the most do not get to attend because of the high price of residential camps. Many parents state this is the biggest reason they cannot send their children to summer camp (Gross 2019; 2020). This section is going to focus on the efforts camps and the American Camp Association are making to make camps across the US accessible to all

by providing scholarships and other types of funding that allow underprivileged children to attend.

Across the thousands of camps across the United States, prices for day camps and residential camps can vary greatly. Some camps are very affordable and cost less than \$100 a week per camper, while other camps are much more expensive and can cost up to \$1500 per week per camper (ACA, 2022g). Obviously this can be an enormous burden on parents, especially if they have multiple children. However, the ACA is dedicated to their belief that summer camp is an important and developmentally priceless experience for children and are doing their part to help all children attend summer camp. One way they are helping parents send their children to camp is by giving them a searchable database that lists every ACA accredited camp. This database allows parents to put in different criteria which then pulls up the camps that match that criteria. They can search for multiple criteria at one time such as overnight vs day camp, what state they want the camp in, what kind of activities they are interested in (rope courses, waterfront, rock climbing, environmental education classes, art, sports, etc.), wheelchair accessible, and much more. The ACA also has a special fund called the Send a Child to Camp Fund that allows camps to apply for scholarship money that can then be given out to campers in need of help to pay for summer camp. The ACA does not give out any scholarships directly, but instead has this fund so that other camps can apply for that money to be able to provide children with that experience. This fund is specifically set up so that financially challenged families can send their children to camp to get the same experience that children from financially stable families are able to get (ACA, 2022f; 2022g; 2022h).

Even if camps can not access the Send a Child to Camp fund for some reason, or if those scholarship places have already been filled, most camps offer their own type of scholarships or other discounts. Most camps operate as nonprofits and receive much of their money from donors and some of that money is often set aside or designated to scholarships. Many camps also offer payment plans so the whole sum is not due up front. There are also often discounts of early registration or registering for more than one session or more than one child. Some organizations such as churches or the military that have funds set up for this or camps will provide discounts to children within certain organizations. There are even some government plans that can be used to send a child to camp. 94% of camps across the United States offer some type of scholarships to give more children access to summer camp. In 2018, approximately \$85,000 worth of scholarships were distributed to children who otherwise would not have been able to afford to go to camp. The bottom line is that the ACA and the summer camp industry in general believes every child should get the chance to go to summer camp and they will do whatever necessary to get them there (ACA, 2022f; Browne et al., 2019).

COVID-19 Impact

There is no doubt in anyone's mind that COVID-19 has made a huge impact on our world and changed it in ways we never thought possible. The same is true for the field of outdoor education. Summer camps and outdoor education became basically non-existent with the onset of the Coronavirus due to social distancing, limited touch practices, and not being able to gather in large groups. This section is going to talk about the impact COVID-19 made on outdoor education during the initial wave, the resilience

within the field to keep outdoor education alive and going, and where the field is heading three years after the onset.

Onset of Covid-19

The onset of Covid-19 was a new and strange time for everyone. Life suddenly seemed to end as we knew it and businesses and industries across the world had to either drastically change the way they had always run or shut down all together. The field of outdoor education faced the same problem. A field that heavily relies on groups gathering together and hands-on experiential activities suddenly seemed impossible and possibly even dangerous. Summer camps, outdoor education facilities, environmental education facilities and others all suddenly found themselves and their livelihoods going extinct. Many locations had to close down permanently because it was too expensive to keep the facilities up and running without consistent income. In 2020, an estimated 63% of these types of facilities believed the pandemic would shut them down too and it's believed that eleven million students lost out on an opportunity to experience the type of hands-on learning these facilities provide (Higgins, 2020; Ardoin & Bowers, 2020).

Another downfall of Covid-19 was that many school districts found outdoor education unnecessary during the pandemic. The pandemic has obviously been hard on the school systems and some of them are just trying to keep their students educated in one form or another, but that meant outdoor education was put on the back burner. Many districts found it unnecessary or unworth the attention amidst all of the other problems they were dealing with. Not only were school students and their field trips affected but once school was out, children still had nowhere to go because summer camps were also closing or postponing camps. Two out of three (about 62%) of the summer camps in the

United States had to close their doors in the summer of 2020 because they could not provide an appropriate, safe, yet still fun summer camp experience amongst the pandemic and all the restrictions that came with it (Leonhardt, 2020). Despite doing what they thought was best at the time, many experts also believed this was the worst decision districts, school systems, and camps could make. Outdoor experiences have proven to be extremely beneficial to one's physical and mental health. As Covid-19 forced people to stay indoors and away from others, they were denied those basic joys of being outside and socializing. Experts believe that is exactly why places like summer camp are needed during this time and were more determined than ever to keep them alive (Ardoin & Bowers, 2020; Leonhardt, 2020).

