

american **CAMP** association®

ACA Camp Research Collaborations Summit

Friday, January 11, 2008

ACA National Office, Bradford Woods, IN

Executive Summary Report

Introduction

The American Camp Association's® national staff Research Team and volunteer Committee for the Advancement of Research and Evaluation (CARE) hosted the first ACA Camp Research Collaborations Summit at Bradford Woods, Indiana, on January 11, 2008. This first-of-its-kind Summit was a one-day meeting conducted to build relationships among colleagues from academic and youth-serving organizations with similar interests, responsibilities, and goals around understanding the camp experience and related phenomenon. The primary desired outcome of the event was to incorporate discussions that could result in future opportunities for collaboration and intersection across organizations and academic communities.

This Summit had a focused list of invitees due to purpose and logistics—one representative from each university and organization that had a history of research with youth development and camp/outdoor experiences. The final list of researchers included the following individuals (non-attendees due to last-minute challenges are in parentheses):

Dr. Cari Autry; Arizona State University; Cari.Autry@asu.edu

Dr. Deb Bialeschki; American Camp Association; dbialeschki@ACAcamps.org.

Dr. Linda Caldwell; Pennsylvania State University; llc7@psu.edu (family emergency)

Dr. Michael Conn; Girl Scout Research Institute; mconn@girlscouts.org

Connie Coutellier; Campfire USA; connie.coutellier@campfireusa.org

Dr. Alan Ewert; Indiana University; aewert@indiana.edu

Gary Forster; YMCA of the USA; gary.forster@ymca.net (flight cancelled)

Dr. Paul Furukawa; Camp CAMP; pfurukawa@satx.rr.com

Dr. Barry Garst; American Camp Association; bgarst@ACAcamps.org

Dr. Michael Gass; University of New Hampshire; mgass@hypatia.unh.edu

Pat Hammond; Association for Experiential Education; executive@ace.org

Dr. Karla Henderson; North Carolina State University; karla@email.unc.edu

Dr. Jennifer Hinton; Ohio University; hinton@ohio.edu

Dr. Jeff Jacobs; Cal Poly State University; jacobs@calpoly.edu

Dr. Jill Martz; Montana State University; jmartz@montana.edu

Dr. Niki Nestor McNeely; The Ohio State University; mcneely.1@cfaes.osu.edu

Dr. Karen Paisley; University of Utah; karen.paisley@health.utah.edu

Dr. Gwynn Powell; University of Georgia; gpowell@uga.edu

Dr. Keith Russell; University of Minnesota Twin Cities; krussell@umn.edu

Dr. Nathan A. Schaumleff; Indiana State University; nschaumleff@isugw.indstate.edu
Dr. Jim Sibthorp; University of Utah; Jim.Sibthorp@health.utah.edu
Dr. Clifton Watts; Texas A&M University; cwatts@tamu.edu
Pat Wellen; Boy Scouts of America; pwellen@netbsa.org
Dr. Anderson Young; Cortland State University; younga@cortland.edu

The Summit schedule was divided into two parts: (1) Research Overview (research interests of attendees' organizations/institutions as well as ACA Vision for Research agenda) and (2) Research Opportunities (both in terms of identifying key research issues and opportunities for collaboration). The following sections summarize key points from each of these two sessions.

Summary of the Research Overview (morning session)

Since many Summit attendees were unfamiliar with each other, time was given at the beginning for each individual to describe their areas of expertise as well as areas of potential interest in the future. Some of the areas mentioned included: the role of technology in camp; staff training issues; ways to connect youth with outdoor settings; the intersections of family with camp; creation of new measurement tools; resiliency and youth; effects of intentional program design; age-appropriate translations of key ideas like leadership, brain science and youth development, outcomes (environmental, developmental, special needs); how to understand camp contributions within a broad spectrum of positive developmental opportunities; the need for longitudinal projects (and money challenges); joint writing partnerships around robust research findings; mental health and camp; identification of important/emerging issues in the field; how to be proactive about research messages; youth development issues that include staff in the spectrum; values of social justice and environmental needs within camp; generational differences; cultural relevance and camp; environmental service learning; understanding the meaning of the camp experience; fidelity of implementation; and translating the research into practice.

The ACA Research Team provided an overview of the past, present, and future research efforts of ACA. They described the rationales and contributions of the research stream generated at ACA and stressed the role of research in establishing a foundation of evidence for the association. The current collaboration process with examples of current collaborative opportunities was provided to the group to demonstrate how partnerships could evolve.

