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Understanding the Effectiveness of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Initiatives at Youth Summer Camps

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Understanding the Effectiveness of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

Initiatives at Youth Summer Camps

by

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Abstract

The purpose of this qualitative study is to explore the effectiveness of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) programs and initiatives at camps in creating a community that is safe and inclusive of all participants. Many youth summer camps are committed to diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) as integral to their values and mission and consider themselves safe spaces for all regardless of their race, religion, or socioeconomic background. DEI should be a matter of concern for any camp, so that it might better prepare its participants to serve as advocates for social justice in society today and in the future. If DEI are strategic priorities for camps, it is important that camp leaders develop and implement DEI programs that are adequate and effective in meeting the needs within their community. Camp directors and leaders must continuously consider and evaluate how they will support and improve DEI within their respective communities both in the moment and in the future. DEI needs to be evident in every fiber of the camp culture such as staff, programming, financing, and governing policies. I intend for my research to demonstrate the effectiveness of specific practices, strategies, and tools focused on DEI at camps in creating a more positive, supportive, and safe experience for all participants. By gauging the level of effectiveness and impact of this work through assessment and accountability, camps might learn how they can modify and improve their efforts in the future to serve as centers for positive youth development and growth in this increasingly complex and diverse world.

Key words: diversity, equity, inclusion, effectiveness, youth summer camps, youth, social justice, advocacy, positive youth development

Chapter 1: Introduction

Rationale for Topic Selection

> What is more hopeful than witnessing growth? If you've witnessed a child's face
>
> when they have achieved a skill, task, or project—no test or score will give you
>
> better proof of success. Every child should experience success—every child
>
> should have a camp experience. (Smith, 2010, p. 26-27)

Personal Reasons for Selection

My family has been involved in the running of Camp Moosilauke for Boys, founded in

1904, since the 1930s. Camp Moosilauke is a traditional, overnight summer camp located in

Orford, New Hampshire. I currently serve as a part of the senior administrative team for the

camp. My primary responsibilities include Business Manager, coordinator of public relations and

marketing initiatives, and providing day-to-day oversight and support to campers and staff while

in session. Therefore, for both personal and professional reasons, I have a vested interest in the

quality of the youth summer camp experience for its participants.

In its history, Camp Moosilauke has proactively sought out opportunities to be a more

inclusive camp for boys. Moosilauke has partnered with a number of different nonprofit

organizations and schools over the past several years in order to provide broader access to camp.

Today, Moosilauke partners with nonprofit organizations in its outreach and recruitment efforts

in low-income and under-served communities. These organizations work closely with the Camp

in identifying potential campers to enroll at Moosilauke each summer. One of the organizations,

the Fresh Air Fund, houses the Camp Moosilauke Scholarship Fund so that interested individuals

can make tax-exempt contributions in support of campers with need. (Moosilauke is a for-profit

organization.) Through these partnerships, Camp Moosilauke's enrollment has become

increasingly more diverse. I define diversity per Bettez (2017) as "the state or act of being diverse; difference; unlikeness" in terms of race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and religion (p. 94). To date, nearly 28% of the camper population are boys from diverse, under-served, and/or low-income backgrounds. Approximately 35% of the campers at Moosilauke are receiving financial aid. Nearly $300,000 in scholarship and financial assistance is allocated to camper families each year (Financial Aid, Camp Moosilauke).

Camp Moosilauke prides itself on being a safe and inclusive community for all of its participants. Moosilauke, like many camps, is committed to diversity, equity, and inclusion as integral to its values and mission and considers itself a safe space for all regardless of their race, religion, or socioeconomic background. I am interested in learning, through my research, the effectiveness of strategies and tools in diversity, equity, and inclusion at youth summer camps in creating a safe and inclusive community for all and where there might be the potential for improvement in the future. Further, I believe that camps have the potential to set an example for the nonprofit sector, particularly those that are youth-centered, on how to foster a community of inclusion that actively serves to combat the social inequalities in today's world.

The Research

My research will reveal the history and evolution of youth summer camps over the past one hundred-plus years. When did camps first emerge and what were some of the driving factors behind their formation?

As we reflect on the camp experience, we observe an evolution illuminated by

urbanism and ruralism, gender issues, socio-economic issues, socialization,

values, character formation, reinforcement of group skills, ethnic awareness,

immigration, and religion...nearly a window on American history. (Smith, 2010,

p. 26)

How have camps evolved late in the 20th century and in more recent years, particularly in light

of the changing demographics of today's youth and communities within the U.S.? How have

camps become more accessible to youth from more diverse backgrounds or under-served

communities and how might camps become more even accessible?

My research will also consider the perceived significance of camps as communities in

promoting and fostering positive youth development, sound health and well-being, and

opportunities for youth broadening their capacity for learning and growth. Additionally, my

research will demonstrate the qualities and characteristics of a camp environment that potentially

leads to the betterment of today's youth such as a supportive and nurturing culture (both peer-to-

peer and adult-to-peer), the awareness of and appreciation for difference (or, in some instances,

the celebration of sameness, meaning equal existence and participation at camp), and the

importance of parents as partners with camps for their children in this camp experience even if it

is from a distance.

My research will consider what youth summer camps might learn from other youth-

centered programs—such as schools, after-school programs, and youth leadership programs—

that integrate diversity, equity, and inclusion strategies within their learning communities and

within their programming and curriculum. Smith (2010) shares that "the camp experience is a

learning environment that complements schooling...an expanded learning environment that

supports the development of healthy, productive citizens" (p. 27). How might camps' efforts be

similar to those of other youth-centered programs and how might camps set themselves apart as

potentially more optimal environments for the work of diversity, equity, and inclusion? Further, I

will share in my research some examples of the diversity, equity, and inclusion strategies and

tools that have been both recommended and implemented more recently at camps in order to

foster camp communities that are perceived as safe and inclusive for all.

Significance of the Study

At Camp Moosilauke, we share with our public that **"Common sense has always told us**

that living and learning in a diverse environment—where individuals have deep exposure to

people different from themselves—makes one more compassionate and better equipped to make

a difference in the world" (Financial Aid, Camp Moosilauke). I agree that diversity, equity, and

inclusion should be a matter of concern for any camp, so that it might better prepare all of its

participants from all backgrounds to serve as advocates for social justice in society today and in

the future. Per Browne et al (2019), the American Camping Association reported in 2018 that

94% of summer camps offered scholarships, with the average of 22% of campers receiving

financial assistance or scholarship and an average of $85,000 spent per camp on financial aid.

Those are encouraging figures regarding camps becoming more accessible and diverse.

However, consider the demographics of the New York City area, where most summer camps in

New England, like Camp Moosilauke, enroll a significant number of their campers (both

scholarship and non-scholarship). Nearly 24% of children under the age of 18 in New York City

live in poverty, 69% percent of the population is people of color, and over 40% of family

households make less than $50,000 (NYC, Social Explorer). The potential for becoming more

diverse and inclusive as camps is therefore quite evident.

Creating a diverse culture, however, is just one piece of the puzzle. Diversity

without inclusion lacks meaning and power. Inclusion is about respect,

involvement, and empowerment. It is about not just having but valuing different

backgrounds, beliefs, talents and ways of being. (Financial Aid, Camp

Moosilauke)

Mitchell and Elvy (2020) write about GORP—not the acronym representing the fun camp snack

we savored on our hikes or around a campfire ("good old raisins and peanuts") but rather—as

"general oppression, racism, and privilege" (p. 11). Despite a camp's diversity, camp leaders

must constantly be cognizant of how oppression, racism, and privilege manifest within a camp

culture or community and "how by exploring these concepts together, we can move toward a

camp experience where all campers and staff feel a sense of belonging" (Mitchell & Elvy, 2020,

p. 11). Camps can serve as a "microcosm of both the country and the world in which we live" in

addressing issues of diversity, equity, and inclusion head on (Mitchell & Elvy, 2020, p. 10).

The Problem Statement

I intend for my research to demonstrate the effectiveness of specific practices, strategies,

and tools focused on diversity, equity, and inclusion at youth summer camps in creating a more

positive, supportive, and safer experience for all participants (campers, families, and staff).

Are diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) programs and initiatives at youth summer

camps truly effective in providing a safe and inclusive environment for all participants? How do

camps engage in diversity, equity, and inclusion work? According to both direct observation and

survey feedback, what do camp leaders perceive to be some of the more effective initiatives and

strategies? What do camp leaders perceive as some of the benefits gained for both staff and

campers as a result of the work? What are the perceived challenges, barriers, or gaps? And, how

might the work be modified or improved in the future? What impact do the efforts of camps

make in terms of positive youth development and personal growth? What impact have camps had

in terms of social justice work and advocacy for others? What advice might camp leaders offer

other camps or youth-centered organizations on creating a community that is safer and more inclusive of all participants?

If diversity, equity, and inclusion are strategic priorities for youth summer camps (and ideally, this would be the case), it is important that camp leaders consider these questions and develop and implement diversity, equity, and inclusion programs and initiatives that are adequate and effective in meeting the needs of all within their community. Simply recruiting and creating a more diverse camp community is likely not enough. Simply organizing programs and initiatives around diversity, equity, and inclusion might not be sufficient either.

Camp directors and leaders must continuously consider how they will support diversity, equity, and inclusion within their respective communities both in the moment and in the future. Jaha-Echols (2019) describes this as "parallel tracks"—the ability to see what is in front of us and the vision of where you want to go (N. Jaha-Echols, personal communication, April 29, 2019). Diversity, equity, and inclusion also need to be evident in every fiber of the camp culture such as staff training, language, relationship-building and mentoring, programming, and finance and governing policies—it needs to be "who we are, not something we do" (N. Jaha-Echols, personal communication, April 29, 2019).

Camp directors and leaders must be committed to the work of inclusion, which might require deep self-reflection, some serious growing pains, and often tough challenges at many levels and at each step along the way. The process to becoming more inclusive requires intentionality, authenticity, self-awareness, and courage and it might be very difficult for some (or most) involved. However, per Ozier (2017), "the result [of work of diversity, equity, and inclusion] is a whole lot of pain, uncomfortable feelings, and, in the end, much more understanding, empathy, love, and acceptance" (p. 55). This journey to inclusion at camps will

hopefully instill in its participants reflection, empathy, community activism and involvement, and a lifelong commitment to social justice issues (Ozier, 2017).

The Study

My study will involve interviews with camp leaders and directors whose organizations have been more proactive in either their history or recent years (or both) in developing and implementing diversity, equity, and inclusion strategies and tools within their camp communities and to attempt to gain a better understanding of the effectiveness of these programs and initiatives. Ultimately, as mentioned previously, diversity, equity, and inclusion should be a strategic priority for camps. And, I believe, the goal of a camp leader, director, or Board member should be to create a community that is considered safe and inclusive for all of its participants. If we are able to gauge the level of effectiveness and impact of this work now, it is my hope that what is learned serves to inform and support camps and/or other nonprofit youth-centered organizations on how to improve efforts in this arena well into the future. Smith (2010) writes "to live in a camp community is to practice life in a microcosm of tomorrow's global community" (p. 27). Are youth summer camps rising to the occasion to support the development of today's youth as global citizens? I hope that, through my study, we will learn more about how camps are faring in meeting this charge and what they might do to continue to evolve as centers for positive youth development and growth in this every-changing and increasingly diverse world.

