

Cosmopolitan Citizenship through the Residential Camp Experience:  
Comparative Research in North America and Central Asia

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## **Abstract**

A cross-cultural international study compares two residential outdoor children's camps to explore learning within personal, social and physical domains. Data was collected in Canada and Mongolia. Mixed methods determined that learning in the said domains was common to the camp experience in each culture. Findings indicate camps are low stress, motivational settings that benefit youth development and learning transfer. Socio-cultural variants that shape aspects of socialization, experiential learning, peer-learning, and perception of role models within each ethnographic group are discussed. Emergent findings revealed that advocacy for peace, human rights, democracy and environmental responsibility were enhanced through residential camp programs. These findings correspond to the tenets of cosmopolitan/global citizenship and are thus deemed to be intrinsic to the camp experience.

## **Introduction**

Several years ago a colleague told me of a worldwide organization dedicated to positive youth development through the experience of organized camping. As a camp director and researcher I was immediately intrigued. The International Camping Fellowship (ICF) founded in nineteen eighty-seven currently represents youth camps and outdoor centers in twenty-eight countries. This organization promotes face-to-face and electronic networking of camp professionals, camp staff, educators, and researchers worldwide to bring the message of global accord through the celebration of youth in the outdoors. The ICF holds a congress and research symposium in a different member nation every three years. It was at an ICF congress that two like minded camp professionals from opposite sides of the world came to be collaborators in cross-cultural research.

## **Background**

### Camp and Outdoor Phenomena

Much of westernized society is urban based, sedentary, consumer driven and increasingly withdrawn from community life. Ideals of community often imply an individual and collective concern for others along with a sense of self as a contributing member (Ridley, 1997). They can comprise notions of civic pride (Putnam, 2000) and also the inclusion of natural spaces as part of an understanding for the overall health of a community (McHarg, 1992). Natural spaces are in turn communities unto themselves; an expansive biological world that is fundamental to the sustaining of our own (Capra, 2004; Naess, 1986). Yet, our youth are now experiencing a further disconnection from the natural world (Louv, 2005).

Understandings of how symbiotic relationships might be established between self, community and nature are often difficult to conceptualize living within a landscape dominated by urban sprawl. Recent research efforts in North America have shown that residential camp experiences can ameliorate and provide learning opportunities that lead over time to an affirmation of self that is inclusive of society and the environment. The learning which takes place at camp encompasses cognitive, emotive, communal, tactile and spiritual domains. It is enduring and can be significant and/or life shaping (Bialeschki et al, 2002; Fine, 2005; Henderson et al., 2007; Thurber et al., 2007). Residential camp experiences and outdoor education are recognized as promoting the development of leadership, self-concept, cognitive function, interpersonal skills, motivation and self-regulation (Bialeschki et al, 2007; Csikszentmihayi 1991; Smith et al, 1992).

Theoretically the design of this comparative research is based on the concepts of experiential learning (Coleman, 1977, Dewey, 1997 [1938]); Kolb, 1984), and contextual learning (Falk & Dierking, 2000; Fine, 2005; Liebermann & Hoody, 1999). Whereas experiential learning is widely recognized as “hands on” or “learning by doing,” contextual learning addresses an interdependence between learner and teacher across a spectrum of experiential episodes within physical, personal, and social domains.

The physical domain offers possibilities for experiential learning, enhances cognitive function, health and well-being. Within the personal domain autonomy is encouraged in the interest of self-regulation and self-efficacy. And the social domain provides socially mediated learning in a convivial atmosphere. Experiential learning is a series of tactile experiences. As Dewey (1997) stated “part of a continuum, a life-long pursuit that builds, one quality educative experience upon another” (p. 37). Contextual learning is linked to this experiential continuum. Individual learning moments can make lasting impressions. These are the layers of the learning continuum. They become truly educative in the existential sense when they, over time, form cognitive linkages with other contextual learning moments to create broader or more holistic understandings of our surroundings, our interactions with them, and often the path in life we choose to travel.

#### Comparative Cross-cultural Research

The intention for engaging in a comparative study is twofold. First, there was a perceived need to replicate the original Canadian study in order to establish the reliability of the findings. The Canadian study had a relatively modest sample size such that upon publication a research collaboration was sought in order to test the findings with a much

larger sampling of both campers and staff alumni. Second, if there was a possibility to conduct the research in a country outside of Canada or the U.S., insights could be gained into the phenomenon of camp, generic and/or specific to the culture being surveyed.

