"There Was More Out There than Our Street": Exploring Summer Camp Programming as a Context to Foster Social Capital and Civic Engagement after Camp

Tracy L. Mainieri
Illinois State University

Denise M. Anderson
Clemson University

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Abstract

The social capital and civic engagement literature indicate a similar concern: Americans today are less connected to their communities than in the recent past. The purpose of this study was to explore intentional summer camp programming as a possible avenue to engendering social capital and civic engagement in campers' home communities. Eight campers and their parents were interviewed at least three months after the campers participated in a structured camp program designed to increase campers' civic engagement and social capital. Campers experienced post-camp gains in their motivation for civic engagement and their bonding and bridging social networks; however, not all of these gains were sustained after the camp experience. Further, the camp program displayed some of the features recommended in the civic engagement and social capital literatures for contexts wishing to foster those outcomes. Practice implications and future research directions are explored.

Keywords: *summer camp, civic engagement, social capital, youth development*

Introduction

The scholars in the social capital and civic engagement literature indicate a similar concern: Americans today are less connected to their communities than in the recent past. Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swidler, and Tipton (2008) argued that Americans display a growing lack of connection between ideas of the self and the larger societal context. Putnam (2000) argued that key indicators of civic engagement, social capital, and interpersonal connection have, in some cases drastically, decreased over the past few decades. Social capital, as a collective resource, greases the processes of collective problem solving and allows individuals to feel more capable to shape public life (de Sousa Briggs, 2004).

Scholars have called for research to identify places in society that support the development of social capital, civic engagement, and the skills necessary for both (Obradovic & Masten, 2007; Putnam, 1995; Putnam, 2000). Recreation-based organizations appear throughout the social capital and civic engagement literature. As an experience with recreation at its core, summer camps could offer an arena within which to address the aforementioned civic issues. Research on summer camp programming has demonstrated that camps can engender many of the same skills and competencies as other youth recreation programs represented in the civic engagement and social capital literature (American Camp Association, 2005; Bialeschki, Lyons, & Ewing, 2005; Thurber, Scanlin, Scheuler, & Henderson, 2007); however, summer camp remains largely underrepresented in the social capital and civic engagement literature. Those studies that have examined social capital in summer camp have focused on building social capital within the camp environment (Devine & Parr, 2008; Yuen, Pedlar, & Mannell, 2005). Further, the camp studies that did address social capital did not examine camp programs that were intentionally designed to engender social capital and civic engagement (Devine & Parr, 2008; Yuen et al., 2005). As a result, there is a need for research to explore whether social capital and civic gains made at camp can be translated to campers' home communities. The purpose of this study was to explore intentional summer camp programming as a possible avenue to engendering social capital and civic engagement in campers' home communities.

Literature Review

Defining Social Capital

Several prominent scholars have defined the term *social capital,* including Bourdieu (1986), Putnam (1995), Portes (1998), and Halpern (2005), among others. The concept of social capital has developed over a long and complicated history. This history points to four components of social capital that continually surface in the literature. First, nearly all scholars who have tackled the

concept of social capital agree that at its core are social relationships and networks. As Portes (1998) pointed out, social capital lives in relationships. Social capital postulates that the social networks we participate in on a daily basis, both formal and informal, afford us resources that are distinctly different from other types of capital we might possess. Second, most scholars of social capital believe that the concept involves some reference to norms, sanctions, and reciprocity. Norms and sanctions enable the successful functioning of individuals within social networks as well as maintain the networks themselves (Halpern, 2005), while reciprocity formed within networks acts as a system of obligation that binds members together (Coleman, 1988; Portes, 1998). Third, many social capital proponents see social capital as more of a collective, rather than an individual, resource (Coleman, 1988; Edwards & Foley, 1998; Field, 2003; Hemmingway, 2006). As a result, community members can draw on the benefits of social capital regardless of their original involvement in the creation of that resource. Finally, though nearly all scholars agree that social capital can impart powerful benefits such as enhanced economic performance, improved health, reduced crime, and more effective governance, they also agree that social capital can possess a "dark side" by enforcing already existing inequalities and being put to use for perverse ends (de Souza Briggs, 1997; Field, 2003; Putnam, 2000). The above four themes in the social capital literature lend to the following definition of social capital: *Social capital consists of the collective resources generated by individuals' membership in social networks and the shared norms and sanctions of those networks that have the potential to produce mutual benefit if put to positive ends.* This constructed definition of social capital will inform the remainder of this paper.