In Chapter 2, I will share research on the history and evolution of youth summer camps, how camps promote personal growth and positive youth development among the participants, and effective strategies and tools that camps, along with other youth-centered organizations, have developed and implemented around diversity, equity, and inclusion. In Chapter 3, I will provide

information regarding the methods, sample, and findings of my qualitative study involving camp

leaders and directors that are developing and implementing diversity, equity, and inclusion

programs and initiatives and their perceived effectiveness of this work. And, finally, in Chapter

4, I will discuss the implications of what I have learned through my study for camps now and in

the future.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

History of Youth Summer Camps

History and Evolution of Camps

How and when did youth summer camps initially gain popularity? My grandfather, who was a Physical Education teacher at the Horace Mann School in New York, was exploring ways in which the boys could enjoy and benefit from an adventure by the lake and mountains while school was not in session. Thurber et al (2007) concurs and writes that "from the 1860s to the 1920s, private school headmasters and university students in education created programs that brought children out of depraved urban settings and into the New England countryside" (p. 242). These camps, Thurber et al (2007) continue, were focused on three main, somewhat simple, "holistic" elements of: "1) community living; 2) away from home; 3) in an outdoor, recreational setting" (p. 242). Campers were tested physically (through multiple activities on land, in the water, or through outdoor excursions) and mentally (through collaborating with others on a group task or navigating new peer relationships) (Thurber et al, 2007). Different moments in history sparked a sustained interest in youth summer camps such as "patriotism and military traditions" in the 1920s and 1950s; the push for immersion in a more relaxed, natural setting for humanistic and psychological reasons in the 1960s and 1970s; "outdoor education, teaching values, and providing day care for working families" in the late 20th century; and now, a renewed enthusiasm for a community that fosters openness, creative play, risk-taking, all the ingredients for positive youth development (Thurber et al, 2007, p. 242). Today's families yearn for an environment where their child is not constantly plugged in to whatever technological device or social media platform and returning to a simpler existence when children played more freely, without these distractions, from morning until night.

Concept of Socialization

Browne et al (2019) write about the concept of "socialization" that was (and in some cases, still is) inherent in the development and appeal of youth summer camps (p. 52). In the early 20th century, camps began to grow in popularity as both family dynamics and neighborhoods evolved and changed (Browne et al, 2019). Per Browne et al (2019), within the family structure, the father started to spend more time away from the home due to work expectations leaving the mother as the sole caretaker and the person primarily responsible for the upbringing of the child. Additionally, environmental factors (an uptick in "pollution, crime, and disease"), as well as shifts in the composition of neighborhoods (the "influx of immigrant populations"), both due to "increased industrialization," prompted families to consider alternative solutions in the summer for their children (Browne et al, 2019, p. 53). The appeal of camp, predominantly for middle class White America, was to provide a child (especially a male child) with an experience in the outdoors that would foster strength, courage, order, and discipline (Browne et al, 2019). Thurber et al (2007) concurs and adds that ideals such as "a Protestant work ethic, the American pioneer spirit, interest in American Indian traditions, progressive educational theories, conservationism, and the philanthropic interests of social service organizations" contributed to the growing interest in youth summer camps in the early part of the 20th century (p. 242).

Access to Camp

As you can imagine, the camp experience costs money and therefore, historically and even today, caters mostly to those families from the "dominant class"—those with a certain amount of privilege and affluence (Browne et al, 2019, p. 54). Therefore, one could argue, youth summer camps continue to serve only the few and perpetuate power structures in society.

Browne et al (2019), per Harro (2013), write that the "cycle of socialization suggests that as long as the status quo remains unchallenged, the cycles of power and oppression continue unchecked. In the case of camp, this means some will attend and some will not; and, among those that attend, some may thrive as a part of the normative social order and some may not" (p. 54).

Sundius (2007) makes the case that there is a strong need for greater access to summer programming for youth, particularly for youth from low-income backgrounds, because of the trend in "learning losses" that occur among youth in the summer months (p. 110). Many of our youth, especially those with limited resources, are not able to participate in summer programs that can serve as both personal and academic growth opportunities. Sundius (2007) reports that "one estimate from the American Camping Association reports that the number of day camps has increased by 90 percent over the past twenty years and that currently more than eleven million children attend day and resident camps each summer" (p. 111). These statistics appear to be positive. However, demand for programs has increased and even some of the free programs, through organizations such as the YMCA and Boys and Girls Club, have limited space and cannot accommodate all youth in need (Sundius, 2007). Similar perhaps to the movement behind the Universal Pre-K initiative, the need for greater access to preschool education for all youth regardless of socioeconomic status, Sundius (2007) makes the case for a federal commitment to and investment in youth summer programs from multiple angles—developmental, sustained learning, and family support.

While access to camp has improved over the past several years, per American Camping Association statistics cited earlier, one could argue that there is still a significant amount of work to be done (Browne et al, 2019).

> Access to camp has always assumed access to resources such as time, money, and information. Discounts and need-based scholarships were and continue to be the overwhelmingly accepted solution to the problem of access to camp experiences. (Browne et al, 2019, p. 57)

Browne et al (2019) continue by stating that "simply removing the financial barriers to camp does not address the systemic inequities that created their situation in the first place" (p. 58). What might be equally important as accessibility is ensuring that camp serves as a place of "empowerment, equity, and justice for people of all cultural backgrounds" (Browne et al, 2019, p. 58). Elements noted by Browne et al (2019) that are critical to consider in fostering this culture community, in addition to financial assistance, include: a multi-year commitment, "wrap-around" programming during the year, intentionally-designed camp programs for campers and staff, and forming partnerships with stakeholder groups (i.e., schools, families, and nonprofit organizations) in recruitment, outreach, year-round services, and educational opportunities for families (Browne et al, 2019, p. 58).

Knopf (2015) concurs and shares that youth from lower-income backgrounds do not have equal access to summer opportunities compared to youth from higher-income backgrounds. Knopf (2015) adds that, in addition to youth gaining access to opportunities of learning or physical activities within summer programs, more importantly, youth need access to basic needs as well, such as three healthy meals a day, attention to mental health issues, daily exercise, and even a good night's sleep. When these basic needs are not fulfilled, youth are at a higher risk for boredom and feelings of isolation which might eventually lead to mental health illnesses such as anxiety or depression (Knopf, 2015).

The Benefits of Camp

Positive Youth Development

Those who have participated in the youth summer camp experience—directors, staff, campers, parents—often attest to the positive and beneficial nature of the camp experience.

The organized camp experience has been an important part of the lives of children, youth, and adults for over 150 years and is a social institution that touches more lives than any other except for schools. From the beginning, the camp experience has been a way for young people to explore and search for an authenticity often missing in other parts of their lives that contributes to their healthy transition into adulthood. (Garst et al, 2011, p. 73)

Research reveals that the summer camp experience can be a beneficial experience for youth, no matter their background, in terms of their positive youth development. How do we define positive youth development?

Per the U.S. Department of Agriculture, [positive youth development] recognizes, utilizes, and enhances youths' strengths, and promotes positive outcomes for young people by providing opportunities and fostering positive relationships; and it furnishes the support needed to build on their leadership strengths. (Hamilton-Honey, 2017, p. 79)

Campers learn to take risks, explore new activities outside of their comfort zones, live independently from their parents, and cohabitate with and form lifelong friendships with peers (most often, strangers) from diverse backgrounds (Browne et al, 2019). However, all of this might not occur unless the camp community is considered by its inhabitants as safe, supportive, and inclusive which is critical in fostering positive youth development.

Health and Wellness

As has been mentioned earlier, there is indeed a simplistic, somewhat routine, nature of the youth summer camp experience. Campers follow a daily and weekly schedule of meals, activities, bedtime, even special events—most steeped in tradition. In a time when youth are over-programmed and over-committed with both academic and extracurricular pursuits, the easy-going, somewhat basic day-to-day expectations are a breath of fresh air (literally and figuratively). Many camp directors would say one of their main goals for their campers each summer is for them to be healthy and happy. Knopf (2015) writes about the importance of "keeping kids emotionally healthy during the summer"—a consistent schedule, being active (busy) both physically and mentally, getting "plenty of sleep," and "interacting with new and different groups of people" (p. 1-2). Camp leaders from around the country would likely concur that these are the ingredients of a positive youth summer camp experience.

Tassitano et al (2020) write "promoting regular opportunities for daily PA [physical activity] engagement and reduced ST [sedentary time] during childhood and adolescence continues to be a significant public health challenge" (p. 2). The argument can be made that youth summer camps provide an environment for youth that fosters sustained physical activity (Tassitano et al, 2020). As others have researched, Tassitano et al (2020) shares that "the out-of-school months...has been identified as [a] critical period associated to negative effects on youth's health due to the less structured environment...that they are [exposed to]" (p. 11). Again, youth summer camps could help serve to fill this void or gap.

Supports and Opportunities

Garst et al (2011) writes that campers need "supports" and "opportunities" (p. 74-75). "Supports include the people, programs, and intrapersonal skills" that foster a climate and culture

that is inclusive and safe at its core, so that campers feel they can be their authentic selves and

take risks in their learning and exploration (Garst et al, 2011, p. 74). These might be directors,

counselors, cabin-mates, and peers. "Opportunities" refers to the experiences (i.e. activities, trips,

traditions) offered to campers that "facilitate outcomes such as skill building, competence, and a

sense of mattering" (Garst et al, 2011, p. 74-5). These might include structured activities where

campers can work toward learning and achieving certain skills in land sports, waterfront areas,

and outdoor adventure and exploration, but also unstructured time of story-telling around a

campfire and hanging out with friends in the cabin.

Camp as Equalizer

Another positive element of the camp experience is that the atmosphere is one that

promotes equality or a leveling of the playing field, so to speak, in its inherent simplicity in how

campers live and function day to day.

> Camp is...an equalizing context for youth. Many of the status symbols of youth
>
> (for example, wearing certain clothing, possessing the latest gadgets and gear) are
>
> less prevalent at camp. Because campers eat the same food, participate in the
>
> same activities, and sleep in the same large, shared spaces, differences between
>
> the haves and the have-nots are minimized. (Garst et al, 2011, p. 78)

Everyone ideally has access to and follows the same activities. Equipment for activities at camp

is typically provided (fishing rods, lacrosse sticks, baseball equipment, water skis, to name a

few). Everyone eats the same food (dietary restrictions or food allergies aside). Everyone lives

similarly, mostly in rustic, basic cabins. There are often no electronics. At some camps, there is a

required uniform.

Parental Support

Still another benefit of the camp experience is that parents believe the experience is supportive to their child's positive youth development. It has been researched that parents perceive camp as their partners in contributing positively to their child's growth and development. Per Henderson et al (2007), "when faced with choices in opportunities for their children, parents seem to be aware that camp experiences can provide unique youth development environments for their children to learn and grow" (p. 1005).

