



NC 4-H

4-H Junior Camp at Millstone, 2008— Tradition and Innovation

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Camping in county groups has a long tradition in North Carolina 4-H. Since 1939, 4-Hers have hiked the piney woods, learned skills in archery or horseback riding, and sung around the campfire at Millstone 4-H Camp outside Ellerbe in the Sand Hills. In those early days, a week at camp represented a week away from the rigors of haying, milking, or tending peaches or tobacco. Everyone knew the refreshment, fellowship, and learning was valuable but little time was spent learning how or why 4-H camping made a difference. Recent studies by the American Camping Association found that camping experiences significantly increased youth relationship skills, leadership, and self-confidence, as well as building outdoor skills. In 2006, NC 4-H began tracking campers' views of their experience and in 2008 Millstone 4-H camp introduced several innovations to improve the quality of programs and evaluations. These processes and their results are reported below.

Participants at 4-H Junior Camp, June 28-July 4, 2008, included 108 youth, ages 7-15, with almost equal numbers of boys and girls, from 12 counties in the northwest part of the state. Almost all youth were Caucasian. Most youth were in the 11-13 year-old range. Near the end of the week, participants completed a 30-item Youth Program Climate survey using infrared remote clickers to record their views. During the week, instructional counselors documented learning experiences in archery, canoeing, and swimming. Cabin counselors tracked personal growth through individual and cabin conversations, recording observations on individual campers on a checklist.

Outdoor Skills Observations. Instructional counselors conducted beginning and end-of-week assessments of skills in archery, canoeing, and swimming as a safety check and as a way to target coaching of individuals and groups. Most youth had little or no skill or awareness of safety rules in these areas on arrival at camp. At the conclusion of camp, over 90% of youth were able to describe and follow safety rules and complete the basic skills independently. Many campers were able to help peers improve these skills.

Life Skills Counselor Observations. Cabin counselors who lived with and coached campers completed a retrospective observation, rating each camper on eight factors for beginning and end-of-week time frames. Significant pre-post gains ($p = .000$) were found in all areas. Five factors with greatest gains, Building Friendships (.72 on a 4-pt. scale), Listening (.67), Trying New Things (.59), Independence (.58), and Leadership (.52) were significantly higher than three areas with smallest gains, including Connecting to Nature (.44), Keeping Traditions (.44), and Resolving Conflicts (.39). Ratings of boys and girls for all areas showed no statistical differences on beginning, ending, or gain scores. Reliability for difference scores was high ($\alpha = .84$). Results confirm earlier research indicating that expanding friendships and social skills, trying new activities, developing independence and leadership are among the most important results of attending Summer camp.

Youth Program Climate Survey. Youth reported that their camp experiences as overwhelmingly positive. Over 70% agreed that they felt safe, supported, and enabled to build skills. Although 40% disagreed that “Other Kids Cared,” most affirmed social norms for acceptance and belonging (78-80% agreement), teamwork (76%), and service (84%). Almost 35% indicated that “Conflicts Were a Problem,” suggesting that individual hassles rather than overall camp culture were problematic. Almost 90% did not report feeling “Embarrassed or Put Down.” Cabin counselors may need to be more intentional about teaching empathy and conflict resolution skills to address these issues. Although the vast majority (70-75%) felt that adults listened and were approachable, it is not clear why nearly one quarter did not agree.

Most youth (75%) agreed that camp provided positive opportunities to set goals, learn new subjects, and gain skills. A large majority of youth agreed that there were opportunities to take responsibility and make a difference. In fact, most reported that the camp helped them grow in confidence, responsibility, and leadership. Most felt that rules were clearly defined, although many were not satisfied with the level of discipline or activities. Over 75% agreed that activities promoted healthy habits. Internal consistency reliability of the instrument was strong (Cronbach alpha = .89).

Tests of difference scores by age, gender, and race indicated few differences. Older youth were more likely to agree that they felt a sense of belonging (#10), which is not surprising given their maturation and social experience. Youth at younger ages were also more likely to be attending camp for the first time. Girls scored significantly higher than boys on viewing other kids as caring (#6), discipline as appropriate (#20), and seeing camp as a part of a broader social network (#24). Earlier maturity and social conformity typical of females account for the first two differences. Girls tend to be more socially astute, thus may be more likely to see connections between social experiences. A larger percentage of girls may have had greater 4-H experience as well; thus, the year-round and camp experiences might seem more a part of a larger whole. African-American youth reported significantly lower perceptions of other youth caring but higher levels of skill-building. Lack of differences on other social acceptance indicators suggests that if discrimination occurred, it was not reported as a generalized experience. Since only six African-American youth attended the camp, a few scores may have significantly affected the group mean. Apart from individual experiences, there is no ready explanation for perceptions of skill building opportunities.