Defining Civic Engagement

Traditionally, particularly in the political sciences, civic engagement has been interpreted as being equivalent to legal citizenship, encompassing basic political functions and actions. More recent scholarship has challenged this view, asserting that civic engagement extends beyond simply casting a vote. Flanagan and Faison (2001) argued that being civically engaged means "a feeling that one matters, has a voice and a stake in public affairs, and thus wants to be a contributing member of the community" (p. 3). Looking beyond political involvement is particularly important when considering civic engagement in youth. Sherrod, Flanagan, and Youniss (2002) argued that expecting youth to be politically engaged, particularly when most are not old enough to vote, is largely unrealistic. Rather, the authors advocated for a broader conceptualization of civic engagement for youth, one that means acting as a member of a group larger than themselves. Youth civic engagement plays a particularly important role in broader societal civic engagement because participation in civic activities during adolescence fosters a habit of community involvement that continues into adulthood, particularly through youth participation in ex-

tracurricular activities (Eley & Kirk, 2002; Jarrett, Sullivan, & Watkins, 2005; Parke, 2007; Smith, 1999) and community service (Janoski, Musick, & Wilson, 1998; Metz, McClellan, & Youniss, 2003; Niemi, Hepburn, & Chapman, 2000; Yates & Youniss, 1996).

Youth face particular challenges to civic engagement in the 21ˢᵗ century. First, youth face a society marked by migration, globalization, and mobility, which brings diverse groups of people together yet can decrease the attachment they feel to their local community or nation-state (Obradovic & Masten, 2007; Youniss et al., 2002). Second, youth face a pervasive societal image of themselves as potential problems rather than sources of potential. Third, age laws such as the voting restriction amplify youths' "otherness" to adults, meaning that many adults view youth as "just kids" who are incapable of contributing as constructive citizens. Finally, some efforts to advocate for positive youth development have swung the pendulum too far in attempting to create programs where youth can have an active voice in leadership, civil, and decision-making processes. In some settings adult facilitators deny age difference all together and neglect to give youth the guidance they need to develop successful civic engagement (Camino & Zeldin, 2002). These challenges suggest that more research is needed to understand how youth become attached to a larger group (e.g., organization, community, nation-state) so as to encourage positive civic engagement (Obradovic & Masten, 2007).

Engendering Youth Civic Engagement and Social Capital

Bourdieu (1986) argued that social capital does not occur naturally. Rather, it requires institutional effort to create and maintain. To engender lifelong civic engagement and connection to others, such institutional effort needs to begin with youth. Gruenewald and Smith (2008) argued that for youth to become civically engaged, they must develop a "readiness for social action" (p. xx). To foster a readiness for social action, youth must be exposed to contexts that support such development. As Arai and Pedlar (2003) stated, "…community is not so much the *building up* of something, but the removal of the structures that separate us and the *creation of space* for people to come together" (*original emphasis*, p. 194). The literature suggests several aspects of contexts that successfully engender civic development in any setting. First, individuals need realistic platforms within which to practice their civic skills and develop their civic values. Civic and extracurricular activities can act as a microcosm of larger community so that youth can practice skills and participate in civic processes (Sherrod et al., 2002; Zaff, Malanchuk, & Eccles, 2008). Second, contexts that engender civic engagement and social capital connect youth to non-familial adults (Innovation Center for Community and Youth Development, 2003; Jarrett et al., 2005). Camino and Zeldin (2002) believed that a key quality of civic development contexts is partnerships between youth and adults. Third, contexts that engender civic engagement provide opportunities for youth voice

and decision-making (Camino & Zeldin, 2002; Wheeler & Edlebeck, 2006). Finally, place- and community-based education (PCBE) scholars call for a utilization of local phenomenon as a source of learning core subject material and citizenship (Gruenewald & Smith, 2008; Smith & Sobel, 2010). By connecting learning to participants' local context, the outcomes of their efforts become meaningful for participants (Umphrey, 2007; Youniss et al., 2002).

Role of Summer Camp in Civil Society

Summer camps share many of the contextual features recommended in the social capital and civic engagement literature, but they remain underrepresented in the literature on this topic. Camp experiences may engender civic engagement and social capital. As Eells (1986) explained, throughout the over 100-year history of summer camps, all camps have shared a common bond of fostering relationships among people and thus have great potential to contribute to social capital.