Through participation in the triennial congresses of the International Camping Fellowship (ICF) and the research symposiums held annually at the national conference of the American Camps Association (ACA) an agreeable camp director was identified from Mongolia. A research agreement was ratified in 2006, each director visited the camp of their counterpart in 2007, and data was collected during the Mongolian camp's 30th anniversary. This time-frame allowed for mutual acculturation and negotiation along with the successful surveying of both current campers and alumni.

Entering into comparative cross cultural research holds many challenges for the intrepid researcher. Issues of distance, language, translation, institutions, customs and traditions, value systems, lifestyles, and patterns of thought can often be overwhelming. Additionally, one may feel ill equipped not only due to a lack of cultural knowledge or understanding but by an insufficient awareness of the research traditions and processes which are followed within different national contexts (Hantrais & Mangen, 1996).

Consideration must also be given to understanding that methodologies designed with one culture in mind may not readily transfer to a cultural context different from the original. Oyen (1990) questions whether comparisons across cultural/national boundaries represent a "different set of theoretical, methodological and epistemological challenges or whether this kind of research can be treated as another variant of the comparative problems already embedded in sociological research (p.4)." Chang (1996) points out that there is a

need to assess the equivalence of specific constructs across cultures rather than simply measure different levels of constructs. While, in the interest of increasing ecological validity, Ho and Cheung (2007) recommend cross cultural researchers recognize the need to design theories and instruments that are sensitive to local contexts.

The research compromises associated with Mongolian socio-cultural distinction and camp phenomenon were less demanding than originally supposed. Mongolia, once a Soviet territory, has a well established tradition of organized camps which was put in place during the Soviet era. The former Soviet Union had a long history of organized camping which is now carried on within the Russian Republic and most of the former Soviet satellite states. (Pulliam, 2004).

The benefits of collaborative cross cultural projects are considerable. Valuable personal contacts are established which allow for the sharing of experience and knowledge from different intellectual traditions. This can sometimes be of greater interest than the comparative results themselves (Hantris & Mangen, 1996). Cross cultural research can also reveal information and point in directions that had not previously been considered and this project is a case in point.

### Cosmopolitan Citizenship

The world as we now know it is globally interconnected and all human action has become an interplay between global and the local forces (Giddens, 1991). Borrowing a cause and effect concept from the environmental sciences we as a globally interconnected

species live our lives in the era of the “butterfly effect” (Lorenz, 1995). Small seemingly insignificant actions on one part of the globe can have far reaching and increasing magnified effects on a worldwide scale. In terms of our collective influence on one another and the planet we can all be seen as global or cosmopolitan citizens regardless of any national status. The word cosmopolitan means *citizen of the world* and there is a great deal of contentious debate in citizenship literature over what the term cosmopolitan or global citizen infers on political, economic and philosophical levels (Bowden, 2003; Kleingeld & Brown, 2006). Cosmopolitan democracy (Held, 1995, 1996) allows for a clearer and less controversial theory within which to locate the educational benefits inherent to residential camp phenomena. Cosmopolitan democracy “has the advantage of acknowledging local, national and global contexts and the wide variety of experiences that learners may bring to their education” (Osler & Starkey, 2003, p. 244). The intent of citizenship education within the schools system is to better enable young people from different backgrounds to learn how to live together.

Concepts of cosmopolitan or global citizenship as it pertains to the phenomenon of camp can be linked to the educational philosophy of Kurt Hahn. Hahn advocated a commitment to world peace and understanding between nations, the development of a sense of responsible world citizenship, and character-building informed by an existential, experiential ideology of education (Rohrs, 1970).

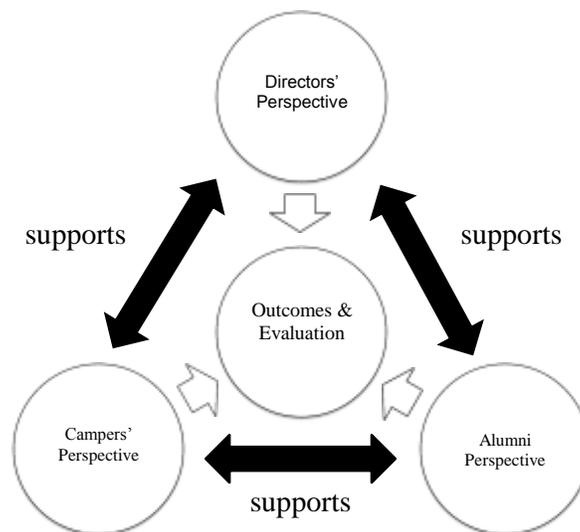
Osler & Vincent (2002) have identified characteristics that should be part of the educated cosmopolitan citizen. These include: accepting personal responsibility and recognizing the importance of civic commitment; working collaboratively to solve problems and achieve a just, peaceful and democratic community; respect diversity between peoples, according

to gender, ethnicity and culture; recognizing that their own worldview is shaped by personal and societal history and by cultural tradition; respecting the cultural heritage and protecting the environment. These tenets of cosmopolitan citizenship follow closely those of Hanvey's (2001 [1976]) seminal work which discusses the five dimensions of global awareness, as well as those advocated by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO, 1995).