As research demonstrates, camp can serve as a beneficial experience for youth on multiple levels. Therefore, access to the camp experience for children from all backgrounds, no matter their race, religion, or socioeconomic status, becomes perhaps even more critical. As Browne et al (2019) write, the "volume of research highlighting the benefits of camp participation serves as a foundation from which we must consider what it will take for camp to be inclusive of all and to be an institution that promotes equity and justice at camp and within society at large" (p. 54).

The Importance of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Initiatives

Demographics and Psychology

The United States is becoming increasingly diverse in the 21st Century. Per Stearns et al, "the nation has experienced a paradigmatic shift in its structure with dramatic changes in not only racial and ethnic diversity but in economic inequality as well" (Stauss et al, 2016, p. 23). To break it down, half of the population growth in the U.S. from 2000-2010 is Hispanic with the Asian population following in second (Stauss et al, 2016). Per the National Poverty Center, "approximately 15% of the population in the U.S. are living in poverty, reflecting the highest

poverty rate since 1993" (Stauss et al, 2016, p. 23). It is increasingly important for people to learn to cope, engage, and succeed in this new diverse society.

Teaching diversity, equity, and inclusion to our young people (children and adolescents) has been researched as being optimal.

Assisting students to be ready and able to form friendships with peers from

ethnically diverse backgrounds provides them with valuable experience and skills

that they can carry forward to new educational, community, and workplace

settings. (Nishina et al, 2019, p. 306)

Leman and Cameron (2017) share that there is both a social and developmental psychology of diversity for children and adolescents. How children understand and perceive others and how children develop their own ethnic and racial identity are both critical in how children experience diversity, are shaped by it, and construct strategies to navigate it (Leman & Cameron, 2017). Leman and Cameron (2017) note two important strategies needed for a child to successfully cope with a diverse world: "bicultural competence" and "intercultural competence" (p. 341-342). The former serves to teach children how to "negotiate diversity [multiple identities] in everyday lives" and the latter relates to "promoting intergroup relations [self versus other perspectives] in diverse contexts" (Leman & Cameron, 2017, page 341-342). Learning effective diversity, equity, and inclusion competencies supports us as we continue to navigate our diverse societies and, research demonstrates that the younger you engage people with this training, the better. Stauss et al (2016), as cited in Crain (2011), states "Adolescence is the primary maturational time period to interject more abstract understanding of diversity issues, and youth need conducive environments and intellectual tools in order for them to maximize their developmental potential"

(p. 25). Much like what has been proven about learning a new language, young people tend to be more open and amenable to absorbing new information, habits, behaviors, and skills.

Effective Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Strategies and Tools Utilized in Schools and Other Youth-Centered Organizations

Schools and other youth-centered organizations that have developed and implemented programs and initiatives around diversity, equity, and inclusion might help to inform youth summer camps on best practices and strategies regarding the work.

Schools

As our communities become more diverse, in most cases this means that our schools are becoming more diverse as well. Brown (2019) notes that "inclusion is important for students' healthy development" (p. 322). Brown (2019) shares four important elements to consider in promoting and nurturing a classroom or school environment that is safe and inclusive for all members: 1) the connection between peer relationships and academic achievement; 2) the concept of integration versus interaction; 3) classroom traditions and norms; and 4) the role of teachers (as the community leaders) in facilitating and managing an inclusive environment. How do peer relations impact academic performance? When young people feel that they are excluded or devalued, they become more isolated and removed from the classroom or school community and in turn are not as invested (Brown, 2019). On the flip side, if a young person feels that there is openness to diverse thinking, communication, perspectives, and problem-solving, they feel a sense of belonging, a positive emotion, and have an easier time focusing on goals (Brown, 2019). Is interacting with diverse groups sufficient? Brown (2019) writes about the "ethnic homophily" tendencies of classrooms, meaning students from similar backgrounds, races, or ethnicities tend to gravitate towards each other within a classroom or school setting (p. 324). Therefore, merely

having diversity within the classroom is not a sufficient tool for inclusion. Each individual within the classroom must feel that they are on equal footing as the other and be comfortable engaging with all (Brown, 2019). Developing shared and common goals as a classroom community can help to bridge differences within. How do traditions or norms within a classroom perpetuate segregation or exclusion? The classroom setting, both historically and currently, leans towards the more traditional in its structure. Classrooms need to be perceived as micro-societies of the world and incorporate more prosocial norms and new traditions (Brown, 2019). What role might the teacher play in managing inclusion? Teachers are the leaders within the classroom and have a responsibility to be sensitive to and prevent growing imbalances with regard to voice and power (Brown, 2019).

Afterschool Programs

After-school programs that are of high quality and well-structured can play an important role in a child's positive growth and development (Simpkins et al, 2017). After-school initiatives serve as a safe space for youth post-school day and often include activities or experiences that serve to empower youth, resulting in youth feeling valued, supported, and encouraged (Simpkins et al, 2017). Simpkins et al (2017) share a framework for promoting positive youth development within after-school programs that include eight important features: 1) appreciation and awareness of culture; 2) safety, physically and mentally; 3) structure, both developmentally appropriate and culturally responsive; 4) supportive peer culture and sense of community; 5) sense of belonging; 6) positive social norms; 7) support for exercising autonomy and leadership; and 8) opportunities for skill building in the arenas of problem-solving, interpersonal, and empathy. Interwoven in each of these elements is an individual's cultural identity and creating an environment where that

individual is comfortable and confident in sharing and infusing their identity (or identities)

within the day-to-day activities of the afterschool community (Simpkins et al, 2017).

Youth Programs

Ourtown for Teens is a youth leadership diversity and inclusion training program

sponsored by the nonprofit Just Communities of Arkansas (JCA) (Stauss et al, 2016). The target

group for this program is high school students of diverse races, religions, cultures, sexual

orientations, and gender (Stauss et al, 2016). The program, which takes place in an alternative

setting (outside school and community), "emphasizes building a community of trust that models

genuineness and safety" in order to improve awareness and knowledge of issues of diversity,

prejudice, and discrimination (Stauss et al, 2016, p. 28). Participants have shared that, through

the program, they gained an increased awareness and understanding of the effects of prejudice,

discrimination, and other social and cultural issues in our society and, upon completion of the

program, strive to be advocates and leaders for change in the fight against social injustices within

their schools and communities (Stauss et al, 2016).

> [Findings] imply that adolescence may be the time period where youth can
>
> achieve more abstract understanding of diversity issues, and their social identity
>
> and diversity awareness develop with supporting and guiding environments and
>
> tools. (Stauss et al, 2016, p. 44)

Still another example of an effective youth diversity, equity, inclusion program is *Youth*

Action, "a community organizing program that engages youth in working for change" (Watkins

et al, 2007, p. 385). Watkins et al (2007) argue that stand-alone youth programs, versus schools,

are more optimal for the work of diversity, equity, and inclusion. The reasons for this are that

youth programs tend to be more group-focused, rather than based on individual achievement,

participants engage on more of an equal basis, as these programs are typically not as hierarchical in structure as schools, and youth programs involve very "high levels of psychological engagement and agency" from the participants resulting in greater youth empowerment to enact change (Watkins et al, 2007, p. 384). Watkins et al (2007) share four conditions for settings that facilitate bridging difference: "cooperation,…equal status, common goals, and support from authority figures" (p. 384). Most youth programs, the authors argue, are better equipped to meet these criteria versus schools that, as cited in Johnson & Johnson (2000), "typically have an individualistic competitive ethos,...[decreasing] the friendliness, trust, and candor needed for members of different groups to come together around common goals" (Watkins et al, 2007, p. 384). Similar to the *Ourtown* program noted above, *Youth Action* focuses on three components that can be utilized to enact change: 1) relationship-building; 2) learning and discovery of self, others, and injustices in society and the world; and 3) acting with increased sensitivity, confidence, and courage in working to change the behaviors of self and others (Watkins et al, 2007).

Integrating Effective Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Strategies and Tools at Youth Summer Camps

There are tools and strategies that youth summer camp leaders have developed and implemented within their respective organizations regarding diversity, equity, and inclusion that have been researched and recommended in helping to create a safer and more inclusive community for all participants. These tools and strategies center around staff hiring and training, language usage, learning how to be an ally to others, and striving to foster a culture of inclusion.

Staff Hiring and Training

Both staff hiring and training can be instrumental in supporting a camp community that is safe and inclusive to all its community members. Most experts in the field of diversity, equity, and inclusion at camp recommend that camps hire staff that is reflective of their camper population, meaning whatever the percentage is of campers from diverse backgrounds (i.e., racial or socioeconomic), the percentage of staff should be the same or similar. Ozier (2017) shares "we have made a commitment to hire staff that mirrors the racial, cultural, and socioeconomic demographics of the youngsters we serve" (p. 55).

Staff play an integral role at camp in terms of facilitating and managing the tone of the camp atmosphere. Ozier (2017) adds that "we need our staff to be able facilitators and educators of social justice" (p. 53). Therefore, camp staff need to be properly trained in how to comfortably and confidently work with diverse populations. There are a variety of tools and strategies that have been shared to help with staff training and orientation in diversity, equity, and inclusion. First, per Jaha-Echols (2019), staff need to be aware of and address their own "implicit bias" and camp directors should consider having their staff (and themselves) take an "Implicit Association Test," developed by Harvard University, which assesses an individual's implicit biases (N. Jaha-Echols, personal communication, April 29, 2019).

> Per Greenwald & Banaji, 1995, implicit attitudes are manifest as actions or
> judgments that are under the control of automatically activated evaluation,
> without the performer's awareness of the causation. (Greenwald et al, 1998, p.
> 1464).

Diversity and inclusion experts and professionals feel that in order to truly understand and address diversity at its deepest level, it is helpful for individuals to understand what their implicit

biases are. The IAT "measures the strength of associations between concepts (e.g., black people, gay people) and evaluations (e.g., good, bad) or stereotypes (e.g., athletic, clumsy)" (Harvard, Project Implicit).

> Most white people and some non-white people appear to have implicit racial bias, associating black male faces with negativity more strongly than white male faces. In addition to race, the IAT has also been used to suggest unconscious biases in how gender, disability, weight, skin tone, last name, and age influence people's judgements about goodness, science-mindedness, careers, violence, and attractiveness. (Thurber, 2017 Mar/Apr, p. 30)

The purpose of the IAT is to bring some of our unconscious ("invisible") biases that shape our attitudes and behaviors to our "conscious minds," ideally making us all more self-aware. (Thurber, 2017 Mar/Apr, p.30). Once this test is administered, camp leaders can facilitate very open conversations with their staff about understanding and reflecting these biases (Thurber, 2017 Mar/Apr)

> Understanding dissolves prejudice...But admitting that ignorance, and allowing for the possibility that our gaps in knowledge cause injustice, takes tremendous courage. (Thurber, 2017 Mar/Apr, p. 38)

The IAT is just one tool to consider in staff training. No matter the tool/s utilized, according to many camp and inclusion professionals, staff training should focus on team and relationship building, open and honest discourse, time for sharing and reflection, openness to mistakes or challenges, and most of all, "listening to understand versus listening to respond" (N. Jaha-Echols, personal communication, April 29, 2019).

