

Evaluation of Old Stories New Voices Intercultural Youth Program: Fort Garland, CO

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Purpose

The Old Stories, New Voices Intercultural Youth Program offers a one-week summer camp experience that introduces young people from at-risk neighborhoods to parks and museums at the local, state, and national levels. The camp is a cooperative effort between the National Park Service, The Colorado Historical Society and several non-profits in Colorado. The purpose of this paper is to describe the evaluation of the OSNV program and its findings. The evaluation was guided by OSNV's stated goals which were to help campers:

- understand the contributions of their own culture to the development of the American West;
- resist using drugs and joining gangs as a result of increased self-esteem;
- appreciate the natural and cultural resources in their own communities, parks and preserves;
- appreciate the value of knowing and understanding history and use newly acquired understandings of the past to make good decisions for the future.

Theoretical Frame

The basis of the camp design was experiential learning. Campers would be given opportunity to learn how different cultures had contributed to Colorado history. It was expected that as a result of increasing their knowledge of their own and other cultures, campers would increase pride in their own culture and gain a better understanding of the cultural contributions of other cultural groups. The camp also provided an opportunity to remove campers from their everyday settings and create a demanding, yet supportive, environment for their development.

Methods

The evaluation was conducted in two phases. In phase one, fifty former participants were selected by OSNV organizers for possible interviews. Individuals were purposively selected to provide names of campers who had participated during one of the past five summers (2000-04). Twenty-two campers were contacted. Phone interviews included questions to help determine whether OSNV was meeting its stated goals. Information from these surveys was used in developing survey and interview material for phase two of the evaluation.

Phase two focused on answering seven questions. What effect did camp attendance have on campers': 1) appreciation for history, 2) knowledge retention of material taught, 3) development of academic goals, 4) diversity awareness and appreciation, 5) conservation

and preservation values, 6) drug and gang resistance, and 7) overall satisfaction with their experiences.

A mixed method approach was used for data collection. The evaluation consisted of pre-camp and post-camp surveys of participants. Pre-camp surveys were distributed to campers the week before camp and during the first two hours after arrival at camp. Campers completed the post-camp surveys on the afternoon of the second to last day of camp. Pre-camp and post-camp interviews were also conducted randomly with selected campers. Sixteen interviewees were randomly selected by ethnicity and geography and interviewed 5 to 10 days before camp began. Post-camp interviews were conducted 9 weeks later; only 9 of the original 16 campers could be reached by phone for a post-camp interview. In addition to interviews with campers, staff surveys and parent surveys were conducted one week and two months later, respectively. Eight of thirteen staff surveys (61.5%) and eleven of fifty-one (21.6%) parent surveys were returned. In addition, the first author attended the camp, observed activities and conducted ongoing interviews with selected campers.

Findings

Fifty-two campers attended the Old Stories New Voices Intercultural Youth Program during summer 2005; 23 were Hispanic, 18 African-American and 10 White. A Chi-square analysis was used to determine if there were differences in pre- and post-camp attitudes towards interest in history. Most campers held positive views of the value of learning about history before they attend camp. 50% of those who didn't, had a positive view by the end of camp. In response to three history-based knowledge questions, 22.7 to 31.8% correctly answered each of the three pre-camp survey questions and 58 to 68% of the campers correctly answered each question on the post-camp survey. Sub-groups that were more likely to demonstrate learning included new campers, those who had studied history before in school and those who enjoyed learning about history.

OSNV campers also showed positive changes in attitudes. Campers placed a higher value on doing well in school (3.68 compared to 3.74; $p < .001$), taking care of the environment (3.58 compared to 3.86; $p < .001$) and learning about cultures different from their own (3.50 to 3.76; $p < .001$). There was no significant change in attitude towards the importance of saving old buildings or feeling pride in your own culture.

Overall satisfaction was rated using several global satisfaction indicators: 82.4% of campers said they would recommend camp to a friend and 73.4% would come back to camp if they had the chance. Campers were asked to rate their satisfaction with nine elements of the camp. The highest rated items were "I made friends at camp" (3.57), "The adults at camp care about me" (3.49) and "The activities at camp are fun to do" (3.53). The indicators with the lowest agreement were "I like the food at camp" (3.27) and "I like living at Fort Garland" (3.06). There was a significant difference by age group for two of the indicators: "the activities are fun to do" ($p < .001$) and "learning about history is interesting to me" ($p < .044$). Campers of ages 9 to 11 had higher means for these statements than students in the younger and older age groups.

Conclusion

Attendees seemed to benefit in a number of ways by attending camp. Campers reported that learning about history was more fun at camp than in school. Additionally, those campers that felt learning about history was interesting set higher academic goals for themselves than those who were not interested in history. Camper surveys indicate that participation in OSNV resulted in a strong increase in knowledge of history and that children indicated that they used this knowledge in their classes. Students also reported that they would place a higher importance on doing well in school after attending camp. Some campers even indicated that OSNV triggered their interest in a college career.

Students also placed a higher importance on learning about different cultures after attending camp. Yet, there was no change in the post camp results on the importance of feeling pride in your own culture. To help increase campers' pride in their own culture, increased efforts should be made by camp organizers to help personalize experiences and relate lessons of the past to campers' present day lives may

Campers saw value on taking care of the natural environment after attending OSNV. The experience of living in a rural environment encouraged campers to want to preserve natural environments. Campers did not the value they placed on the importance of saving old buildings. Once again, creating a stronger personal connection between the campers and the stories of the past should increase campers' appreciation for historical preservation.

Some staff felt the camp had some influence on attendee's on gang membership and drug use, while others did not feel the camp did not do a good job in these areas. Many counselors did not feel comfortable discussing these issues with their campers. More fully incorporating these discussions into the curriculum would benefit OSNV participants by ensuring that each camper was provided the same type of support and introduced to similar content.

Highlights of the week at camp included climbing the sand dunes, riding horses, making new friends, and getting to know the camp staff. Those campers who most enjoyed their counselors and felt cared for by the adults at camp showed the highest amount of satisfaction with their experience. The most important keys to high camper satisfaction included the counselors as well as fun activities, feeling good about oneself at camp and learning about history.

Implications

Summer camp has the potential to provide hands-on learning experiences that can supplement or even create better opportunities to learn what they are taught during the school year. OSNV has incorporated an academic curriculum into a camp setting that encourages learning and fun simultaneously. During interviews, there was no indication from OSNV campers that they felt bored or overwhelmed by what they were learning.

Activities were organized in a way that many students probably did not realize that learning was happening. This framework for camp shows that enrichment activities can be incorporated into non-academic settings.

An area that OSNV give more focus to is applied history. Many times, teachers and other adults press children to absorb information without first explaining to them the importance of education. Providing campers with stories and information about how they can use or apply their knowledge of history will help campers develop a greater appreciation for history and help them understand why learning about history is important.

The OSNV concept is different than the design model used for most camps. Few camps offer a history and diversity-based curriculum in the context of a summer camp. The data collected in this evaluation indicated that participation in a diversity-based camp can improve campers' appreciation for diversity; help them understand the importance of learning about the history of a many cultures; and help campers understand that Colorado was built with a multitude of cultural influences.

This evaluation demonstrates that there is a wide variety of goals that can be accomplished in a camp setting. However, the OSNV camp setting was limited in time, reinforcing the necessity of setting set realistic program goals that can be accomplished within the time limits and resources of the program.