Camp research offers compelling evidence to support the inclusion of camp in civic engagement research. For example, the American Camp Association Directions study (2005) indicated growth in some of the skills also identified in civic development research. For example, campers and parents saw significant increases in leadership skills from pre-camp to post-camp and post-camp to follow-up questionnaires. Similarly, Yuen and colleagues (2005) reported that the camp activities enhanced campers' cooperation abilities, such as utilizing flexibility, understanding democratic procedures, developing group goals, and establishing shared meanings. They predicted that these camp skills could help campers in their home communities; however, the study did not extend beyond the camp experience so they were unable to determine if campers carried the skills home. Finally, Browne, Garst, and Bialeschki (2011) found that the Camp2Grow program fosters independence, problem solving, affinity for nature, and empowerment.

Fewer studies have focused explicitly on social capital building in the camp context. Yuen and colleagues (2005) explored whether summer camp could create civic skills and outcomes, focusing on building social capital within the camp community. The researchers identified four major contributors to social capital building among the campers: leisure as a context for relationship building, opportunity for participation, opportunity for social learning, and emergence of community. Devine and Parr (2008) aimed to explore the development of relationships in an inclusive residential camp setting using the framework of social capital. They discovered three main themes: the concept of reciprocity and investment, the use of inclusion as camouflage to disguise inequalities in access to social capital, and the roles campers expected campers and staff to play in mediating the creation of social capital. As with the Yuen et al. (2005) study, Devine and Parr (2008) focused solely on social capital building while at camp.

Study Purpose

A review of the above literature suggests that summer camp could be an avenue to engender youth civic engagement and social capital, though further research is necessary to determine whether gains made at camp can be translated to campers' home communities. The purpose of this study was to explore intentional summer camp programming as a possible avenue to engendering social capital and civic engagement in campers' home communities. To address this purpose, this article focuses on the following research questions:

1. What was the impact of the Teens Leading & Connecting (TLC) program, a summer day camp program intentionally designed to impact campers' civic engagement and social capital, on campers' social capital in their home communities after camp?
   a. What supports and barriers did campers experience when attempting to apply their social capital learning from camp to their home communities after camp?
2. What was the impact of the TLC program on campers' civic engagement in their home communities after camp?
   a. What supports and barriers did campers experience when attempting to apply their civic learning from camp to their home communities after camp?

Methods

Realistic Evaluation

To achieve the above purpose and answer the research questions, the foundation for this study was Pawson and Tilley's (1997) realistic evaluation. Under the premise of realistic evaluation, programs do not simply "work or not work." Certain ideas work for certain participants in certain situations. Pawson and Tilley (1997) simplified the program process to the following equation: mechanism + context = outcomes. Their approach to evaluation aims to document this three-part relationship. Realistic evaluation extends typical evaluation models by acknowledging that the environments and contexts of a program are constantly changing and, therefore, must be taken into account in the mechanism–outcome relationship. This approach drove the choice of data collection procedures for this study.

Setting

The setting for this study was a weeklong pilot camp program, Teens Leading & Connecting (TLC), that was intentionally structured to increase participants' civic engagement and social capital in their home communities. The program was implemented during the summer 2012 at a YMCA day camp in

Georgia, serving a total of 10 teen campers aged 13 to 16. TLC was designed to align with the recent focus in the camp arena to increase the intentionality and structured curricula in camp programming to better target desired outcomes. Examples of these efforts include Camp2Grow for leadership and environmental stewardship (Browne et al., 2011; Garst & White, 2012), Explore 30 Camp Reading Program for increased reading enjoyment and improved vocabulary (Garst, Morgan, & Bialeschki, 2012), and Play It, Measure It designed curricula for friendship skills, teamwork, and affinity for exploration (Roark & Evans, 2010). As Browne and colleagues (2011) explained, structured curricula "… allow camps to target desired outcomes and document their efforts to stakeholders" (p. 81). TLC aimed to impact campers' civic engagement and social capital in their home communities. The program drew activities and lesson plans from literature focused on structured camp curricula, civic engagement, social capital, youth programming and Place- and Community-Based Education (see Figure 1 for more details about the program components). Finally, to assist campers in processing and transferring their learning from the camp environment (Bialeschki, Henderson, & James, 2007; Gass, 1999; McKenzie, 2000), the participants wrote a letter to themselves about their learning and intentions to apply it in their home communties prior to leaving camp. This letter was mailed to participants one month following camp as a reminder of what they learned and as a motivator for participants as they attempt to apply camp learning outside the boundaries of camp.