Language

One strategy that has been researched that might help to improve the culture of a community at camp is as (seemingly) simple as language usage. Words are powerful. Words can be supportive, positive, and encouraging, but words can also be hurtful or perhaps devastating. Thurber (2012) shares, in reference to camp administrators and staff, "[the] responsibilities as a youth development professional include coaching campers to curtail crassness and use their creative verbal skills in ways that nurture a healthy culture" (p. 20). This is referred to as "safe talk" as is respectful of race, religion, and sexuality (Thurber, 2012, p. 22).

Language can also play a role in how staff engage with the campers. Within the first few days of a camp session, there is typically time allotted for campers and staff to learn about each other. Staff members should think carefully about the types of questions they might present to campers, however well-intentioned they might be. Thurber (2017 May/June) shares that questions (or statements) can often be discriminatory or exclusive. He provides examples:

What do your mom and dad do for work?

Where do you go on Christmas vacation?

What is your SnapChat name? (Thurber, 2017 May/June, p. 27)

There are many assumptions of individuals when asking the above questions: a camper has two parents who are heterosexual; a camper is Christian and can afford to travel; a camper's family has money to purchase a smartphone (Thurber, 2017 May/June). Immediately, a staff person might be making a camper feel that they do not belong as others most likely will excitedly respond to any or all of these questions. Alternative questions to consider are:

Whom do you live with? What do they do?

What did you do during school vacation?

What do you like to do with your friends? How do you stay in touch? (Thurber,

2017 May/June, p. 27-28)

Thurber (2017 May/June) concludes by sharing "showing you care about the who, not the what,

will motivate your campers to give you the best gift they could: their respect" (p. 29).

Allyship

Being an ally is another critical concept in creating a safe and inclusive community for

all. Gillard (2018) writes that "being an ally to campers means listening, noticing, reflecting, and

taking action to change patterns of society's injustices" (p. 23). Gillard (2018) continues by

describing the concepts of "targets" and "agents" (p. 23).

Targets of oppression are people in social identity groups who are considered to

be inferior, disenfranchised, negatively valued, exploited, and/or victimized.

Agents of oppression are people in social identity groups who are considered to

be privileged by birth or acquisition who knowingly or unknowingly exploit or

gain unfair advantage over people from targeted groups, and are seen as superior

or "normal." (Gillard, 2018, p. 23-24)

Gillard (2018) shares that in order to create a more positive, inclusive, and safe camp

community, staff should strive to strengthen their "allyship" with campers (p. 23). Steps include

educating oneself about the issues target groups might face, becoming more aware of implicit

biases and associations, speaking with (not for) individuals from target groups, and utilizing the

"power you have as a camp counselor (and an agent)" to foster a cabin culture that celebrates

equity, individual difference, and open expression (Gillard, 2018, p. 23-25). Camp staff, as allies,

should consistently display and role model qualities of openness, fairness, kindness, empathy,

respect, patience, and have a strong understanding of their own limitations by seeking guidance

to problem-solve when they struggle to manage challenging situations surrounding diversity that might occasionally arise (Gillard, 2018).

Bettez (2017), per Chescaleigh (2014), shares tips for becoming an ally which could be utilized in fostering a safe, inclusive, and empowering youth community. These are: "1) understand your privilege; 2) listen and do your homework about people (who are different from you); 3) speak up, but not over ([those] you are trying to support); 4) you'll make mistakes: apologize;...ally is a verb" (Bettez, 2017, p. 96). These actions can be uncomfortable, challenging, and, frankly, exhausting, but "you have to do the work" (Bettez, 2017, p. 96).

Culture of Inclusion

Ozier (2017) shares that "American summer camps have a long history of inclusion, and have sought to create safe spaces that embrace the things that make campers and staff unique" (p. 2). But do they? What should inclusion look like? Per Jaha-Echols (2019), inclusion means "everyone being their authentic selves," "divergent beliefs" accepted, and "healthy conflict" permitted—campers feeling that they truly belong and are an integral part of a camp community (N. Jaha-Echols, personal communication, April 29, 2019). Where do camps fall short? Jaha-Echols (2019) continues by sharing, through the use of two simple analogies, why camps need to continue to evolve in how they address diversity, along with the layers, depth, complicated dimensions, and nature of diversity and inclusion (N. Jaha-Echols, personal communication, April 29, 2019). One analogy is "seeds and soil"—the "soil" is the camp culture and the "seeds" are the individual campers; the latter needs to be tended to, supported, and nurtured in a way for the former to grow (N. Jaha-Echols, personal communication, April 29, 2019). Another analogy is a box of crayons and artwork—the former symbolizes individuality and diversity and the latter

is inclusion (what the crayons produce when they work together) (N. Jaha-Echols, personal communication, April 29, 2019).

> At camp, you have the incredible opportunity to not only make a difference in the lives of individual campers, but in the lives of people from targeted groups who have faced oppression. A lot of us wish the rest of the world was like camp. Camps can be powerful learning experiences for children (and staff) who seek to create a world that is fairer for everyone, where everyone can thrive. (Gillard, 2018, p. 25)

Summary

The literature discussed in this section demonstrates that youth summer camps are beneficial sites where positive youth development can occur for all youth.

> A camper is learning how to 'live with others' and develop a sense of community—a community that respects and celebrates diversity. (Smith, 2010, p. 27)

It has also revealed that there has been a growth in access to and diversity within youth summer camps (certainly with more work to be done). The literature has provided examples of strategies and tools to consider in addressing, managing, and advocating for a culture that is diverse, equal, and inclusive—specifically within youth-center programs. These strategies and tools might also equip today's youth with powerful, lifelong skills in serving as change agents in combating today's social inequalities. Further, the literature has emphasized the importance for youth summer camps, as youth-centered programs, to develop and implement effective diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives. Advocating for diversity, equity, and inclusion at youth summer

camps is about "addressing systemic biases versus programmatic solutions" (N. Jaha-Echols, personal communication, April 29, 2019).

Are diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives within youth summer camps perceived to be effective in providing a safe and inclusive community for all participants? Are they reflective of and embedded in a camp's mission and values? What are the benefits, strengths, barriers, and challenges of creating a culture of inclusion at youth summer camps? If diversity, equity, and inclusion are strategic priorities for youth summer camps, it is critical that camp leaders consider these questions in striving to meet the needs of all within their community. I believe that, especially in this increasingly diverse world, diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives need to be supported and integrated into the fiber of youth summer camps at the deepest levels, so that they are constantly working towards advocating for social justice within the camp communities and perhaps in society at large.

> The camp experience is a powerful venue for learning and development. Yet, we are not talking about the preservation of the past but, instead, using today's well-founded hope that is convincing and substantiated thus illustrating relevancy in today's world. (Smith, 2010, p. 27)

There appears to be a gap in research in understanding the effectiveness of diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives at youth summer camps. My research, as outlined in the next chapter, will involve a qualitative study of the perceived effectiveness of diversity, equity, and inclusion programs and initiatives at camps through interviews with current camp leaders and directors. Through this study, I hope to reveal the challenges and successes in providing effective DEI programs and initiatives, so that other youth summer camps and/or nonprofit organizations focusing on youth development will learn how to better serve their youth populations.

Chapter 3: Research Methods and Findings

Methods

The purpose of this research is to explore the effectiveness of diversity, equity, and inclusion programs and initiatives at youth summer camps in creating a community that is safe and inclusive of all participants. This section provides an overview of the process of recruitment and outreach to the sample, determining and designing the interview protocol, and the process of analyzing, synthesizing, and summarizing the data. I submitted a proposal to and received approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of the University of Richmond. The IRB proposal included: my qualifications; a synopsis of the purpose of the project; research procedures, participants, recruitment, and dissemination plans; direct and general benefits, if applicable; identification of risks, if applicable; privacy and data safety protocol; and information regarding the consent form for participants. I conducted interviews with leaders of seven youth summer camp programs.

Sample and Recruitment

The sample population is composed of leaders or directors of youth summer camp programs. All individuals are over the age of 18 years. The sample was identified through both word-of-mouth and a recruitment posting on a private Facebook group page. The word-of-mouth strategy was more effective and yielded all seven of the participants, while the social media posting yielded none. Word-of-mouth involved me contacting (via email and LinkedIn) authors of articles researched in the literature review on the topic and soliciting their input on recommendations for potential interviewees. Upon receipt of the recommendations, I sent a recruitment email to the potential interviewees, a total of 13 camps overall. From this group, seven responded and agreed to participate in the project. Once an individual agreed to participate

in an interview for the project, I sent a Zoom meeting invitation, which was based on a mutually

agreeable date and time, and a consent form. The consent form included the following

information on the project: the purpose; contact information; possible risks; possible benefits;

confidentiality of records protocol; use of information and data collection protocol; protection

and rights of participants; and a statement of consent. Each participant signed and submitted the

consent form prior to the start of the interview without any additional questions.

The sample of participants includes a Chief Executive Officer, two Executive Directors,

three Camp Directors, and one Youth Leadership Project Director of youth summer camps

organizations. All organizations are nonprofit organizations. In order to ensure confidentiality in

this process, the sample of individual organizations has been provided generic (numbered) labels

(i.e. Camp #1). The sample includes individuals who represent camps and programs in a variety

of geographic regions. The majority of the organizations represented are traditional, overnight

camps or nature/outdoor experiential learning-based. Two organizations offer both overnight and

day camps. Camp sessions among the different organizations vary in length from one week to

two months. Some of the organizations are gender-specific, but most are coeducational or

gender-neutral. Most of the organizations serve youth, ages 8 through 18 years. One is specific to

youth ages 9 - 11. The number of youths served by each of the organizations ranges from 100 to

5,000. A summary of the sample characteristics can be found in Figure 1.

Figure 1

Summary of Sample Characteristics

	Location	Ages	Size	Session/s	Type
Camp #1	Northeast	8-18	500	2-weeks	Traditional; overnight
Camp #2	Midwest	8-18	5,000	4, 6, or 13 days	Nature, outdoor experiential; leadership; overnight & day
Camp #3	Midwest	8-18	200	2-, 4-, or 6-weeks	Traditional; overnight
Camp #4	New England	8-18	100	3-, 4-, or 7-weeks	Traditional; overnight
Camp #5	Southeast	5-17	600	1-, 2-, or 3-weeks	Nature, outdoor experiential; overnight
Camp #6	West Coast	9-11	700	5 days	Nature, outdoor experiential; DEI-focused; overnight
Camp #7	New England	9-17	600	4- or 11-days (day) 10 days, 3- or 6-weeks (overnight)	Nature, outdoor experiential; some trip-based; day and overnight

Instruments

I utilized an interview protocol for data collection. See Appendix for interview questions.

The interview questions were aimed at gathering general information on the organizational

mission, purpose, values, history, and demographics. The interview questions were also focused

on understanding how organizations were engaging in diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI)

work and how feedback is solicited from the participants on the work. Finally, I sought to learn

the benefits gained through an organization's DEI work, the challenges/barriers/gaps that might

still exist in this work related to their organization, and the impact of the DEI work on areas such

as positive youth development, personal growth, social justice, and advocacy. The participants,

on occasion, referred me to their organizational website or other resources in order to provide

more detail in response to a specific interview question.