### **Methods**

A mixed-methods approach was taken with triangulation achieved through 1) camp director dialogue 2) five scaled Likert surveys with open-ended questions for current campers and 3) camper/staff alumni. Face to face dialogue through a translator took place on several occasions between the camp directors in addition to camp visits in Canada and Mongolia. The Canadian study additionally employed alumni interviews which were substituted with open ended questions for Mongolian alumni due to the increased number of participants, and the logistics associated with distance and language. The Canadian data accounts for 113 campers and 18 alumni. Mongolian data accounts for 925 campers and 218 alumni. Quantitative data measured camper and alumni perceptions of camp experiences within personal, social and physical domains. Qualitative data provided thick description and further informed the quantitative data. Data from campers along with that of alumni converge to support or refute the philosophical intention or mission statement of the camp directors.

## Research Methodology



The surveys consisted of 20 questions each and focussed on the subjective perceptions of current campers and staff/camper alumni in each of the domains: personal, social and physical. The surveys were collaboratively designed in Survey Monkey. The online questionnaire was then translated into Mongolian, administered to the participants with paper and pencil, the answers then translated back into English and inputted into Survey Monkey for analysis. Open ended questions were coded according to themes. The coding process was simplified as responses were cut down to basic answers of only three to seven English words. It is uncertain whether this was a direct reflection of the actual answers given or if it was the result of translation issues. Consideration had to be given as all processes and procedures associated with the administration of the data collection were delivered in-kind by the camp being surveyed.

Additionally, there were some variations from the original data collection protocol. These included: negotiations with the Mongolian camp to include within the survey items of specific interest to their operation, for example participant satisfaction with services; and the creation of surveys for alumni. Alumni were interviewed within the original Canadian study. Consequently there is a lack of thick description in the responses of Mongolian alumni.

## **Findings**

### Similarities

Canadian outcomes of camper and camp alumni indicate that camp contributes significantly to learning in areas of: self-concept, self-regulation, self-efficacy, peer teaching, cooperation, teambuilding, socio-cultural understanding, and environmental ethics. Learning attributed to experiences at camp were also identified as having successfully transferred to later life situations and in some cases were significant in life direction.

The Mongolian study supported the original research as follows. In the personal domain camp experience increased self-regulation, self-confidence, independence and recognition of strengths, weaknesses and potentials. Habits of personal hygiene and action towards a fit and healthy lifestyle were established. Within the social domain, participants improved communication skills, accepted others regardless of ethnicity, social or economic standing, realized the value and practicality of teamwork, and improved skills in group planning and organization. Learning in the physical domain included a broader knowledge for sustaining clean air and water locally and globally, the value of contact with nature, and a commitment toward environmental responsibility.

Overall findings indicate that camps are optimal learning environments that transcend national and/or cultural boundaries and can effectively prepare youth for successful community interaction at local and global levels.

