

Parent Perception of Changes in Children After Returning Home from Camp



UNIVERSITY OF WATERLOO



Troy D. Glover, Ph.D., Steven Mock, Ph.D., & Roger C. Mannell, Ph.D.
University of Waterloo
Stephen Fine, Ph.D., Hollows Camp

While proponents of summer camp advance the notion that camp provides participants with a transformative experience, the impact of camp beyond the setting in which it takes place remains understudied and unclear. Collecting empirical evidence of transfer is crucial to positioning camp as a genuine catalyst for positive youth development. The purpose of this study, therefore, was to examine the extent to which the skills, knowledge, and values that campers develop during their summer camp experiences transfer to their home, community, and school environment based on parental observations.



Background

When an individual learns something new from participating in an activity, transfer represents the application of that new knowledge, skill or value position in a different setting. Transfer is not a *fait accompli*. In formal education settings, for example, students learn information, but often fail to transfer it to real world contexts. Though capable of doing so, they often choose not to do so, because they dislike the subject and have no interest in applying their new knowledge to their daily lives. Presumably camp, because of its focus on intrinsic learning, provides a learning environment that encourages campers to retain and use the knowledge they gained from their experiences.

Summer camp experiences are short lived, however, which may affect their transferability. If positive development outcomes do result from these brief experiences, then understanding what, if anything, transfers from camp to other settings is important to assist camps in better planning and structuring their program offerings to support optimal youth development. It is not enough for camps to simply provide opportunities for positive developmental outcomes for youth and *hope* these outcomes continue to affect their campers after camp is over. Camps need to understand what, if any, outcomes transfer and adjust or improve their programs accordingly to facilitate optimal developmental growth opportunities beyond the camp experience.



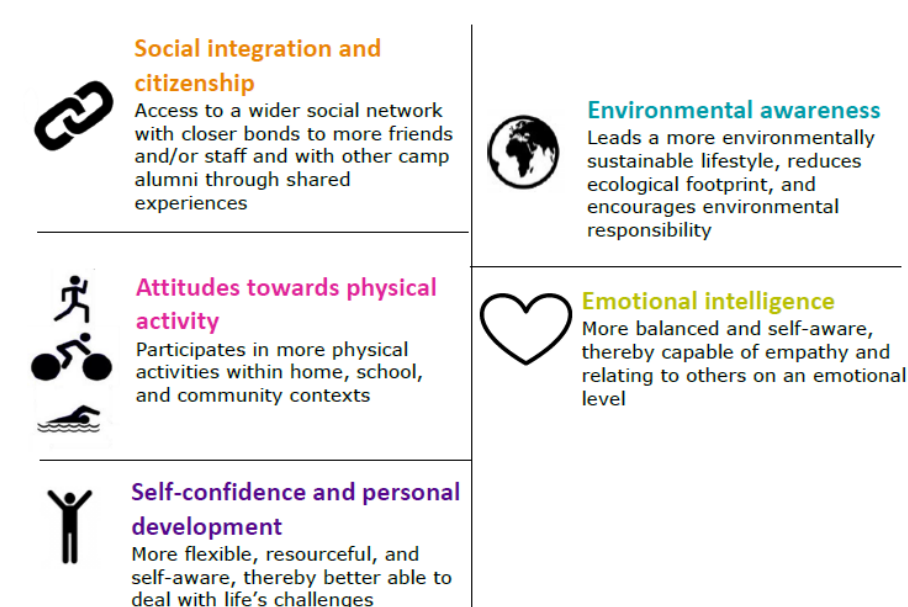
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Method

This study reports findings from Phase Three of the Canadian Summer Camp Research Project (see Glover, et al., 2013), a national study aimed at examining the outcomes children experience after participating in a summer camp program. For Phase Three, a survey instrument was developed to determine changes in attitudes or behaviour that parents noticed since their children returned from camp. Demographic information was collected about parents, as well as information about their child. In total, data were collected from 1,405 parents, predominately from two-parent (80%) households with an average family income of \$110,000 to \$119,000 Cdn. Age was re-coded into four incremental groups according to camper's approximate grade school levels: Pre-K to K (4-6 years), Grades 1 to 3 (7-9 years), Grades 4 to 6 (10-12), and High School (13-18). The average age group was 7-9 year olds. Nearly half (49%) of the campers were girls. Over 110 different Canadian summer camps were reported by parents. Program types included: residential (49%), day (21%), religiously-affiliated (16%), those designed for children with special needs (3%), and specialty (i.e. science, language, music, sport) (11%).

Five outcome areas were explored: (1) social integration and citizenship; (2) environmental awareness; (3) attitudes towards physical activity; (4) emotional intelligence; and (5) self-confidence and personal development. Among the five key outcome areas, parents were asked to rate statements based upon changes, if any, noticed in their child since leaving summer camp. Each item was scored so that a higher number indicated a stronger agreement (1= very strongly disagree, 6= very strongly agree).