Procedure

I conducted fairly structured interviews. I stuck primarily to the script of interview

questions and the interviews mainly stayed on track and did not veer off on another tangent or

direction. The interviews took approximately 30 minutes to 1 hour. All but one interview took

place virtually using the Zoom platform. One interview was conducted over the phone, due to a

poor Zoom connection from the interviewee's rural location. All Zoom interviews were recorded

and transcribed by otter.ai. I also took copious notes during the interviews. The phone interview

was not able to be recorded or transcribed, only recorded via note-taking. No names of either

individuals or organizations were used in either the otter.ai transcripts or hand-written notes.

Once the recordings were transcribed, the original Zoom recordings were deleted. As mentioned

previously, all organizations were then labeled and identified as numbered (i.e. Camp #1).

Limitations

While seven participants are a strong sample from 13 solicitations, more participants

would most likely have been beneficial to the study, specifically having multiple participants (2-

3) from different types (3-4) of youth summer camps or organizations. Additionally, the sample

participants shared other potential interviewees for the project, but due to time constraints, I was

unable to request their participation. The sample was limited to those who agreed to participate

within the allotted time frame. Only IRB-approved interview questions were asked during the

interview. The participants were respectful of this protocol and only responded to these questions

and did not solicit additional information outside of what was shared through the recruitment

email or the interview process. Finally, for many camps and programs, diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) work is a more recently developed strategy or tool within their programming, with some exceptions. It also might have been more optimal to gather feedback from a sample of organizations that are at varying levels in the process of the implementation of DEI work—for example, new, mid-stream, and established.

Data Analysis

Upon conclusion of the interviews, the transcripts and hand-written notes were compared and reviewed, coded, and key themes were then identified, synthesized, and summarized by interview question category.

Findings

Seven leaders of youth camps and organizations were interviewed about the mission, purpose, values, history, and demographics of their respective organizations. They were also interviewed about the diversity, equity, and inclusion work at their camp and the impact it has had on positive youth development, personal growth, social justice work, and advocacy for others.

Mission, Purpose, Values

When asked about the mission, purpose, and values of their organizations, the sample participants share that their overarching mission, purpose, and values, for the most part, has remained constant since their organization's founding. Many, particularly the older organizations, are in the process of assessing their mission, purpose, and values and updating them to be more reflective of the diversity, equity, and inclusion work they have been or hope to be integrating within their programming now and in the future. Considerations for change have

mostly been based upon and related to systemic oppression and injustice and gender identity and awareness.

History

Each camp leader was asked about their camp's history and founding and how the camp has evolved in recent years. Most camps respond that their history remains integrated into the fiber of the camp's mission and purpose and they exist today in much the same way as when they were founded, whether that was within the past 20 years or past century. One camp is affiliated with a larger organization that has been in existence for at least a century. While the focus of the camps has remained consistent since their inception in the 1930s, the organization is evolving in terms of its mission, purpose, and values to be more reflective of the needs of today's youth. A few camps note changes within their organizations in response to a commitment to being more diverse and inclusive of under-served or low-income communities and the broader youth population overall.

Demographics

I inquired of each youth summer camp program what the current demographics are and how they might have changed in the more recent years. The demographics of the different organizations vary (see Figure 2). Some organizations were founded on the idea of being majority youth of color, such as Camps #1, #3, and #6. Other organizations have witnessed a growth in youth of color populations as a result of the overall changing demographics within the U.S. For some, there has been intentionality in becoming more diverse, such as partnerships with community-based organizations and increased scholarship funds to support the youth in enrolling and attending. For all organizations, religion is not something that is tracked. The socio-economic diversity of most organizations has grown due to increased financial support and the

commitment of organizations to devote resources to scholarship for under-served communities.

Most organizations draw more regionally for their youth populations, with some exceptions.

Figure 2

Summary of Sample Demographics

	Race/ethnicity	Gender	Socio-economic	Geography
Camp #1	48% LatinX 30% Black 15% White 5% Multi-racial 3% Asian	Gender neutral	All free/reduced lunch $40K average income	NYC Upstate NY 10% outside of NY (relocated)
Camp #2	26% Youth of color Shift in demographics in urban areas has increased youth of color population	Girls	20% receive financial assistance	Regional: 49 counties within 2 states of Midwest
Camp #3	30-35% Black or Black/bi-racial 40-50% White 15% LatinX Low % Asian	Gender neutral	30% receive scholarship Scholarships range from 25-75% of tuition (no full scholarship)	60% Chicago city or suburbs 25% Regional 20% Different states/countries
Camp #4	No formal tracking Approximately 15-20% Youth of color	Boys	$125K to $140K of scholarship offered each year	90% regional (mostly northeast) Some west/west coast 10% outside of the U.S.
Camp #5	"Anecdotal," no formal tracking Primarily white	Gender neutral	Primarily white, middle class	Primarily regional; southeast and DC Some outside of region and international
Camp #6	50% White 50% Mixed race, youth of color	Gender neutral	Even split between "upper class," "middle class," and "working class"	Exclusively regional; Oakland city and suburbs
Camp #7	25% Youth of color (African American, LatinX, Asian, Other)	Gender neutral	28% receiving scholarship each year; no full scholarship	Mostly DC and north, including PA and NY State; Small numbers from West coast, southwest, international

DEI Work

Some of the organizations have been founded with the purpose of integrating diversity, equity, and inclusion in their day-to-day operations, while others have implemented DEI strategies and tools in more recent years. Leaders of organizations were asked about DEI work in the following sub-categories: recruitment, engagement, and access; staff hiring and training; day-to-day activities and programming; and camp traditions.

Recruitment, Engagement, and Access. Four camps already have strong recruitment and engagement with diverse youth populations, now and in their history. Two camps have placed more of an emphasis on increasing diversity and access in more recent years, with more money for scholarships and a greater commitment from the Board to increasing access. Three have increased partnerships with community-based organizations to strengthen diversity, specifically with organizations that work with children from under-served environments. One notes that recruitment will be an area of focus now and in the future and it is assessing where they are advertising, the application process, and "busting up the old model of recruitment" in order to be more accessible to a broader youth population. Four camps successfully rely on and benefit from high return rates and positive word of mouth each year of participants from diverse backgrounds.

Staff Hiring and Training. One camp is very intentional about staff hiring, both in outreach/recruitment as well as the interview process. It notes partnerships with colleges and universities, charter schools, and community-based organizations that aid in its staff recruitment process. One staff interview question is "Why are people poor?" The camp is looking for potential staff to address systemic oppression, lack of access to opportunities, referencing "marginalized and oppressed" communities. This same camp emphasizes the importance of staff

training, as the staff's job is to uplift the camper voices. The interview serves to give the camp a

sense of where people are for training purposes. A second camp mentions that it probes potential

staff in its interviews on their interest in social justice, working with young people, and creating

an equitable environment. Additionally, one camp notes that it offers inclusion workshops, run

by the leadership team, on topics such as LGBTQ, race equity and microaggression work, power

and privilege, gender and gender identity, and learning to be an ally. This camp also shares that it

has new DEI policies and procedures which will serve as the guiding principles for staff moving

forward. Most camps note that staff training is an ongoing process, happening prior to the

opening of camp but also throughout camp as well. Two camps require staff to take Harvard's

Implicit Bias Test and one has its staff develop individual development plans (IDPs). One camp

offers money for professional development opportunities for staff in the off-season.

  Most camps strive to hire diverse staff that are reflective of the camper population, but

this can be challenging. Three camps maintain that they have an easier time recruiting staff of

color because their camper populations are more diverse and due to their more social justice-

focused missions. Per Camp #3, "if you build it, they will come." One challenge from the same

camp regarding hires is meshing the "camp people" with the "social justice" people. Another

notes that it is imperative that staff "get there quickly" in terms of DEI training in order to

effectively provide safe space to others. Two camps are integrating DEI work into their staff

training moving forward, as well as adding DEI-specific questions to the staff interview process.

As with camper access and recruitment, most camps are "thinking outside the box" in terms of

recruitment and hiring of staff in order to be more diverse and inclusive. And, most agree that

bias training for staff is critical.

Day-to-Day Activities and Programming. There seems to be some distinctions, with some overlap, between camps regarding DEI work within day-to-day activities and programming. Camps #1 and #6 have the most structured and intentional curriculum and programming with regard to DEI work. Camp #1 focuses on campers, ages 12 to 18, gaining a strong understanding of the "whole self," by integrating age-level initiatives on the topics of social justice (12s and 13s), ethics and debate curriculum (14s and 15s), requiring reflections (14s through 18s), and providing character education (12s to 18s) and outreach (17s and 18s). Camp #2 notes that it attracts a refugee population to its program, so has worked on changing camp terminology to be sensitive to this group. Its DEI work focuses on racial justice overall, but is at times more trauma-informed with regard to its refugee population. Camp #3 has historically tried to be "super intentional" about integrating DEI into the activities and curriculum and has learned that it is more effective for the participants to just "be," meaning living, playing, and working together. It does arrange cabin groups in an intentionally diverse way, mixing up campers based on race and "external-based appearances." Camp #4 has laid out its position on diversity in a more formal manner this year and its plan moving forward, in the spirit of its founding and history, explicitly reminding and charging its community to have a sense of responsibility to this work based on the camp's tenets of personal growth, character development, and community building. Camp #5 has changed housing from being more gender-based to gender-neutral. Cabins have been renamed, policies updated, facilities changed, and campers are housed by how they identify gender-wise. It adds that there has been a shift in the mentality and approach to DEI work at the camp and it is learning to be more thoughtful with all programming in order to be more culturally sensitive and inclusive. Some examples include how the camp administers the swim test and what type of food is being served in the dining hall.

Camp #6 feels that its neutral environment (the outdoors) provides campers with an "even playing field" and bases its work on the concept of "contact theory," campers having the opportunity to mingle constantly and therefore challenge themselves and others within the community. There is a lot of intentionality in the programming and curriculum of the camp: day 1 is laying the groundwork, setting up agreements for the week; day 2 is celebrating and exploring difference, learning what makes diversity fun; day 3 focused on how the group is interconnected and interdependent, as a community and on this planet, learning empathy for each other and nature; day 4 involves the group learning about conflict resolution, how to work through conflict in a respectful way; and day 5 brings all of the different elements together. The camp program is described as a "living curriculum," constantly changing, always being in the "right here and right now," not remaining static, with the goal of continually eliminating youth's fears about society and the world. Camp #7, based on its founding traditions, has historically and is today focused its attention on social justice and civil rights issues. Evening discussions of race and class are a constant. Topics such as identity, empathy, critical thinking, and action are consistently explored through songs, shared books, and speakers. Through its programming, the camp seeks to create a place of belonging for all, a place where the participants celebrate difference and want to be good, open, welcoming, and nice to each other.