### Distinctions

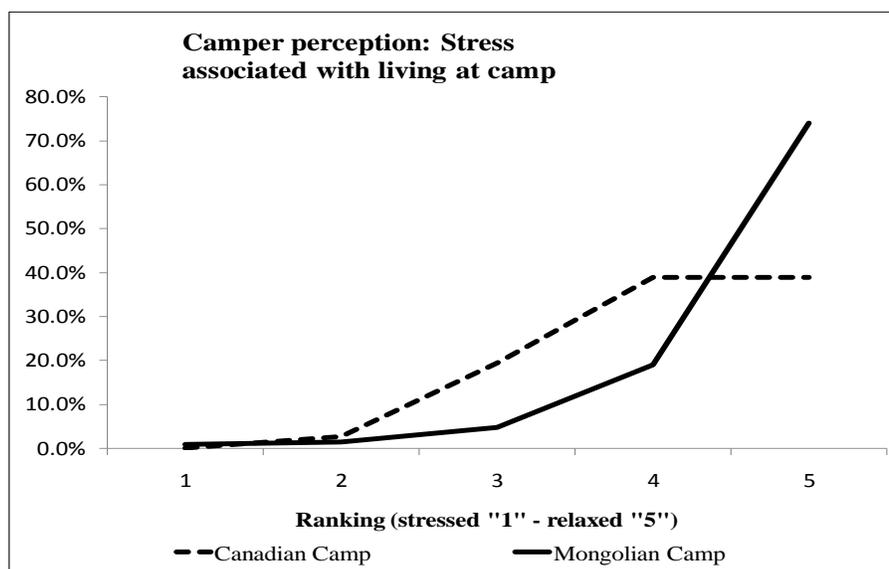


Fig. 1: Mongolian youth found camp offered a low stress atmosphere and were more comfortable within the camp setting than Canadians. This can be attributed to the recreational/leisure aspect of camp as Mongolian children have little opportunity for recreation and socializing due to family obligations and formal schooling.

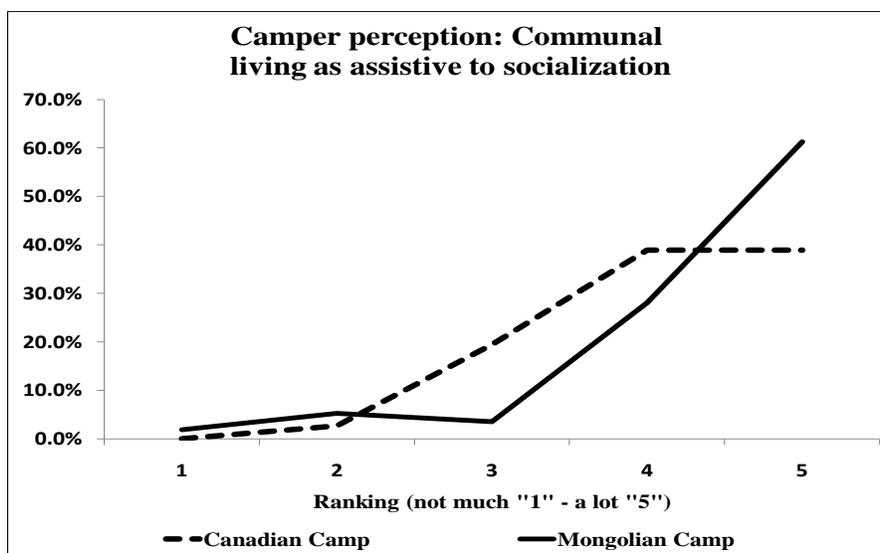


Fig. 2: Mongolian children live their everyday lives in close knit communities without the options for privacy and personal space that is common among Canadian youth. This may attribute to a better understanding on the part of Mongolian youth with regard to the benefits of constructive socialization.

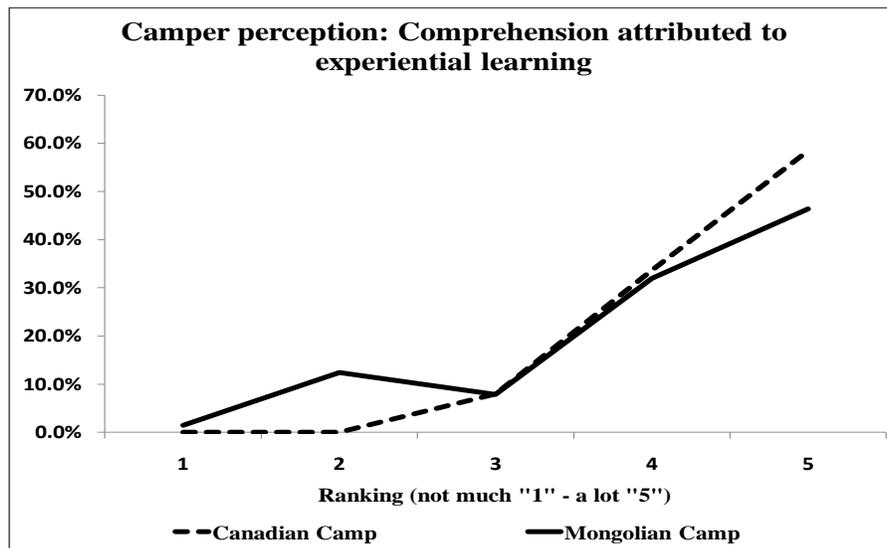


Fig. 3: Mongolian youth are somewhat more conditioned to being taught in a formal manner. The variation here is slight between Mongolians and Canadians as both enjoy learning by doing, but there is a predisposition on the part of Mongolians to feel most comfortable with a “scaffolding” relationship with their teachers (Vygotsky, 1997 [1926]).