The CEO of ACA, Peg Smith, shared with the group the importance of research to the vision of the future for ACA held by staff as well as the National Board of Directors. Peg's message focused on relevancy and transformation as key issues for tomorrow's world. She believes research can be the tipping point for the way forward. She articulated that the "brutal truth" for us interested in camp is that we work with: 1) an evaporating demographic (e.g., middle- to upper-class white youth that may soon be the "minority"); 2) parental unwillingness to put the care of their children with others (i.e., greater expectations and demands, qualifiers, and outright fear; and 3) fewer parents with the camp experience and a personal understanding of the value of

it (i.e., they don't have camp in their own up-bringing). Peg then talked about ACA's ability to send "the right message" that focuses on "making better people and improving lives." She emphasized the ACA message currently focuses on:

- Nature-deficit disorder ("save the planet" as well as health and wellness of youth)
- Authentic human relations (kids make "secondary" connections through technological means but are they really authentic relationships?)
- Human-powered activity (mind, body, and spirit)

Camp professionals have great stories but can we articulate, document, and add value to them? We often lack the foundation evidence that lends credibility to the story. She suggested efforts are needed in the following research arenas:

- Primary "pure" research (often through research grants that care about theoretical knowledge development)
- Applied research (often with partners to solve immediate problems)
- Practical application (translation of findings and development of educational materials by field experts)
- Public translation (messages developed by media experts based on our research that get into the mainstream public dialogue)

ACA (or any other nonprofit) will never have the budgets to do all of these things. We need integrated strategies, collaborative relationships, and creative synergy. We need the four arenas of research to be relevant and need the collaboration efforts of many committed individuals and organizations joined together. Our inability to do this collaboration will result in the parallel of academic's "publish or perish" to the nonprofit world's "Be a broker or go broke." Camp research should also have broader applications and value to others beyond just us.

Peg's comments were followed by questions and dialogue. The discussion points included: how to get the message out about the value of the camp experience to the public, articulating the value of play/camp and human growth/development in a legitimized way, research's role in public policy, the difficulty in defining "camp" especially within a public context, and how to address parental fear (stranger danger and parent stress over academic pressures being exerted on their child).

Summary of the Research Opportunities Session (Afternoon)

The large group sharing and discussion opportunities in the morning set the stage for the afternoon sessions focused on opportunities particularly around the topics of what research needs to be done and how do we get it done. The afternoon format was designed for two small group break-out sessions followed by "report backs" to the large group. The following section summarizes the important points from these discussions.

In the first break-out session, the focus was on what research needs to be done particularly around outcomes; best practices (management/operations/programs); staff development/training;

parent issues; and generating “the big picture” about the value of camp. The following summaries are the main points shared from the “report backs” of the small group dialogues.

Outcomes Group

- Need to recognize that camps are different—don’t push all camps to focus on the same outcomes
- Camps are only as good as their delivery systems . . . need to understand the value of training and how it results in youth outcomes
- At what level are we measuring?
 - Staff outcomes vs. participants’ outcomes . . . there is a reciprocal action happening. That might be something (a dynamic) unique to camp. IT allows for the identification of other outcomes that speak to different communities

Best Practices Group

- How do business decisions impact outcomes? If you cut back on staff, what impact does that have on staff? If your camp is smaller, what is the effect of age ranges, smaller groups, etc., and when does that affect what you want to do with kids?
- ACA standards . . . they focus often on the facilities. Do we need to have food service standards if there is a county health inspection process in place? Do the standards focus too much on facilities and not enough on programming?
- Look at youth development more in standards; for example, age characteristics of youth, grouping of campers, and essential elements of quality youth development programs. Standards need to focus on these areas.
- Staff development and training— are there too many staff? Does that impact the camper experience?
- What about the quality standards of other related organizations? How can we connect more with those areas?

Staff Development Group

- Role of staff development
- What is the content we need for staff? (i.e., KASA [knowledge, attitudes, skills, and aspirations]— what is it we need at camp with counselors)
- What is the generic core of skills?
- Which of these can be addressed through training and which ones cannot?
 - Hiring/screening
 - Pre-service
 - On-site training
 - On-the-job training
- Embrace the role of staff development (at camp) in (more global) workforce preparation

Big Picture Group

- The 3rd rail of development
- Connection with brain research and experience
- Transferable skills related to process

- Process . . . why can we “get it” at camp better than other contexts
- Rote memory vs. special memory
- Academic, physical activity, socio-emotional
- How do we communicate the WHY to parents?
- Isolation is part of the novelty . . . outside comfort zone
- Transition for independence (space/process/support)
- Look to early childhood research
- ACA push to help CP realize we are doing youth development . . . at the same time schools are teaching character development using rote memory, information, etc., but it’s not connected to camps
- Build on the “All 5th graders in Indiana came to BW”
- Issues around language
 - We try to make it new
 - We aren’t talking outside ourselves
 - We aren’t building on like-minded projects

Parent Group

- Parent education
 - Workshops, courses
- Transition
 - Take the camp experience and transition what is learned at camp back home
 - Facilitate campers’ skills in the home environment
 - Train parents
- Expectations/Fears
 - Assessing these pre-camp
 - What’s the role of the assessment/info?
 - How do you use the information?
 - What’s the youth perspective vs. the parent perspective?
 - What’s the staff perspective?
 - Combine all 3
 - Technology and parents’ fears

In the second break-out, we spent time discussing the challenge of translating these topics into researchable projects. Each group went back to a set of topics/issues raised in the previous break-out session and tried to formulate a list of research questions that could begin to target particular research efforts. These questions (see Appendix A) were shared and discussed by the whole group with some beginning discussions on how we might take some actions around these topics. Much interest surrounded parent issues as well as the relationships among camp, the child, and the outdoor setting.