Camp Traditions. The newer camps have not had to make any changes with regard to camp traditions. They do not have the traditions that are outdated or insensitive to Native American cultures or indigenous people. However, one camp notes minor changes that have been made with regard to music used for traditional events by artists that are controversial given their behavior towards women and children. Two camps renamed cabin groups so that they are more gender aware, inclusive, and sensitive. Two camps are newer and were built on the

foundation of diversity, equity, and inclusion, so no traditions were deemed dated or culturally offensive. Two of the camps, being older camps, have had to face the misappropriation of Native American and indigenous cultures and went through a deep dive as organizations in assessing, educating participants, teasing out, and changing norms or traditions, including songs, cabin group names, and other activities and events. Another older camp was founded on principles that did not involve programmatic aspects that were culturally insensitive, so camp traditions have remained intact to date.

Feedback

Each sample participant was asked how they solicit feedback from staff, campers, and families regarding their camp experience, including its work around diversity, equity, and inclusion. All camps conduct end-of-session or season surveys and evaluations with all the different constituency groups, but have slightly different approaches and timelines. One camp solicits ongoing feedback on the campers' general experience. This camp has a year-round component so is engaging in collecting feedback from campers and families on a year-round, regular basis. Three camps mention the need to add or have recently added questions to the surveys that are specific to diversity, equity, and inclusion. One states that it does not have DEI-specific questions on their post-camp surveys, however many parents will write about this element of camp in the freeform section of the survey. Three camps conduct exit interviews with staff. One camp administers an end-of-session evaluation to parents, campers, and staff. One camp has a healthy group of volunteers engaged in the camp, so feedback is solicited from this group by the staff assigned to a particular volunteer group. One camp has a suggestion box for all campers and staff as a tool to collect feedback throughout the summer. This camp also surveys campers three times around the camp season: half-way through the session, just before their

departure, and again 1-2 weeks after departure. Additionally, it surveys parents to gather from them their general perception of the overall experience and their observations of the growth of their child. One camp has end-of-session meetings with its campers where the directors are providing an open space for camper thought and reflection, as the directors quietly observe and actively listen. One camp notes weekly staff meetings where it conducts strengths and challenges exercises and then administers a more broad-based survey to staff after each session. Another camp has staff feedback sessions on an ongoing basis during the season, along with one-on-one meetings with administrators each summer. One has developed different staff caucuses based on race and gender identity in order to create a space where staff can more openly share feedback on what is working or not. The challenge of these caucuses is making sure that feedback is subsequently shared with the managers or administrative team as well. Finally, the camp with the school-based partnership administers pre- and post-surveys to campers (student participants) and post-program surveys to both teachers and families.

Overall Benefits

Each sample participant was asked what they perceive as the benefits gained for both staff and campers as a result of their work, generally and as related to diversity, equity, and inclusion. There are many common themes that emerge around benefits to the camp experience for the children and young adults. Most camps share the following regarding benefits: being a part of and engaging in a community; providing an open, safe, and inclusive space where youth have a voice, share and talk freely, make mistakes, learn to be active listeners, and form their own opinions; having a deepened understanding, concern for, and empathy toward others; developing resilience and coping skills; equipping today's youth with valuable life skills; a place where people have time for each other and time for their own thoughts; learning to live and

respectfully communicate with each other; and being their authentic selves and seeing people

beyond the surface. Camps with stronger and more established diversity, equity, and inclusion

programs (four of the camps overall) note how youth gain a greater awareness regarding race

relations and a better understanding of the harm they might perpetuate even without intent. One

of these camps remarks that the youth, as they become familiar with the terms and tools around

DEI, are learning how to apply and embody these DEI strategies within their schools and

communities. The most common benefit mentioned among all camps is safety—camps serving

as safe environments where youth and young people can just "be." Per Camp #7, camp serves as

"a microcosm of the world as we would like it to be...inherently diverse, empathetic, full of

challenge, full of joy."

Challenges, Barriers, and Gaps

I asked each sample participant what they perceive to be the challenges, barriers, or gaps

to their DEI work and how they might improve or modify initiatives or programs in the future.

The perceptions of where the challenges, barriers, and gaps are regarding diversity, equity, and

inclusion work at youth summer camps and organizations seem to be reflective of how much an

individual camp is already engaging the youth in the DEI work. However, all recognize potential

areas for improvement moving forward. Per Camp #1, "I think the challenges or barriers are our

blind spots," meaning they are not necessarily known until they are directly in the line of vision.

One camp mentions the need to provide more training to the Board on diversity, equity, and

inclusion work, as well as the need to recruit Board members that are more representative of the

population they serve. The challenge is "marrying" the supporters and the people without

compromising the integrity of the program and organization. Three camps mention financials—

with more, they could do more. Two camps note the need for assessment and more reflection on

the DEI work. Two camps, that one could argue are "checking all of the boxes" in terms of effective DEI initiatives in creating safe and inclusive communities, are working on yielding more critical feedback from their families by asking more poignant questions. Two camps mention greater diversity on the leadership team. Two camps point to the area of staff accountability around DEI work, bringing the staff along on embracing the change, getting staff to understand the issue of "microaggression" and how their actions can negatively impact a child (even if unintentional), and addressing problems as they arise more quickly so that the potential detrimental impact is minimized. The camp with the large volunteer base particularly struggles with accountability, as the volunteers are not always as invested in the DEI work, so suggests that improving the volunteer interview process by adding specific questions focused on DEI might help. Two camps touch upon the need to be more accessible to under-served communities. One camp would like to revamp the website so that it is more accessible to diverse and/or low-income populations, contains updated information about who the camp is becoming, and also provides a bi-lingual option so that it is user-friendly for Spanish-speaking populations. Another camp would like to expand partnerships with community-based organizations working with youth from low-income urban communities. One camp did share that it has lost some families due to some of the changes it has implemented regarding gender identity and sensitivity; but, the hope is that it will gain families as a result of this work in the future. Another camp states that one of the challenges is some participants feel that they "know" things already (the DEI terms, concepts, etc.), however, they are not certain how to behave in the moment when faced with a situation, applying the knowledge they know and have learned. The focus of this camp continues to be the application piece which tends to be more difficult for youth. Additionally, youth from lower income and more vulnerable backgrounds have trust issues with the DEI work. They

maintain that this is "just the way it is" and it is tough to break through this perception. The challenge is to ensure youth that camp is a safe space to share experiences and to also develop an agency for understanding among the youth that there can be positive change. Finally, one camp reveals that one barrier is that you are constantly figuring out how best to implement change, how to persist with the changes, and then how to effectively teach changes with all parties involved. Per Camp #7, the continual challenge in this work is "creating a place where everyone belongs...so regardless of your grandparent coming here or not, regardless of how much camper-ship you get, you feel as great a stake in the place and a sense of purpose and agency."

Impact of Work on Positive Youth Development and Personal Growth

I inquired about the impact the camp's efforts—including those centered around DEI—on positive youth development and personal growth. Camp #1 shares the biggest impact is the long-term relationships, sense of security and stability, the familial atmosphere. Per Camp #1, the DEI work is a "crockpot versus a microwave," meaning it is important to meet the youth where they are and to be patient. Camp #2 shares that in a recent survey, a strong majority of the campers have a stronger sense of self, learned positive values, sought new challenges, engaged in healthy relationships, participated in community problem solving and cooperative learning, served as leaders, and learned by doing (experiential learning). Camp #3 notes that campers are going out into their communities and doing positive things. In reference to the testimonials on its website, it was shared that the camp has made an impact in terms of a personal growth, confidence, a greater sense of empowerment, youth challenging themselves outside of their comfort zone, and, through discomfort, campers learning to respect, appreciate, and advocate for others and difference. The camp also touts a high return rate and how many families feel that the camp is not long enough (they want more!). Camp #4 shares that the impact has been profound

and long-lasting, also referencing the testimonials on its website from participants over the years that remark on "being challenged and celebrated," "learning new skills," taking on "new roles of cooperation and responsibility," personal growth and independence, and character-building, confidence, and maturity. Camp #5 states that the summer camp experience overall led to positive youth development and growth as a result of youth being away from home, in charge of self, making their own decisions, learning consequences and responsibilities in life, and learning as a young person to be empathetic to others. Camp #6, also referencing the testimonials on its website, hears from participants that the camp helped them overcome their fears in making positive change in their communities, among many other positive accolades. This camp hopes to explore expanding programming to reach more age groups in the future. Camp #7 states that campers learn to challenge themselves in a supportive environment, learning that it is okay to fail, resolving difficult situations on their own, becoming "nicer" overall, and being "untethered" from their day-to-day stressors at home (i.e., over-programming and technology). Parents remark that campers return home with improved habits, more intuitive and questioning to the world around them, calmer, nicer, and caring.

Impact of Work on Social Justice and Advocacy for Others

The individual sample participants were asked how their efforts related to DEI have impacted participants' social justice work and advocacy for others. Two camps have not yet measured the impact of the DEI work on youth in terms of social justice and advocacy of others. Three camps note how many campers ultimately pursue "do-good" career paths, such as teaching, social work, and activism/community-organizing. Three camps share how campers often brought lessons-learned back to their communities and families. Two camps feel that the campers have a deepened understanding of the world and what's going on in this time of change.

And, another camp says that it provides the tools for social justice and advocacy work and, with these tools, the campers are equipped to navigate a situation, be empowered, find common ground with others, and be enlightened by the work. This camp also shares that all youth yearn for a safe, fair, and welcoming community. While at times, the DEI work at the camp makes the youth uncomfortable or angry, the camp serves as a safe space to process that anger so that when they are back in their communities they have the tools to make positive change in a situation rather than making it worse. Finally, another camp describes the DEI work as enabling campers to "see the light in everyone."