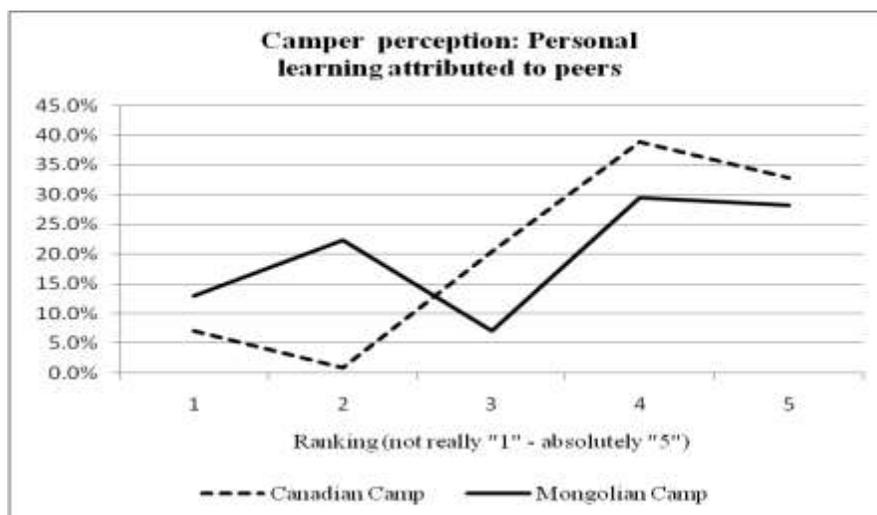


Fig. 4: Although there is a mutual agreement among both Canadian and Mongolian youth as to the benefits of peer learning. Canadian youth are somewhat more inclined to trust peers for the same reasoning as in Fig. 3.

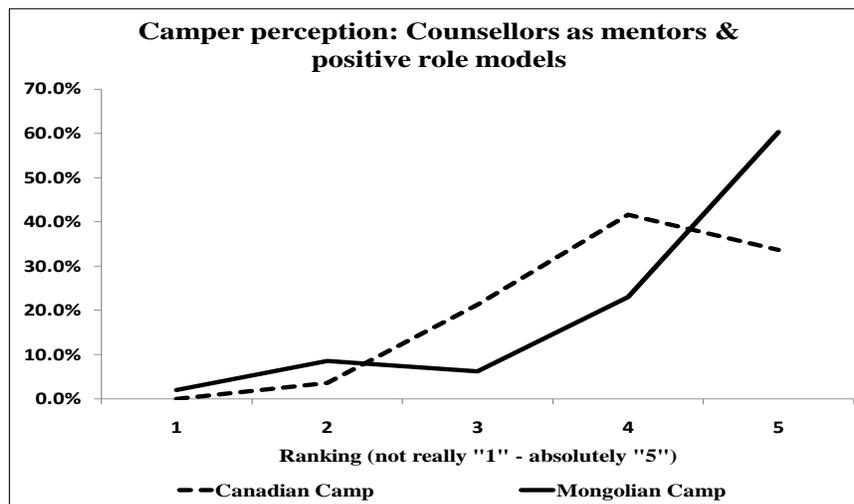


Fig. 5: The Mongolian director attributed this ranking to high standards of staff training. Many of the Mongolian camp staff are full time personnel and often graduates of teacher's college. The tradition in Asian countries is to highly value and respect teachers and leaders. This may also be a rationale for these results.