Key findings from Phase 1 CSERP revealed five areas where camp directors expected campers to experience positive outcomes (Glover et al., 2011):

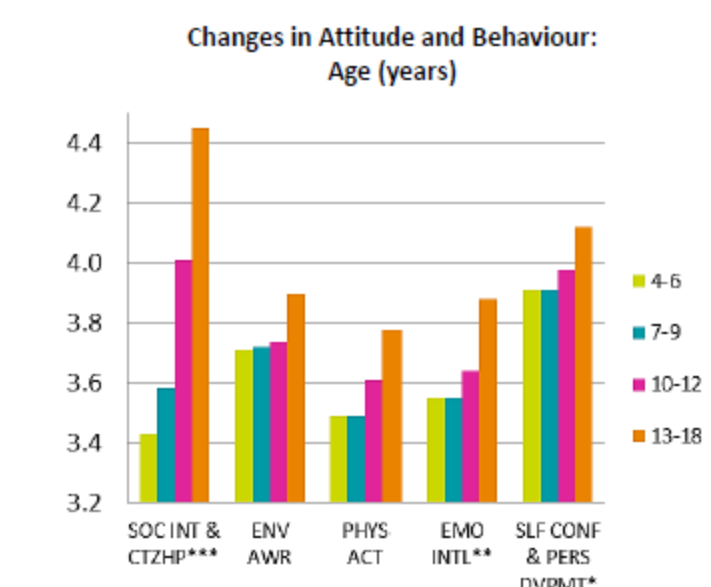


Survey Findings

Findings indicated that positive development in all five key outcome areas appeared to transfer from children's camping environment to daily life. Detailed analysis further revealed that gender, age, length of stay at summer camp, and returning campers were all positively associated with changes in attitudes and behaviour.

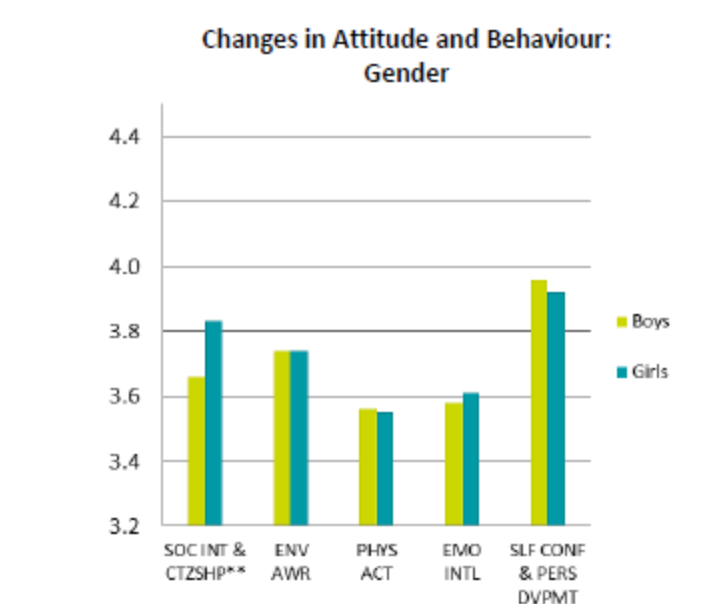
Age

Older campers seemed to experience significantly greater levels of change in all five key outcome areas with respect to social integration and citizenship.



Gender

Findings indicate that girl campers tend to experience greater levels of social integration and citizenship than boys.



Discussion

According to parents,, positive changes in attitudes and behaviour continued or maintained after camp. This positive finding aligns with previous Canadian summer camp research which found that learning transferability to daily life contexts can be traced back to the experiences that took place at camp (Fine, 2005).

With respect to differences in age, older campers presumably showed the greatest change in development because, with greater maturity and social experience, they were able to adapt to new situations with greater ease. Nevertheless, all four age groups examined were found to experience significant positive change, thereby providing good evidence that children continue to develop with subsequent camp experience.

With respect to gender, though societal gender expectations may encourage girls to demonstrate more caring behaviour through greater interpersonal skills, camp directors and programming staff may wish to consider ways to foster greater social integration/citizenship at camp among boys.

References

Fine, S. M. (2005). *Contextual learning within the residential outdoor experience: A case study of a summer camp community in Ontario*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Toronto, Ontario, Canada.

Glover, T. D., Graham, T., Mock, S., Mannell, R. C., Carruthers, A., & Chapeskie, A. (2013). *Canadian Summer Camp Research Project, Phase 3: Parent perception of changes in children after returning home from camp*. Waterloo, ON: University of Waterloo.