Advice for Other Camps

Finally, each individual sample participant was asked to offer advice to other youth summer camps on creating a community that is safer and more inclusive of all participants. Two camps emphasize the importance of staff training and language within the camp. Both feel that the staff are the most impactful in terms of the role they play in the overall camper experience. They add that campers are often super vulnerable and staff need to understand how their microaggressions can be hurtful to a camper and impact them and their experience in a negative way (even if they are unintentional). Further, staff need the skills to be aware of when these microaggressions occur in the moment so that they can process and talk about them immediately. Three camps enthusiastically state to "do it" and "don't be afraid to make change." They continue by admitting that the work is really hard, and camps need to be committed, be prepared, understand who they are leaving out, and not to quit in the face of challenge. One camp says that if an organization is not willing to go the distance with DEI work, they should not consider developing and implementing DEI initiatives or strategies at their camp, remarking that it wouldn't be fair to all participants. Another adds that the work is not just about being diverse and
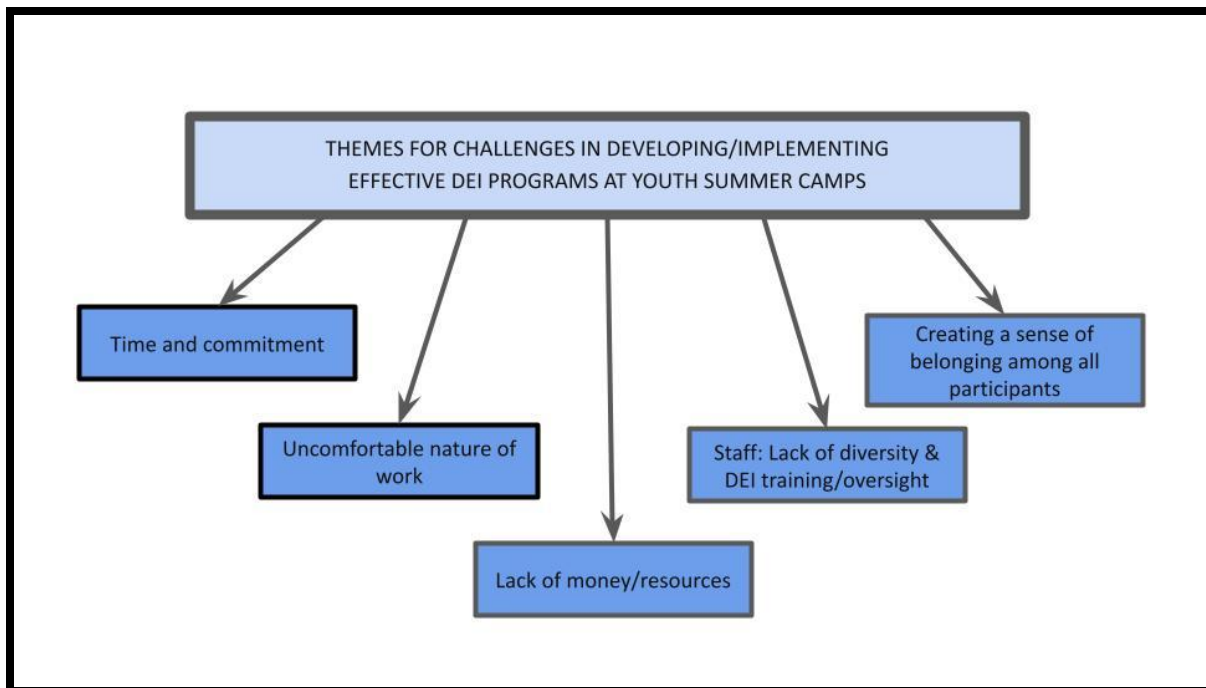
it is not "charity work," but more of a mutually beneficial learning experience and camps need to

determine if they have the drive to do the work, and assess their readiness. Finally, one camp

suggests to slow down, it takes time to create a safe space, and no significant change or growth

will occur until a safe space is established. Further, mistakes happen, so be curious and have

patience. And, finally, per Camp #6, "it is imperative that camps have a clear vision about what

their intended outcome will be at the end...what they hope others will say about them."

Themes

During the interviews I conducted, there were recurring themes related to both the

challenges and successes in developing and implementing effective diversity, equity, and

inclusion programs and initiatives at youth summer camps. Challenges (see Figure 3) include:

investing the time and sustained commitment; the uncomfortable nature of the DEI work; the

lack of financial support and resources; the lack of diversity in staff hiring and inadequate DEI

training and oversight; and the inability of camps to foster a sense of belonging among all

participants. Themes shared in successful diversity, equity, and inclusion work at camps (see

Figure 4) include: the hiring of diverse staff that are DEI-trained and provided opportunities for

ongoing reflection and oversight; ample and dedicated Board and financial support; collaborative

partnerships with community-based and DEI-focused nonprofit organizations; intentional DEI

programming that leads to positive youth development and personal growth among the

participants; and, ongoing and thoughtful engagement with camp families during the summer

and throughout the year. These themes will be discussed further in the next chapter.

Figure 3

Themes of Challenges in DEI Programs and Initiatives at Youth Summer Camps

THEMES FOR CHALLENGES IN DEVELOPING/IMPLEMENTING EFFECTIVE DEI PROGRAMS AT YOUTH SUMMER CAMPS

- Time and commitment
- Uncomfortable nature of work
- Lack of money/resources
- Staff: Lack of diversity & DEI training/oversight
- Creating a sense of belonging among all participants

Figure 4

Themes of Successes in DEI Programs and Initiatives at Youth Summer Camps

THEMES FOR SUCCESSES IN DEVELOPING/IMPLEMENTING EFFECTIVE DEI PROGRAMS AT YOUTH SUMMER CAMPS

- Staff: Diverse; DEI-trained; proper oversight
- Partnerships with community-based NPs
- Ongoing family engagement
- Intentional DEI programming
- Board and financial support
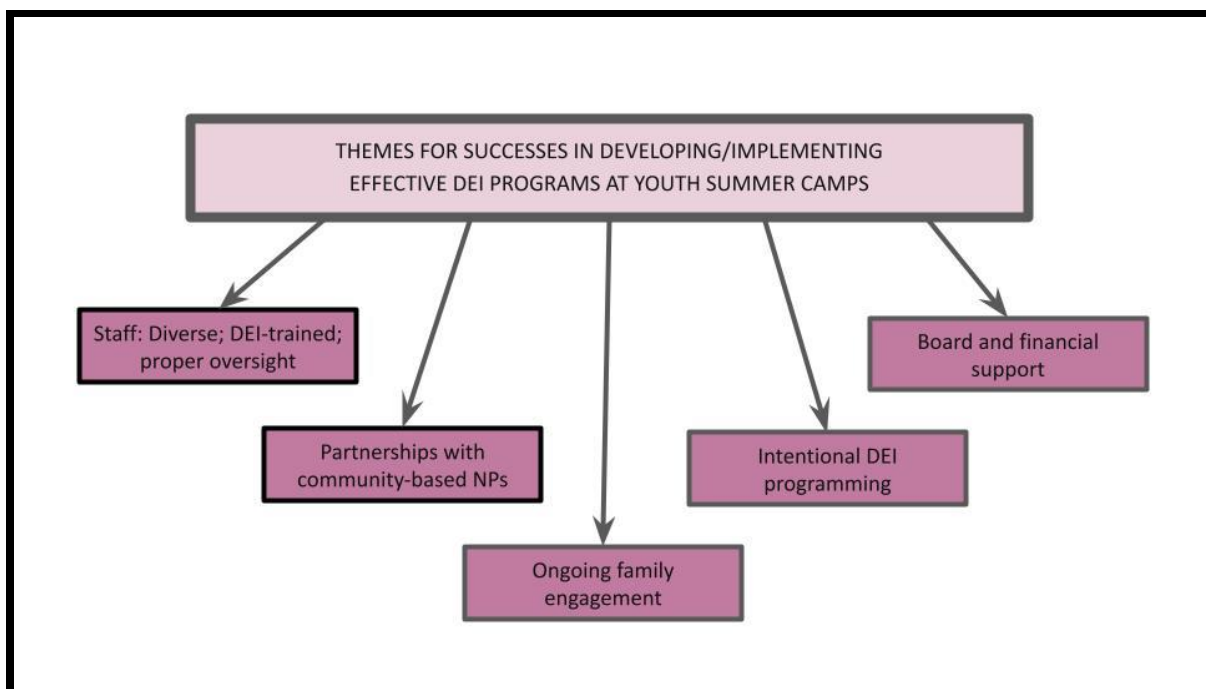
Chapter 4: Discussion

Youth summer camps, based on both research and interview findings, have made great strides in becoming more diverse in recent years in light of changing demographics of today's youth and communities within the U.S. as well as a more concerted effort on the part of these organizations to become more accessible to youth from more diverse backgrounds or under-served communities. Based on interview findings, many camps demonstrate a strong commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion as integral to their values and mission and proactively strive to create safe spaces for all their participants regardless of their race, religion, or socioeconomic background. Based on interview and research findings, camps have the potential to serve as a study on how to foster a community of inclusion that actively serves to promote advocacy for social justice and combat the inequalities of today's world and in the future.

It is important for youth summer camps to understand the effectiveness of specific practices, strategies, and tools centered around diversity, equity, and inclusion in establishing a more positive, supportive, and safer experience for all participants. Simply increasing the number of campers from diverse backgrounds and under-served communities and establishing programs to address diversity, equity, and inclusion may not be sufficient. Diversity, equity, and inclusion programs and initiatives developed and implemented within camp communities need to be adequate and effective in meeting the needs of all. Effective and adequate means all participants (campers, families, and staff) within a camp community have a sense of belonging. When a child feels safe and included, research shows that they have the courage and confidence to learn the skills needed to thrive and succeed as they become adults in an ever-evolving and challenging society. Camp directors and leaders must constantly consider how they will support diversity, equity, and inclusion within their respective communities both in the moment and in

the future and hold themselves and their organizations accountable should programs be insufficient or lacking in any way. By continually gauging the level of effectiveness and impact of this work, camps might learn how they can modify or improve their efforts in the future in order to continue to serve as centers for positive youth development and growth in this increasingly complex and diverse world.

Themes

During the interviews I conducted, there were some common themes that arose around both the challenges and the successes on how to develop and implement effective diversity, equity, and inclusion programs and initiatives at youth summer camps. Challenges include: 1) time and sustained commitment; 2) the inability to foster a sense of belonging for all participants; 3) the lack of diversity in staff hiring and inadequate DEI training and oversight; 4) the lack of financial resources and support; and 5) the uncomfortable nature of diversity, equity, and inclusion work. Successes include: 1) diverse staff that are DEI-trained and provided opportunities for ongoing reflection and oversight; 2) intentional diversity, equity, and inclusion programming that leads to positive youth development; 3) ample and dedicated Board and financial support; 4) collaborative partnerships with community-based and DEI-focused nonprofit organizations; and 5) ongoing and thoughtful engagement with camp youth's families during the summer, as well as throughout the year.

Implications

Many youth summer camps are committed to becoming more diverse and more accessible organizations, particularly in recent history. Camps are reevaluating their missions and values in order to be more inclusive of a broader youth population. Some camps have been founded on this premise, while others are starting to prioritize this more in recent years. Further,

current events have prompted camps to address issues of diversity, equity, and inclusion in a

more transparent and open way to help raise awareness about racial inequities and social justice

issues in contemporary society.

Practice

Based on research findings, youth summer camps can serve as microcosms as how

individuals might learn to live together, coexist, and cope with difference or the other in today's

societies. I have found that, through interview findings, camp directors and leaders concur. The

impact of diversity, equity, and inclusion work at camps on the participants can be significant. In

most cases, based on interview findings, camps provide a setting that is removed from the culture

individuals are experiencing in their home communities or schools. Youth (campers) and young

people (staff) who participate in camp are often coming from a variety of different backgrounds

and then forced to live together, often in a remote location, for an extended period of time. Many

camps ban phones and tablets of any kind so that participants are in a sense cut off from what is

going on in the world. The camp environment often provides a "level playing field" for its

participants. Campers and staff live similarly at camp in the same cabin or tent structures, often

wearing the same clothes (in some cases, a uniform), eating the same food, following the same

schedule, and provided the same opportunities. Camps provide a simpler existence where youth

are learning how to live in close quarters with one another, engage in face-to-face conversations

(no texting or FaceTime or other social media platforms), and resolve conflicts or problems,

often collaboratively, on a regular basis. For many youth and young people, camp might be the

first experience they have living with others who are different from themselves (by appearance,

socioeconomic background, religion, or in other ways). Therefore, based on interview findings,

camp can serve as an optimal setting to fully engage youth and young people in conversations and programs centered around diversity, equity, and inclusion.