The Resilience of Outdoor Education

While the summer of 2020 was clearly a rough one for summer camps and outdoor education, facilities were determined to come back stronger in 2021 and provide children with something, even if it was non-traditional summer camp. A year into the pandemic and people were finally realizing exactly what they were missing out on by not being able to go outside and enjoy time with others, so they knew summer of 2021 had to be different. Experts knew that getting outside would greatly benefit everyone, especially children, mentally and physically, and that the outdoors was a great place that everyone had access to regardless of social class or ethnicity. With this idea in mind, the Green Schoolyards America (GSA), Lawrence Hall of Science of the University of California, Berkeley, the San Mateo County Office of Education in California, and Ten Strands created the National Covid-19 Outdoor Learning Initiative. This initiative is a huge database of free resources that anyone can use to help educate children during the

pandemic. Most of the resources are geared towards learning outside to encourage educators and educate them on the benefits of learning outside and how they can be successful at it. With entirely too many children unable to gain access to the technology required to do distance learning, the National Covid-19 Outdoor Learning Initiative was designed to help even the playing field and keep all students up to date with their learning no matter their economic class or background (Cowe & Rigby, 2021; Green Schoolyards America, n.d.).

The Future of Summer Camps and Covid-19

As the Covid-19 variants, mask guidelines, vaccine recommendations, and social distancing rules have shifted and changed over the last three years, it seems that things finally might be slowing down, which is good news for summer camps and outdoor education facilities. The most recent mask guidelines sent out by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) state that masks are only required in areas that are considered high risk and they have a tool on their website allowing people to look up their area to determine the risk level and their specific mask guidelines (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [CDC], 2022). A study conducted by Pennsylvania State University found a 20% increase in the number of adults who spend time outside now compared to before the pandemic (Wagner, 2022). Not only are adults spending more time outside, but children are too, and summer camp sales are skyrocketing as parents register their children for the summers they have been missing out on the last few years. For many camps, this has been a testing period but also a proving period. They were able to prove that they can safely care for hundreds of kids at a time, completely outdoors. If parents were concerned before about their child being safe at camp, they no longer have

to worry about it. Overall, summer camps are coming back strong and the demand for them is even stronger (Miskin, 2022).

Conclusion

In this paper I want to explore the topic of outdoor education and the benefits of learning outside of the classroom. Specifically, I plan to explore the benefits children gain and the skills they learn at outdoor education focused summer camps and how necessary those skills are as they develop and grow. The research is clear: summer camps and outdoor education have clear and proven benefits and children attending such experiences develop and grow in ways other children do not. Since the beginning of summer camps back in the 1860s, people have realized the physical and mental health benefits children gain from spending time outdoors. They are able to experience a type of learning that is not often found inside of the classroom through real world experiential learning. This type of learning is so powerful and helps children connect to nature and other concepts far better than learning it through a lecture. Children at summer camp also get to experience the joys of making friends and be guided by camp counselors who have dedicated their whole summer (or sometimes their whole lives) to helping children grow this experiential learning and develop social-emotional skills that other children do not develop the same way. While camp obviously has some drawbacks like challenges with accessibility, the financial restraints it puts on families, and the struggles it took to survive the Covid-19 pandemic, most people in the camp industry would agree that it is still worth it. Plus, with all the work camps are doing to offset costs and make areas more accessible, the industry is growing larger and the community is growing stronger all the time. Camp has a bright future and is an industry that will not die anytime soon.

In Chapter Three I will discuss my project and how I have decided to formulate it. My project will be a residential summer camp curriculum and will include several topics such as how to teach an archery class, various games for campers to play, and multiple “teaching tips” that are designed to coach new instructors on my own personal tried and true techniques that improve participant engagement. Chapter Three will also give an overview of how my curriculum will be written, how the week of camp will be assessed, and the day-to-day schedule camp counselors will follow. Much of the curriculum is guided from my own personal experiences and that will be reflected in how the curriculum is written and how it is intended to run in real life.