Evaluation Innovations. Camp staff feedback in previous years indicated that end-of-camp Scantron-based evaluation was stressful for youth and staff. Youth with lower literacy and test-taking skills struggled the most, but “bubble sheets” reminded many of high-stakes standardized testing experiences at school. Experiences were equally stressful for camp staff that were trained to administer the surveys but not prepared to assist low-literacy campers and often pressed to complete other tasks before the close of camp. Thus a rewarding time of sharing about camp, reflecting on experiences and appreciating memories became a stressful performance test. Camp staff worked with a state specialist to introduce high-tech, high-touch approaches that were youth-friendly and data-rich.

To reduce evaluation time and stress demands, the 30-item Youth Program Climate survey was the only feedback requested from campers. Two trained staff conducted all evaluations, working with 20 or 30 campers at a time, reading instructions from PowerPoint slides, and directing campers to use infrared remotes to point-and-click their responses. Coordinators reported that youth quickly learned the technology and enjoyed this approach more than the paper questionnaire and Scantron format of previous years. Lower literacy and processing demands reduced stress on participants. However, the seating configuration sometimes made infrared

line-of-sight difficult, thus radio frequency remotes would have been more adaptable. Youth remained focused on answering for themselves even in the interactive environment. Greater skill was required of coordinators in programming of remotes for data recording, facilitating data collection, and checking data for accuracy and completeness. However, the immediate availability of an accurate electronic database that could be readily merged with camp registration and counselor observation data dramatically decreased work time and expedited reporting, enhancing use of data by camp staff, county agents, and the general public.

A shift in response patterns is evident in the final six items, as very few youth indicated strong agreement despite 30-60% strong agreement on the previous 24 items. Such a dramatic shift in all items seems inconsistent with earlier views but does seem consistent with systemic distortion in Power Point options or infrared clicker programming or operation. Evaluation coordinators were unable to corroborate either possibility. Perhaps this anomaly serves to illustrate the potential for error and importance of monitoring and maintenance in such innovative approaches.

Life skills observations were completed by trained cabin counselors. Self-reports by children and early adolescents were deemed unreliable due to their limited understanding of skill concepts and compliance bias. Observations were implemented to reduce assessment demands on youth, establish a more expert rating system, and increase staff facilitation of camper growth. Counselors were trained to maintain objectivity and were not rewarded for positive reports, thus their reports are likely as reliable as short-term estimates can be. During the week, staff led discussions, modeled and shared skills and opportunities with cabin groups, and engaged in individual and small group interaction designed to help them understand campers and foster their development. Immediately after camp, counselors rated each of their campers, an average of ten youth, on eight life skills (noted above) as observed at the beginning (retrospective) and end of camp, based on the following scale: (1) Never (practiced the behavior); (2) Seldom; (3) Often; (4) Always. Consistency of ratings across gender and cabin groups and with the Climate feedback provided by youth underline the validity of this data. Moreover, counselors noted that the rating process helped them more quickly and thoroughly understand youth and provide supports and opportunities to individuals based on their observations of assets and growth potential.

Overall Summary

Junior campers overwhelmingly agreed that Millstone 4-H Camp provides a safe, supportive, and stimulating environment. Almost all campers learned rules and skills related to archery and canoeing. Cabin counselors observed significant advances in listening, friendship-building, and conflict resolution skills as well as engagement in new activities, camp traditions, and experiences in Nature, and demonstrated independence and leadership. Evaluation and programming innovations such as use of infrared remotes and staff observations fostered a pattern of intentional activity, interaction, and reflection that increased staff effectiveness, quality of youth learning and sharing, and availability of useful data for camp staff, county and state 4-H professionals, parents, and decision-makers.

Support: NC 4-H camps are largely self-supporting, with camperships made available through local fund raising, county and state 4-H development funds and partner-sponsors.