       Time and Sustained Commitment. Diversity, equity, and inclusion work, in general, is hard work. It requires patience, sustained commitment, discomfort, reflection, self-awareness, and humility. There is not a one-size-fit-all approach with diversity, equity, and inclusion work within any organization or sector and most certainly not within youth summer camps or other youth-centered organizations. To develop and implement effective diversity, equity, and inclusion programs and initiatives at camps, camp leaders, directors, Board members, staff, campers, and families (all involved constituents) must be prepared to commit to the work in the long term. Diversity, equity, and inclusion needs to be prevalent, engrained, and prioritized at all levels of camp work—such as budgeting, culture, enrollment, hiring, language, leadership and management, operations, programming, training, and recruitment—in order to be effective. Additionally, DEI work needs to be assessed annually (at minimum), adjusted and modified as needed, and responsive to current trends. Camp leaders and directors need to have an all-in approach with diversity, equity, inclusion work. As with any nonprofit program or initiative, if it is not fully supported at all levels of the organization, the likelihood of the being successful and effective in meeting the needs of those intended to serve is minimized or perhaps insurmountable. In reference to one interviewee, if camps are unwilling to dedicate the necessary time and energy needed to effectively do the diversity, equity, and inclusion work, then they might want to consider whether it is worth the effort.

       Staff Hiring, Training, and Oversight. Camp staff should be reflective of the camper population. Based on interview findings, campers (and youth, in general) are drawn to and relate better to adults and role models (counselors, teachers, and mentors) that look similarly and

perhaps come from comparable backgrounds as themselves. If a camp seeks to improve camper diversity within its community, it must consider increasing the diversity of its staff as well. Based on interview findings, the staff interview process can play an important role in recruiting and hiring a diverse staff. Camp leaders and directors should consider including diversity, equity, and inclusion questions within the interview process that specifically address issues of systemic racism and poverty. The responses will reveal a prospective staff member's knowledge and awareness on these issues, as well as their capacity for growth through orientation, training, and the overall camp counselor experience.

Based on interview findings, it is imperative that camp staff undergo diversity, equity, and inclusion training during orientation and ongoing throughout the summer. Elements of successful staff training include understanding biases and microaggressions and regular opportunities for sharing, reflection, and assessment. Some camps require, and research supports, that staff undergo implicit bias testing and/or develop individual development plans each summer. Based on research findings, camp staff should be trained in the areas of language and active listening. Learning to engage with campers in a culturally inclusive and sensitive way is critical so that campers do not feel isolated based on their own individual characteristics (such as race, socioeconomic status, gender identity, or religion).

Ongoing oversight of camp staff is important for the managers, staff, and campers. Camp staff should be allotted time to reflect on their work on a regular basis with others. Challenging, new, and different situations will most likely arise. This is the reality of trying to build community among a group of youth who are from a variety of backgrounds. Camp staff need to be prepared to address matters of a sensitive nature in a timely fashion. Camp staff are the "frontline workers" of a youth summer camp. Based on interview findings, their actions and

behaviors have a deep and meaningful impact on the youth they serve. The slightest

microaggression might have the unintended consequence of being hurtful to a camper and result

in the camper not feeling included, safe, or having a sense of belonging.

Board and Financial Support. In order to develop strong and effective programs around

diversity, equity, and inclusion, support both financially and from the Board is needed. The

Board of a camp should place a high priority on diversity, equity, and inclusion as integral to the

camp's mission and values. Based on interview findings, the Board should be open to diversity,

equity, and inclusion training as well. A challenge faced among camps, based on interview

findings, is "marrying" the supporters (Board, funders) with the people (campers, staff,

administrators) without compromising the integrity of the program and organization. Boards play

an integral role in providing oversight and resources to a camp. If a Board is not deeply invested

in the diversity, equity, and inclusion work at its core, those on the ground who are implementing

and experiencing the work might not feel supported. The Board needs to not only advocate for

but also actively participate in the camp's diversity, equity, and inclusion work.

The Board also needs to support this work financially through their own donations,

within annual budgets, and as the focus of fundraising campaigns. More funds could result in the

potential for increased scholarship, more resources for staff hiring (salaries) and training, and

DEI programmatic efforts. This, in turn, might provide youth summer camps with a greater

capacity to adequately provide for youth from diverse backgrounds and under-served

communities.

Intentionality of DEI Programming. Youth summer camps should not shy away from

intentionally creating opportunities for learning around issues of diversity, equity, and inclusion

within their camp communities. Based on interview findings, DEI programs and initiatives

should be constantly evolving and changing based on current needs and trends, specifically

centered around youth. Camps need to be aware of traditions that are culturally insensitive or

exclusive and consider changing or eliminating these traditions. Effective DEI programs and

initiatives might be explicitly curriculum based, focusing on topics of social justice and/or racial

inequities. Knowledge and understanding of issues of diversity, equity, and inclusion are

important, but perhaps even more important is the ability for youth and young people to practice

and apply what they have learned both in the moment at camp and upon their return to their

home communities.

Effective camp DEI programming can also be residence-based. Cabin names that have

been steeped in traditions might be offensive or hurtful to some of the participants and need to be

evaluated and changed. Cabin assignments can be made with the intentionality of creating a

diverse living community. One interviewee noted that just "being" together in a diverse living

environment is often sufficient enough and doesn't necessarily require a formal curriculum in

order for the youth to engage in a meaningful way with each other.

Based on both the findings in the interviews and research, learning about racial inequities

and social injustices, living with difference, advocating for others, having empathy, and coping

with challenges both individually and collaboratively are all important ingredients of effective

diversity, equity, and inclusion programs at camps and serve to contribute to both positive youth

development and personal growth.

Nonprofit Partnerships. Nonprofit partners serve to support youth summer camps in

recruiting both youth and young people from under-served communities and diverse

backgrounds to enroll either as campers or to be hired as staff. Nonprofits are community-based

and often have established and trusted relationships with families and youth within the

communities they serve. Some nonprofits might share the same mission and commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion as the camp organizations. Community-based nonprofits can act as liaisons to camps in identifying and enrolling potential campers and/or identifying and hiring potential staff members. Based on interview findings, partnerships with community-based nonprofits aid camps in recruiting youth from under-resourced communities, but also help with establishing a sustained commitment among these youth to return to camp year-after-year.

Family Engagement. Youth summer camps should consider the importance of a sustained and thoughtful engagement with the families of the youth enrolled at their camps, not only during the summer months but throughout the year as well. Based on research findings, engaging with a family on an ongoing basis (even during the off-season) leads to their child's multi-year commitment. Based on both interview and research findings, when a child returns to camp for multiple summers, there is greater potential for personal growth and positive youth development. Parents and families can and should serve as partners with camps in their children's journey of becoming confident, courageous, independent, empathetic, and capable young adults in the future. Camps should consider a variety of approaches to family communication and engagement throughout the season and year (beyond technology) in order to be more inclusive of all families, regardless of their immediate access to technology. For instance, based on interview findings, some ideas might include: monthly newsletters (sent via email and "snail-mail"), end-of-season surveys (sent via email and/or conducted by phone), and personal check-in emails or phone calls to individual families. Camp should not assume that all camp families have the same access to email and other technology and social media platforms in their solicitation of feedback and ongoing communications with families.

Future Research

This study involved seven youth summer camps with varying degrees of diversity, equity, and inclusion work. I hope that this study will serve as a resource for other camps and for youth-centered nonprofits in learning what the challenges and successes are in developing and implementing effective diversity, equity, and inclusion programs and initiatives. For many camps, this work is new to their organizations, so this research might aid them in determining the best path forward. For the camps that have more established programs, the consensus was that this work is constantly changing and evolving and it is important to always be current and responsive to the needs of today's youth. Ongoing feedback from camp constituents and participants is essential in this work. Most camps, even those that are more seasoned in DEI work, are now making more of a concerted effort to explicitly solicit feedback from participants on the issues of inclusion and safety. This data will be critical in helping camps understand whether their efforts in diversity, equity, and inclusion are indeed effective and how they might modify or change programs and initiatives moving forward. Overall, addressing and fostering diversity, equity, and inclusion at camps seems to be a fairly new phenomenon for most camp directors and leaders and, therefore, the effectiveness of this work should continue to be researched in the future.

Conclusion

It is essential to understand if diversity, equity, and inclusion programs and initiatives at youth summer camps are adequate and effective in creating a safe and inclusive community for all participants. In my research, I discovered that it is indeed very important (critical) for camps to develop and implement diversity, equity, and inclusion programs. Per Blow (2017), "Recognizing and even celebrating individual identity groups doesn't make America weaker; it

makes America strong. Acknowledging that identity groups have not always been—and indeed, continue not to be—treated equally in this country should not be a cause for agitation, but a call to action" (p. 23). However, when developing and implementing diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives at camps, it is equally important to constantly assess them to understand if they are effective in fostering a sense of belonging for all members of the camp community. I learned that advocating for and implementing effective diversity, equity, and inclusion programs and initiatives at camps is about "addressing systemic biases versus programmatic solutions" (N. Jaha-Echols, personal communication, April 29, 2019). Diversity, equity, and inclusion programs need to be supported and integrated into the fiber of camps at the deepest of levels, so that they are constantly working towards and advocating for social justice within the camp communities and in society at large. I believe that we, as youth summer camp leaders, nonprofit professionals, and societal citizens, must be up to this task. I believe that effective diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives can serve to provide people—such as a camper or counselor—with cultural knowledge, awareness, and competencies so that they have the capability and capacity to interact with each other in a respectful and productive way in an increasingly diverse society.

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Appendix

Interview Questions

1. Please describe your camp (in its current state).

    a. What is your mission, purpose, and values?

2. Please share the history of your camp (founding and how it has evolved into its current state).

3. Please describe the demographics of your camp community.

    a. Race/ethnicity
    b. Religion
    c. Socio-economic
    d. Geography

4. How have the demographics of your camp community changed in recent years? Versus 5, 10, 20, 50 years ago?

5. How have you engaged in diversity, equity, and inclusion work at your camp? What are some of the most effective initiatives or strategies you have developed and implemented in recent years? (Below are some areas noted to guide the conversation, as needed.)

    a. Recruitment and engagement process (camper access)
    b. Staff
    c. Day-to-day activities and programming
    d. Camp traditions

6. How do you solicit feedback from staff, campers, and families each summer regarding their camp experience, specifically related to diversity, equity, and inclusion?

7. What do you perceive as some of the benefits gained for both staff and campers as a result of your work?

8. What do you perceive as being some of the challenges or barriers to your work?

9. Where are the gaps still? How might you improve or modify in the future?

10. What impact have your efforts made in terms of positive youth development and personal growth?

11. What impact have your efforts made in terms of social justice work and advocacy for others?

12. What advice would you offer other youth summer camps on creating a community that is safer and more inclusive of all participants?