CHAPTER THREE

Project Description

Introduction

Summer camps have been around for generations and are continuously growing, proving their importance to the American family and in the development of children. My plan for this project is to explore the topic of outdoor education and the benefits of learning outside of the classroom. Specifically, to explore the benefits children gain and the skills they learn at outdoor education focused summer camps and how necessary those skills are as they develop and grow. I have decided to write a summer camp curriculum for this project to showcase all of the ways that summer camp can benefit children. The curriculum will describe various outdoor education, environmental education, and adventure education activities or lessons and relate back to children's developmental growth. Some activities are geared toward growing children's teamwork and social skills and others will be geared towards growing their confidence and decision making skills. Overall, summer camp is a great place to learn, but it's also meant to be fun and each activity also allows children to laugh and have fun while learning.

Project Overview

My capstone project is a week-long residential camp curriculum. This curriculum will have two parts: the first part is a simplified daily schedule that can be given to parents or caregivers, and the second part will be a detailed outline of day-to-day activities and lessons. I believe the simplified schedule is important because for some parents this is the first time their child has been away from home and they want to know that their child is having a fulfilling and safe experience. This schedule will run through

the hourly schedule of a day at camp and list several of the activities that campers will participate in during their week of camp. It will emphasize the safety aspects of camp and the skilled counselors and staff that will be caring for their children during camp.

The second part of this curriculum is the detailed description of every activity and lesson and how they fit into a schedule each day. This curriculum is intended to be given to camp counselors at summer camp to help them understand why they are teaching certain games, activities, concepts, etc. and what the campers should get out of these lessons. Not every activity at summer camp is intended to have a lesson with it. It's summer, kids are meant to have fun! However, many times campers do not even realize they are learning when they actually are. As I describe the different activities in the curriculum, each of them will have a section explaining the importance of the activity/lesson and what the campers can gain from such activities/lessons and a section explaining how to do the activity. Aside from just descriptions of each activity, the project will also have an overall schedule of each day and the entire week. This is intended to keep counselors on track with their day and make the campers get the most out of their experience at camp.

Setting

The intended setting for my project and curriculum is a residential summer camp with several outdoor classrooms and facilities so children get to spend as much time outside as possible. It would be a week-long, Sunday night to Friday afternoon camp where children stay with the same two camp counselors the entire week. They sleep in bunk-like cabins where all the campers and counselors are in the same room. The curriculum will be written in such a way that it applies to children between the ages of

nine to twelve, but can be adapted to younger or older children. Each activity will be designed with sixteen campers and two camp counselors in mind. I chose this ratio because current American Camp Association (ACA) guidelines state that a safe counselor to camper ratio is 1:8 for this age group at a residential camp (ACA, 2022c). The location of this camp is in the Appalachian Mountains and will have some elements that relate back to the ecology of the area.

Audience

The main part of the curriculum is written for the camp counselors who will be with the campers each day of the week. These camp counselors will be between the ages of twenty to twenty-five, therefore, the curriculum will be written in easy-to-read everyday language without using education jargon without explanation. Many of the camp counselors could also be first time counselors so it will be written in a format that easily explains activities and is easy to follow. It will not only thoroughly describe how to do the activities but will also be full of “teaching tips” that will help them better explain or present the materials to their group of campers. The activities, lessons, and concepts in the curriculum are intended to be taught to children between the ages of nine to twelve. They can be adapted to younger or older audiences, but the nine to twelve age range is the intended audience because this age group is commonly grouped together at summer camps due to the common developmental milestones between them.

Parents and caregivers are the intended audience for the initial simplified daily schedule that is also a part of my project. Parents like to know what their children are doing at camp while they are away so this simplified schedule is intended to give them a quick overview of their child’s week. It is also meant to inform them on the benefits,

safety procedures, and well-trained staff that will be with their campers throughout the week.

Timeline

This curriculum is meant to be used over a one-week period without repeating too many activities. Some activities such as pool time, meal time, rest time, and free time will be repeated throughout the week to allow children to have some down time or time to be imaginative on their own. Each activity is approximately one hour long, but some activities may take more or less time and those will be distinguished in the curriculum. Scheduled activities will begin Sunday evening when campers are dropped off and go through Friday afternoon when campers are picked up.