Participants

A total of 10 campers, aged 13 to 16, participated in the TLC program, however this article will focus on the eight campers who completed all three camper interviews. Table 1 describes the campers, including their self-chosen research pseudonym, the number of years they attended the hosting day camp, their age and their grade in school. Also displayed are campers' perceptions three months after camp of their post-camp community contribution as more, less, or about the same as before TLC. Finally, the researcher was unable to arrange a parent interview with the parents of Amanda and Stevie, despite numerous attempts to do so. The remainder of the campers each had one parent participate in the parent interviews, as noted in Table 1.

Data Collection Procedures

Each TLC camper participated in a series of three in-person semi-structured interviews with the researcher. The interview structure was based on Seidman's (2005) "Three-Interview Series." The researcher chose to employ Seidman's approach because the three-interview sequence builds rapport between the researcher and participants over time, which allows participants to develop a comfort with both the researcher and the research process. The first inter-

Skill-building sessions[1]	Community interactions[2]	Service activities[2]	Other key components
• Group dynamics • Cooperation • Identifying needs • Leadership • Organization • Problem solving • Planning	• Day-long tour of local community visiting community organizations and areas of need • On-camp meeting with 10 community leaders, planned entirely by the campers, to brainstorm ideas about how campers can get involved with their community after camp	• On-camp service project planned and executed by the campers, based on a camp needs assessment completed by the campers • Off-camp volunteering at local organization that offers a Saturday respite program for kids and adults with disabilities	• Daily sessions of traditional camp activities, including a camp-out experience • Sessions to plan an off-camp service project each camper wished to complete after camp[2] • Opportunity for each camper to write him or herself a letter about his or her experience in TLC, sent to each camper one month after camp

Figure 1. An overview of the component of the Teens Leading & Connecting program.

[1]Skill-building sessions focused on civic skill development with intentional lesson plans and facilitator scripts drawn from successful camp and youth development programs and service learning curricula. Skill sessions provided information for campers to learn about each skill and activities for campers to practice each skill.

[2]Community interactions and service activities were inspired by the recommendations of the place- and community-based education literature and aimed to connect campers' civic learning to two communities of import to the campers: the camp community and the campers' home community. These activities also provided concrete opportunities for campers to put the skills they learned in the skills sessions into action.

views, which lasted between 15 and 40 minutes, took place in person in the week prior to TLC and explored the youth's prior civic engagement, attitudes toward civic engagement, and expectations about the upcoming camp experience. The second round of interviews, which lasted between 15 and 55 minutes, took place in person or on the phone in the week following TLC and focused on the civic skills and attitudes each youth gained through the camp experience along with future intentions to be civically engaged in the camper's home community (e.g., How would you describe what you learned in TLC? Do you think TLC has impacted the way you see your role in your local community? Do you think TLC has impacted your motivation to contribute to your community?). The third and final round of interviews, which lasted between 25 and 80 min-

Table 1

Characteristics of Study Participants

Chosen Pseudonym	Year as Camper	Grade Entering after Camp	Gender	Age	After Camp Community Contribution[a]	Parent Interview
Amanda	9th	9th	Female	14	Same	None
Billy Boy	6th	7th	Male	13	More	Mother
Dustin	8th	9th	Male	15	More	Father
Georgia[b]	8th	9th	Female	14	More	Mother
Kage	8th	9th	Male	15	More	Mother
Kat	4th	8th	Female	13	Same	Mother
Patrick	4th	9th	Male	14	More	Mother
Stevie	9th	9th	Female	15	More	None

[a.] As reported by the camper and compared to his or her before camp community contribution levels.
[b] This camper lives primarily outside of the community where TLC was hosted.
Note: Though a 3-month after camp interview did not occur with another camper, Camron, a parent interview with his mother did take place and is included in the analysis.

utes, took place in person approximately three months following TLC and focused on determining whether the campers' levels of civic engagement in their home communities matched their intentions as expressed in the post-camp interviews (e.g., Given what you said about your expectations to use some of the skills you gained at camp in your own community, how have you been able to use those skills since you've returned home?. Since you have returned to your own community, do you feel like you have been able to contribute more, less, or about the same to your community? Why?).

In addition to camper interviews, the lead author conducted parent interviews. The parent interviews took place approximately four months after TLC via telephone and lasted between 20 and 40 minutes. All interviews were recorded with the consent of each participant (e.g. Do you think the TLC program affected your child's motivation to contribute to his or her community? How do you know? Since your camper finished the TLC program, do you feel like your child has been able to contribute more, less, or about the same to his or her community? Why?).