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Cabin Counselor Observations of Youth Life Skills

Millstone 4-H Junior Camp, June 28-July 4, 2008

Beginning and End-of-Week Ratings

Communicating	Mean*	
	Begin	End

○ Active Listening	2.55	3.21
○ Showing interest, respect (eye contact, "open posture")		
○ Effort to see/hear other's point-of-view, ideas, descriptions		
○ Checking for understanding (ideas, feelings) before responding		
○ Thinking before talking		
○ Changing approach to fit the listener, situation		
○ Building Friendships	2.74	3.47
○ Initiating relationships (introducing self, asking about other)		
○ Sharing (time, space, possessions)		
○ Practicing inclusion ("acting friendly" to all peers)		
○ Respecting limits (time, space, possessions, ideas, feelings)		
○ Showing concern, compassion, patience with others		
○ Conflict Resolution	2.70	3.09
○ Clarifying viewpoints, differences		
○ Clarifying rules or principles		
○ Managing anger, negative emotions		
○ Exploring alternative solutions		
○ Seeking a mediator if unable to resolve on own		
 Engaging		
○ Trying New Activities	2.84	3.45
○ Initiating or extending experience on unfamiliar activities		
○ Observing, then demonstrating new skills		
○ Learning something new about the camp's people, places, and things		
○ Independence	2.64	3.24
○ Practical orientation to camp environment (time, space)		
○ Adjustment to being away from home emotionally		
○ Self-determination on events (vs. unengaged, follow leader)		
○ Connecting with Nature	2.65	3.11
○ Participate in planned Nature/environmental events		
○ Make efforts to keep camp environment clean		
○ Spend some time alone in the natural environment		
○ Keeping Traditions	2.90	3.35
○ Camp Assemblies (following rules, showing respect, participation)		
○ Table Etiquette (setting places; "Please" and "Thank You," use of knife, fork, spoon, glass; taking turns; help serve, clean-up)		
○ Shows Leadership	2.29	2.83
○ Take responsibility for leading activities		
○ Help others learn and contribute		
○ Show perseverance and flexibility in facing challenges		
○ Support others as leaders		

All Pre-/Post- comparisons significant at the p = .000 level

Youth Program Climate: 4-H Camp Experience

Millstone 4-H Junior Camp, June 28-July 4, 2008

	Percent of Respondents				Mean
	STRONGLY DISAGREE		STRONGLY AGREE		
	DISAGREE	DISAGREE	AGREE	AGREE	
1. I felt safe from being hurt or injured.....	13	12	19	55	3.11
2. I was embarrassed or put down.....	69	18	8	4	1.44
3. Activities promoted healthy habits.....	4	17	32	45	3.16
4. Adults listened to what I had to say.....	8	15	35	40	3.03
5. I felt comfortable going to adults for advice.....	11	16	30	41	2.94
6. Other kids cared about me.....	14	26	37	21	2.62
7. Conflicts between people were a problem.....	34	31	19	15	2.10
8. I learned to work with others as a team.....	8	13	23	54	3.19
9. Serving others and volunteering was important	4	9	21	63	3.38
10. I felt like I didn't belong.....	56	23	7	12	1.72
11. All kinds of kids were welcomed.....	7	10	15	65	3.31
12. I learned to accept differences in others.....	7	10	20	58	3.22
13. Activities taught me to develop a plan to reach my goals.....	8	13	18	59	3.24
14. I was challenged to think and build skills.....	8	15	24	50	3.10
15. There were opportunities to learn new subjects	7	13	19	59	3.25
16. I felt that I could make a difference.....	15	21	29	33	2.77
17. I was encouraged to take responsibility.....	11	7	17	62	3.24
18. Perfect performance was more important than learning from mistakes.....	44	24	17	14	1.97
19. Rules and expectations were clear.....	7	7	21	62	3.34
20. Discipline was not too strict, not too loose.....	15	23	24	35	2.74
21. Activities were just right for my age.....	12	18	26	43	2.99
22. I gained a broader view of 4-H.....	8	23	22	44	3.12
23. I gained a broader view of the world beyond my community.....	12	13	22	52	2.48
24. Activities were related to issues in my club, my family, my community.....	22	24	26	25	2.77
This week...					
25. I had fun at 4-H camp.....	6	8	82	2	2.77
26. I gained more confidence in myself.....	12	18	64	5	2.57
27. I became more responsible for myself.....	10	16	66	7	2.65
28. I learned to be a better leader.....	7	18	69	4	2.65
29. I decided to do more in 4-H during the year.....	9	24	63	3	2.58
30. Is an experience I would recommend to friends...	6	9	81	3	2.79

T-Test (Age): #10; (Gender): #6, 20, 24; (Ethnicity): #6, 14