In a summer long program, the entire curriculum can be reused many times. Each week is a new set of campers, so the same schedule could be reused each week if desired. The curriculum would also have to be completed several weeks before the first week of summer camp started to give enough time to order or buy any necessary materials and send the curriculums out to camp staff so they are prepared for summer. The goal would be for camp staff to have the curriculum at least two weeks before their arrival date at camp. The first week the camp counselors are on the camp property is the training week where all the camp counselors and permanent camp staff go over the curriculum together to learn it before teaching it to the campers.

Curriculum Development Theory

The guiding theory behind this curriculum is that children learn better and retain more from hands-on experiential activities. The Association for Experiential Education (AEE) defines experiential education as “a teaching philosophy. . . in which educators

purposefully engage with learners in direct experience and focused reflection in order to increase knowledge, develop skills, clarify values, and develop people's capacity to contribute to their communities” (Association for Experiential Education [AEE], n.d., para. 1). This is exactly what summer camp has tried to do since its inception. The goal of summer camp is to provide safe, comfortable, educational places for children to spend their summers as they gain skills that cannot always be developed in a classroom (Better Environmental Education Teaching, Learning, and Expertise Sharing [BEETLES], 2020).

Another principle that I want to emphasize in my curriculum is Challenge by Choice. Challenge by Choice is a principle originally designed for adventure education and is often used in outdoor education as well. The basic premise of the principle is that participants always have the power to choose if they want to participate in the activity or not. As an instructor (or camp counselor in this case), they are meant to guide and instill confidence in their participants and encourage (or challenge) them to break through their fears. However, it is also fully understood and explained to all the participants that whatever decision the participant makes will be respected. Often the participant can learn just as much, if not more, when they decide to not participate and learn to use their decision making skills. In the summer camp setting, this allows children to develop their decision making skills, build their confidence in themselves, and respect the decisions of others (Neill, 2008).

Assessment

There is no formal assessment designed for this project since it is very difficult to assess the concepts children learn at summer camp. However, like I mentioned before, there will be a debriefing and reflection time at the end of activities to informally assess

learning. There will also be an evaluation sent out after the camp week is over which will allow children and their parents to share their thoughts on the camp if they desire. It will ask the campers questions such as: What was your favorite part? What was your least favorite part? What did you learn? Did you make any friends? Would you go again? Did you have a favorite counselor? Then the parents' side of the evaluation would ask questions such as: What inspired you to send your child to camp? Did your child enjoy camp? Were you properly informed on how camp worked and the expectations? Were all your questions answered? Were the staff knowledgeable and kind? Did your child have any complaints? Is there anything you would change?

These voluntary evaluations are sent back to the permanent camp staff and are meant to help improve the camp experience for the campers and parents. While there are often things that cannot be changed, these evaluations allow camp staff to see what campers and parents think and what they feel is important. They will also allow campers and parents to give shout-outs or praise to any camp counselors or staff that made their experience special. This can then be sent to that counselor or staff person so show them the difference they made during a week of camp.

Conclusion

This chapter is meant to cover the details of creating my project and how that project will work in real life. I have described my thought process while creating this summer camp curriculum and have also described how it will function in a real summer camp setting with campers and counselors. Much of this project is coming from my own personal experience with camps and writing curriculum and knowing what works and what does not. My intention is that this curriculum will not only be beneficial to me as I

write it and relearn some activities and lessons I have not taught for a while, but that it will also be beneficial to those who will read it and possibly use it after me. In the next chapter I will analyze the results of this curriculum and the outcomes after the project is completed.

CHAPTER FOUR

Conclusion

Introduction

My goal for this project was to explore the benefits children gain and the skills they learn at outdoor education focused summer camps and how necessary those skills are as they develop and grow. Having grown up in camp since the age of eight and having worked at camps since the age of sixteen, I firmly believed in the benefits of summer camp long before starting this project. Summer camp and outdoor education is where I learned how much I love to teach others and where I gained the confidence in myself to pursue a career teaching others. I had counselors and mentors who invested time in me and I want to do the same for other children. Throughout this project and the time I have spent researching it, I have learned even more about summer camps and the positive impact they can have on children. As I wrote my curriculum I wanted it to be more than just a list of lessons and diagrams. Since my goal was to prove that the skills learned at camp can be used in the outside world, I added a section to each lesson titled “Why Learn _____?” Each blank is filled in with the title of whatever lesson it correlates with and this two to three sentence section explains the skills and benefits children gain from that particular lesson. Skills like observation, critical thinking, and problem solving show up often, and others like map reading, following technique, and a deeper appreciation of the world show up less often but are just as important.