What Next?

The final discussion centered on next steps. The following concrete actions were initiated:

- A concise list of prioritized research questions will be developed from the full list generated in the afternoon sessions (University of Utah will coordinate this effort).
 - This “research agenda” would be available from the ACA Web site to guide potential university-based research efforts (often by graduate students and faculty) as well as offer starting points for collaborative efforts begun as an outcome of this Summit
 - A Web-based tracking system will be set up to follow actions taken on these research questions
- a list serve will be established (hosted by ACA) to facilitate ongoing communication among Summit participants
- A Summit Summary will be developed and shared with key stakeholders of the various institutions and organizations
- A follow-up with Summit participants will occur in six months to see what efforts (if any) are underway as a result of the Summit

Other suggested potential action steps that could still result in long-term actions included:

- Trying to share with a broader audience with more voices (regional)
- Beginning an “Association of Associations” of folks interested in youth, outdoors, of like-minded individuals (coalition model efforts) — getting the thought leaders of all these different formal groups together periodically to share efforts
- Share information with the SCLA (Student Camp Leadership Academy)
- Look for other ways to get the ideas out there
- Explore other structures for continuing this work
- Parallel development along CEO lines (CEO was started with individuals getting together— now sixteen years later, its organizations getting together), so maybe future efforts could happen in conjunction with CEO
- Explore potential avenues for a *Journal for Camp Research* (talk with folks that produce the post-CEO journal, *Research in Outdoor Education*. Since it is published every other year, maybe they would be willing to publish a biennial journal of Camp Research.

Summary

This Summit was the first attempt at bringing together researchers interested in camp/outdoor research from both academic and youth-serving organizations. The one-day meeting was an opportunity for like-minded individuals to get to know each other while engaged in dynamic dialogue around critical camp research issues. A sincere thank you is extended to all of our participants for taking time out of busy schedules to attend this meeting, to the ACA CARE volunteers who helped plan and carry-out the Summit, and to ACA national staff, especially Sheila Dannemiller of the Research Team, for the help in making the Summit happen.

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Appendix A: Research Questions

1. When we look at program improvement, through adding or subtracting of some program aspects, what happens? How does it contribute to a quality camp experience?
2. How do directors/staff influence organizational culture so that they want to understand their baseline and then want to change (improve) from there?
3. How do we reduce directors' fears that doing critical evaluation processes may somehow imply they are "doing something wrong?"
4. What elements increase or decrease parental fears? To what extent are parental fears a barrier to camp enrollment?
5. What are parents' goals, expectations, and fears related to outdoor-based youth programs and how well do these align with campers' goals, expectations, and fears?
6. How do people define camp?
7. How do camp outcomes compare with workforce outcomes?
8. Do children know when they are given quality decision-making opportunities?
9. What is unique about the camp environment? How does a "camp" uniquely achieve positive youth development?
10. What is camp? (big C and little C) Do "Big C" camps do something differently than "little C" (i.e., accredited) camps? What are specific outcomes of both types of camps?
11. What skills do staff need in order to make positive youth development happen? (Of those skills, what can and can't be taught?)
12. What's the relationship between accreditation standards and positive youth development?
13. What's the role of ritual and tradition in camp?
14. What's the role of counselors in building positive relationships with adults?
15. What's the role of intentionality of design for quality programs?
16. What's the role of small group living in positive development?
17. What is it about "camp" that contributes to positive youth development and that is different than in other settings? Same as 9
18. What role does technology play in the process of camps? How is technology impacting the camp experience?
19. What are the dimensions of parental fears? In relation to camp? (Do a meta-analysis of what's already out there?) Same as 4 & 5
20. What do parents believe/expect about camp? Same as 5
21. What role do opportunities for exploration/awe/wonder/surprise play in youth development theory?
22. What elements make camp unique? Same as 9 & 17
23. How does the quality of staff training impact camper outcomes?
24. What are the benefits of camp to the community?
25. What are the components of a high-quality camp program?
26. Do children with certain characteristics benefit more from the camp experience?
27. How does camp compare to other youth development methods in the capability to provide higher levels of essential elements of positive youth development?
28. What are the long-term benefits of camp? Similar to 24
29. How are camps contributing to the development of competent, contributing, caring, and concerned citizens?
30. What workforce prep skills are learned as a result of serving as a camp counselor or staff member? Similar to 7
31. What elements make camp unique and that provide baseline outcomes? Same as 9, 17, 22
32. How does the quality of staff training affect quality program outcomes? Similar to 14
33. What are the benefits of camp to community, citizenship, environment, leadership, decision-making?
34. What are the benefits of camp participation beyond camp? Are there certain populations for which camp is the best environment to enhance their development? Similar to 24
35. What are the essential components of a quality camp experience? Same as 25