Data Analysis

The lead author analyzed the qualitative interview data following Hycner's (1985) guidelines for the analysis of interview data. As recommended by Hycner (1985), after transcription and multiple readings of the interviews, the researcher identified meaning units within each interview, clustered meaning units in each interview, labeled themes within each interview, created individ-

ual textual descriptions of each participant, clustered composite meaning units across the interviews, then labeled relevant composite clusters into themes.

Trustworthiness of the Data

Trustworthiness of the data and analysis was established in a variety of ways. First, the researcher employed member checks of emerging themes with the participants during the program, the post-camp interviews, and interviews three months after camp by questioning the participants regarding the accuracy of emerging ideas. Second, the researcher enlisted the assistance of a second data analyst who analyzed a sample of the interview data. The assistant's resulting themes, subthemes, and theme descriptions were compared to the researcher's analysis. The themes were adjusted as necessary following these checks (Hycner, 1985). Third, the researcher for this study was on-hand for the entire TLC program, conducted three interviews with each participant, and spent time building rapport with the participants throughout the program, following Glesne's (1999) and Creswell's (2007) suggestions for prolonged engagement to support the trustworthiness of findings in qualitative research. Finally, the researcher employed reflexive bracketing, given the researcher's previous camp experience (Finlay, 2002; Gearing, 2004). To ensure the researcher's presuppositions did not overwhelm the voices of the participants, the researcher utilized methods such as journaling, employing a facilitator to deliver actual program content, reviewing continually the interview protocols, and enlisting the assistance of a second data analyst.

Findings and Discussion

The purpose of this study was to explore intentional summer camp programming as a possible avenue to engendering social capital and civic engagement in campers' home communities. The following sections will explore and discuss the findings from this study, organized by the study's two main research questions.

Research Question #1 and #1a: What was the impact of the TLC program on campers' social capital in their home communities after camp? What supports and barriers did campers experience when attempting to apply their social capital learning from camp to their home communities after camp?

Social capital related outcomes three months following camp. In the months after camp, campers were more likely to stay in contact with other campers than with the adults they met during TLC, though both forms of contact were low in the months after camp. Campers who stayed in contact with other campers did so via Facebook and seeing each other at school. If campers did not stay in contact with each other, they stated that they could reestab-

lish connection easily if they were to see other campers outside of camp and especially when they see each other at camp the next summer. For example, Kage explained, "I know that whenever I would see them, it would be at camp this year or if I see them at school or something like I'd know that I'd want to say hi." Amanda, Kage, and Kat discussed the importance of the connections TLC made among the campers. Amanda saw these connections as one of the primary purposes of TLC saying, "I would say it gets teens together." Stevie was the only camper who contacted any of the adults involved in TLC, outside of the researcher. She contacted the leaders of the organization where the campers did their off-camp service project after TLC to nominate them for a local award.

Kage and Kat came to see the people they met during TLC as resources they could use. Kat talked about using others' knowledge instead of doing independent research saying, "You're not using the Internet, you're using the person as resources." She stated that she learned this in TLC because the campers had to rely on each other to be successful. Kage talked about using the other campers as resources. He said, "And then seeing him in this group, knowing how funny he is. How much . . . how we're friends and how he hangs out with everybody that if I hung out with Dustin, I'd be accepted." Kat discussed using people as resources in relation to the community leaders she met. She explained, "…I think they could give me like information about…people they knew as good contacts and, you know, who was reliable and people they knew personally so they could say 'Oh yeah. I know this person.' And have that arranged I guess."

Barriers to maintaining contact with TLC participants after camp. Campers felt that the primary barrier that prevented them from staying in contact with adults they met during TLC was that they either lost or never had the adults' contact information. In terms of staying in contact with other TLC campers, campers either said that they did not have the campers' contact information or that they would see the campers next summer. In the case of Georgia, she felt that she lived too far away from both adults and campers she met in TLC to stay in contact.

Discussion of social capital related outcomes and barriers. The aforementioned definition of social capital constructed from themes in the social capital literature was: *Social capital consists of the collective resources generated by individuals' membership in social networks and the shared norms and sanctions of those networks that have the potential to produce mutual benefit if put to positive ends.* Two campers did share sentiments that aligned with this definition of social capital. They expressed that the connections they made during TLC were a resource they could benefit from. By having a connection to particular campers or adults, these campers thought they could leverage those connections as resources. The campers' statements reflected social capital as a collective resource with *potential* to create positive outcomes (Bourdieu, 1986; Coleman, 1988; Portes, 1998; Putnam, 2000). Three months after camp, how-

ever, this potential resource created during TLC rarely translated to continuing contact with other TLC campers or the participating adults once camp was over. These findings align with the findings of Devine and Parr (2008) and Yuen and colleagues (2005) that camp fostered social capital building among camp participants at camp but did not necessarily transfer outside of camp.