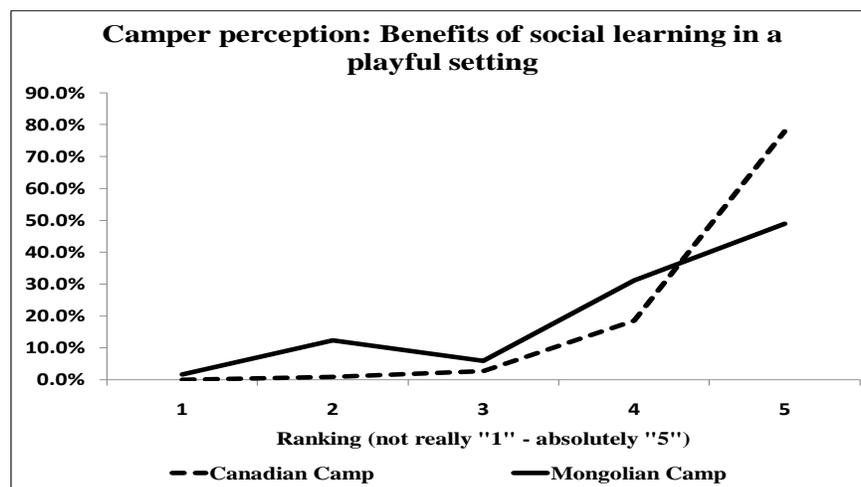


Fig. 6: Mongolian youth find camp a very different learning environment than the formalize structure of their daily schooling. For them camp is fun but they are less certain about the learning aspects of this experience.

Emergent

Tenets of Cosmopolitan Citizenship from the Literature	Canadian and Mongolian Campers and Camp Alumni
Accepts personal responsibility	Learned self-regulation and self assessment
Demonstrates social responsibility and civic commitment	Learned about obligation to community & love of homeland
Respect for diverse cultures, gender & ethnicity	Learned respect, understanding and acceptance of others
Promotes solidarity & equality at local national & international levels	Learned value & practicality of teamwork, equality & effective communication
Respect for cultural heritage and the environment	Learned responsible environmental practices for land, air, water & animals
Collaboration for the promotion of justice, peace & democracy	Learned fairness, fair-play and sharing in decision making

### Discussion

Canada and the United States share the same historical and cultural roots in organized camping (Kilpatrick, 1931) and are correspondingly very similar. Mongolia's roots in organized camping are founded in the country's ancient nomadic heritage and the former Soviet Union's *Young Pioneers* (scouts) organization (Pulliam, 2004). Mongolia is an autonomous parliamentary democracy and like the United States and Canada the rights of children are protected by law (UNICEF, 2007). The literacy rate in Mongolia for adults and youth is greater than 97% and comparable to that of North America (UNdata, 2009).

Mongolia is a developing nation where children generally do not have leisure or recreation opportunities for socialization outside of the classroom or family unit. Education is formal and household chores normally complete daily routines. Camp is a unique and very different learning environment for these children. Social factors along with cultural attitudes toward formal and informal education may account for differences in camper perceptions toward learning at camp. However, evidence on the positive impact of learning at camp is borne out through the responses of the Mongolian alumni

both campers and staff. Schooling is a high priority for Mongolians as it is in most developing countries of the world (UNICEF, 2007), however camp is not.

Today camps are hard-pressed both in the developed and the developing world to learn ways of negotiating and finding common ground with what Kahn & Kellner (2004) describe as our “global youth culture.” Cell phones, music videos, ipods, online networks, and consumerism are the stuff of globalization for both Canadian and Mongolian youth. Camp directors and administrators, educators and parents will continue to juggle the everyday realities of children’s personal and social lives within a globalizing context for many years to come.

All youth are now in the process of globalizing. In some ways they are becoming homogeneous but still, we as social beings are all predisposed to our cultural experience. Living and learning at camp allows for a deeper understanding and appreciation for a multitude of personalities and cultural distinctiveness in a context of global similarities.

The exciting and most promising aspect of our findings is that camps overall provide young people with skills that can effectively prepare them for active roles as social actors on the global scene (UNESCO, 2003). The challenge for camps is not so much their ability to attract a diverse and globalized camper population but in their ability to acquire and maintain the trust and support of this growing demographic.

Apart from being a proving ground for the original Canadian study emergent data of a global nature came to the forefront. This emergent data demonstrated strong correlation

to the tenets ascribed to that of globally-minded or cosmopolitan citizenship. It is important to note that although the Mongolian camp had intentional programs since 2003 which focused on the development of globally-minded citizenship the Canadian camp did not. Despite this, data from both camps indicated corresponding findings which show that the tenets of global or cosmopolitan citizenship are inherent to the phenomenon of residential camp and has the capacity to transcend national & cultural boundaries. The primary limitation to this study lies in the comparatively small sample size within the Canadian study. It could be productive to run a second comparative study in another country at a camp with a sample size more in keeping with the Mongolian camp.

Perhaps in order to assure the development of cosmopolitan citizens, camp experience should become acknowledged as a beneficial component of education systems internationally. Societies worldwide are increasingly influenced by global events. One manifestation is the broad migration of peoples which has resulted in demographic changes to our local communities. Camp offers opportunities for the positive development of youth regardless of cultural background or national heritage and can assist them to take an active role globally as well as in their local communities.

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