

Professional Development in Summer Camp Employment

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Introduction

Purpose

The purpose is to identify what opportunities are being provided by summer camps to aid student development and how supervisors are utilizing professional development opportunities throughout the summer to assist students in articulating their experience.

Questions

- What professional development opportunities are summer camps providing to their students serving as camp counselors to reflect on their experiences?
- What programs and professional development opportunities are summer camps utilizing to help students identify their skill development?

Literature Review

Importance of Transferable Skills

- Mentoring others and designing programs improves leadership, collaboration, teamwork, self-confidence, and problem-solving skills (Chase et. al., 2020)
- These are all skills that cannot be taught but are learned through experiences (McKinney, 2002)

Skill Development in Camp Counseling

- The camp counselor experience requires college students to make decisions, be leaders, use resources wisely, be self-responsible and contribute to a team (Duerden et. al., 2014)

Career Readiness through Camp Employment

- Camp counselors develop many skills as they are given so much responsibility and are faced with daily challenges (Owens & Browne, 2021)

"I really believe and lean into vulnerable leadership, meaning that I go all in with them. I try to connect with my counselors and team leaders, everybody is invited to everything."

Methodology

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- Constructivist approach (Creswell & Creswell, 2018)
- Qualitative interviews

Sample

- Summer camp supervisors for at least two years
- Directly oversee seasonal camp staff aged 18-23
- Representation from a variety of camps and industries

Data Collection

- 10 Semi-structured interviews, approximately 60 minutes, over Zoom
- Convenience and Snowball Sampling (Creswell & Creswell, 2018)
- Analyzed the transcripts of the interviews to find themes, trends, and approaches through coding (Creswell & Creswell, 2018)

"Giving our staff grace and understanding that they are learning is always at the forefront of my mind."

Results

Skills Gained as a Camp Counselor

- When asked about skills gained through camp counseling, most participants mentioned working with others, flexibility, empathy, communication, problem-solving, creativity, and organization

Opportunities for Reflection

- Each agency has a unique structure for end of the year evaluations, some with more opportunities for reflection than others

Current Professional Development Provided

- Orientations/Staff Trainings
- Goal Setting
- Counselor check ins and evaluations
- Developing individual Self-Care plans
- Child development
- DEI trainings

Discussion

Existing Research

- There are nearly 14,000 camps across the US and majority of counselors are college students. Camp counseling is an industry providing young adults with many transferable skills (Owens & Browne, 2021)
- A study done indicated that 78% of mentoring relationships involved the direct supervisor and subordinate (Collins-Camargo & Kelly, 2007)

Limitations

- No student perspectives
- No data behind current programs
- Small sampling size

Implications for Research

- Examine the success rate of the professional development opportunities post-graduation
- Explore the value that college students put on such professional development opportunities

Implications for Practice

- Resume building sessions
- Working in a professional setting training
- Self-Care plans
- Creating Internships
- Trainings in norms of communication

"I don't think there is a career out there that teaches more than this one."

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