When I attended camp I never realized all of the things I was learning, but looking back at those times as an adult I realize now how important those times were for me. I would be where I am or who I am today without those experiences. In the following

sections of this chapter I will give an overview of the literature I used in Chapter Two that influenced my project the most, an overview of the project itself and how it is written, the project limitations, my personal use for the project, and the possible future professional use of the project.

Literature Review

Throughout literature, the benefit of being outdoors is evident. The summer camp industry began in the 1860s because it was believed that children needed to be outside and learn from nature (ACA, n.d.; Rillo, 1964). Summer camps became so popular and people realized the need for them was so great that the American Camp Association (ACA) was established in 1910 and became the leading professional organization for American summer camps. As I developed my own summer camp curriculum, many of the principles I researched on how to properly establish a camp came from the ACA. Guidelines such as the 8:1 camper to camp counselor ratio and having numerous hands-ons experiences for campers to participate in come directly from the ACA (ACA, 2022b; ACA 2022c). As the main accrediting body for camps, I researched the ACA standards for accreditations as I developed my curriculum for this project and wrote my curriculum in accordance with those standards. Each activity of my curriculum has a section that explains the social and developmental benefits of that activity as per ACA standard requirements (ACA, 2022i). This was an important section for me to add not only because of the ACA requirements but also because it demonstrates the real benefits of summer camp as an educational experience. Many children do not even realize they are learning while at summer camp and that is a part of the beauty. As an employee at a summer camp, you have no idea the impact you and the activities you teach can have on a

child, but it can be a monumental impact. Children learn valuable social-emotional lessons at camp as they learn how to live with strangers for the first time and work as a team with those strangers (Gateway Region YMCA, 2019). One of my goals with this project was to demonstrate how each and every activity at summer camp could have a positive impact on children and I believe I was able to do that through my curriculum.

The Project

My project includes a Camp Counselor Curriculum Guide, a Camp Counselor Schedule, a Parent Information Sheet, a Parent Survey, and a Camper Survey. The purpose of creating these pieces was to provide the summer camp industry with a framework to run a successful summer camp program. For my project, I created my own camp name and logo to make the curriculum feel more real and give it a cohesive theme. I chose the name Camp Wohali because “wohali” is the Cherokee word for “eagle” and a sign of bravery. I wanted to emphasize from the very beginning that it takes bravery to lead children at camp just as it takes bravery from the children to be led by a stranger. You can ask camp counselors across the country and they will tell you that it is not an easy job. For an entire week, you are in charge of keeping sixteen children you barely know fed, clothed, happy, and healthy. My Camp Counselor Curriculum Guide starts off with a letter from me as the camp director encouraging them to be brave and embrace the name Wohali for the summer. I want the counselors who read this curriculum to feel empowered and supported to take on the challenges of summer camp.

The Curriculum Guide is the largest portion of my project and provides a detailed lesson on multiple camp activities including archery, campfire cooking, water ecology, and many others. Each activity is clearly defined by a title and includes specific sections

such as a description of the activity, the “Why Learn _____?” section discussed earlier, a set up section discussing how to prepare for the activity, an introduction section with the background knowledge on the activity, and the main body of the lesson explaining how to do the activity. There are fourteen activities/lessons provided in the Curriculum Guide and over the course of a week, a camp counselor would do every one of these activities with their campers. Every single activity in this Curriculum Guide is something I have personally taught in summer camp before, therefore, I believe I had an advantage when writing these because I knew exactly how they would run with a group of children. For this reason, several of my lessons have sections called “teaching tips” that come straight from my own personal experience. They offer small tidbits of information that can help the camp counselor on how they present information, how they can better engage their campers, or just general information that I believe could be helpful.

Aside from the Curriculum Guide, I also wrote a Camp Counselor Schedule detailing out the week of camp and when each of the activities in the Curriculum Guide would be done. The Schedule is organized into days and broken down into fifteen minute time slots. There are specific time slots built into the Schedule titled “travel time” that are designed to be used by the camp counselor and their group of campers as time used to travel between activities. “Travel time” was important for me to add because I have never seen a camp add it to a counselor's schedule before. Being on time is talked about often, and counselors are told to build in travel time so they get to their next activity on time, but I have personally never seen a schedule with it already built in. It made sense to me to build that time into the Camp Counselors Schedule so there is no guessing and no excuses for not being on time for an activity. The bottom of the Schedule also has a

“Helpful Hints” section explaining some of the various activities on the schedule so camp counselors knew what to expect during those times. It explains activities such as camp check-in, opening campfire, free time, and cabin time among others.

When thinking about summer camp we think about the children and the camp counselors and all of the great things a child will experience, but we often forget about the other large party of people involved in the process: the parents. In order to get children to come to summer camp, the camp must first convince the parent it is worth it. So when creating this project, I did not want to leave this important party out, therefore, I decided to create a Parent Information Sheet. This Sheet gives a brief overview of what campers do during a week of camp and also provides the parent with a point of contact should they need to get in contact with anyone at camp . I also created a Parent Survey that would be sent to parents at the end of the week asking about their child’s experience at camp. It asks them to rate the skills their child gained at camp, the quality of the activities, their likelihood to recommend Camp Wohali, as well their overall satisfaction with the camp. I also created a similar Camper Survey that would be given to the campers on their last day of camp and ask them to rate their favorite meals, favorite activities, what they learned during the week, and how they liked their camp counselor.

Project Limitations

The biggest limitation I found was the sheer amount of information needed in the curriculum. I had originally intended to add many more things to this project, but time simply would not allow for it. I originally wanted to combine my Curriculum Guide with a camp counselor handbook that included things such as camp rules, uniform guidelines, appropriate conversation, and other guidelines that the camp counselors would have

followed during their summer at camp. However, as I started writing I realized that was going to be entirely too much information for me to fit into one document or write all in one summer course. Since the lessons were the bulk of my project, I decided to forgo the handbook section and just write the Curriculum Guide.

Another large portion of information I was unable to add to my Curriculum Guide was for high ropes. Having personally been high rope certified, I know the amount of information and training it requires to successfully run high rope challenges.

Unfortunately, it was something that I could not fully and comfortably encompass in this project, therefore, I felt it was important to mention it has a limitation. In my Camp Counselor Curriculum Guide I do mention high ropes and some of the rules camps and counselors must follow when doing these activities. I also note in that section of the Curriculum Guide that, in a real-life setting, the counselors would have received a formal training session in high ropes by a professional organization before being allowed to perform the activities with children.

In a real setting, another limitation to this curriculum could include the intended audience. I choose activities that would interest children between the ages of nine to twelve. While many of the activities could be adapted for younger or older children, it would take some reworking to adapt to those age groups. Also that fact that the Curriculum Guide and Camp Counselor Schedule are written for an residential camp would limit its use at a day camp. Again, many of the activities could be used for a day camp, but it was not written with a day camp in mind.

Personal and Professional Use

My goal for many years now has been to one day open my own summer camp and I hope to use what I have created for this project as a part of that goal. Since beginning the capstone project many months ago, I have had my mind set on creating a curriculum like the one I have created. I felt as if I needed to create a project like this for my own personal goals and now was the time to do it. While I originally had much grander hopes for what I could add to this curriculum, I realize now that building a camp from scratch will take much more time than two semesters. However, I feel confident that I have a solid base now and I am looking forward to the day I open my summer camp and am able to use this curriculum. In the coming months and years I plan to build on what I already have, add more activities and lessons, and enhance the program I have created. I want to one day be able to offer this curriculum to others just starting out and give them a base for their summer camp or outdoor education career.

Conclusion

Writing this project has been a great learning experience for me. Having originally bitten off more than I can chew, it taught me the value of reeling in my expectations and understanding the scope of what I want to create. It also has taught me that my learning does not stop here at the end of a semester. With the goal to one day open my own summer camp, the learning and growing can never stop. Children across the United States go to camp every summer for different reasons and gain different things. I want to be a part of the process that helps children grow and learn about themselves. I also want to have a part in training the next generation of camp counselors and I believe this Curriculum Guide will allow me to do that. Without great counselors

who have access to great programming, campers would never be able to come to camp and would not have the amazing experiences that they do. I want this project to be used for many years in the future as a teaching tool and stepping stone into a career in camp for others, just as other camps, counselors, and programs have done for me.

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