The community tour, meeting with community leaders, and off-camp service project during TLC aimed to increase campers' connections to non-familial adults, thereby expanding community social capital (Camino & Zeldin, 2002; Innovation Center for Community and Youth Development, 2003; Jarrett et al., 2005). Though connecting campers with community adults was a main aim of the various community experiences, TLC did not include a specific skill session that focused on viewing connections as resources or skills to maintain such connections. Two campers expressed social capital sentiments in the interviews three months after camp without intentional lessons dedicated to social capital. This finding suggests that an intentional, explicit lesson dedicated to social capital could have the potential to expand such sentiments to more program participants. Further, one of the main barriers for campers to stay in contact with adults they interacted with during TLC was perceived lack of contact information for the adults. As a result, TLC and other youth programs aiming to engender social capital that endures after camp should ensure clear communication channels between campers and adults that encourage continued contact after camp has ended. Such efforts would echo Bourdieu's (1986) argument that social capital requires institutional effort not only to create social capital but also to maintain it.

> **Research Question #2 and #2a:** What was the impact of the TLC program on campers' civic engagement in their home communities after camp? What supports and barriers did campers experience when attempting to apply their civic engagement learning from camp to their home communities after camp?

Civic engagement related outcomes three months following camp. Campers stated that they contributed to the community about the same, and usually more, than before TLC, though both campers and parents talked less about active civic engagement and more about an aware civic mindset as the campers' major gains in the months after camp. First, TLC campers thought that the program helped them to become more confident and motivated to contribute to their community. Stevie discussed this transition saying:

> Before [TLC] I thought I was that little kid that would send a little letter to Santa saying, 'Santa, I want blah, blah, blah.' Not really like – I'm not doing anything…like I was a little child sending a letter to Santa and the elves doing all the work. And then I realized after TLC, I was an elf. I wasn't a child anymore.

Dustin also commented, "Probably because before TLC I didn't think I could get too involved, but after TLC, I'm pretty sure you can get involved in any level." In many cases, this new confidence meant that the campers felt they left TLC with a different role in the community. For example, Billy Boy expressed that TLC is about "Helping teens like step up and be more helpful in the community because teens don't really know that they're important in the community." Georgia felt more confident to contribute primarily because TLC helped her to change her perception about adults in the community.

Second, campers believed that TLC helped them to learn about the different organizations in the community and remain aware of them even after TLC ended. The campers commented that they were unaware of many of the organizations involved in TLC prior to the program. Dustin's father noticed this awareness in Dustin, saying:

> When [our family] did our donations this year, Dustin suggested we take them to [the ministry organization visited during TLC]. And we did. So direct result of your program and being exposed to the organization…I don't think he would have had the knowledge of any particular place. He had an input because he was aware.

Finally, one of the activities that campers particularly seemed to remember was the iceberg lesson. This lesson compared the community to an iceberg where only part is visible while a majority of the iceberg, and the community, is hidden beneath the surface. Campers believed that since TLC, they were more aware of the bottom of the iceberg in their community. Parents recognized this awareness in their campers since TLC. For example, Patrick's mother thought that Patrick:

> …became more aware of…the big picture with the community. And, you know, that there's people out there that are in need. And they are. They're all part of our community. Rather than it was just our little bubble down the street here with our friends and family. There was more out there than our street.

Parents and campers reported a heightened awareness of campers' ability to contribute, of organizations to get involved in, and of hidden needs of the community as ways in which campers' civic engagement changed in the months since camp.

Supports and barriers for the civic engagement related outcomes three months following camp. Among the supports of the three months after camp outcomes were features of TLC itself. Several campers and one parent thought that certain features of TLC helped them to carry over what they learned in TLC to their home lives. In particular, they shared that TLC gave campers ample opportunities to practice what they learned which made them comfortable and confident to apply their lessons outside of TLC. Kat said, "…lots of the

group team building stuff, it gave me confidence…like even though – even if I'm in a group with people I don't necessarily know a lot, I could still be a leader." Further, the self-letter was an intentional effort during TLC to remind campers of what they had learned during camp. Campers wrote the letters on the last day of TLC and were mailed their letters one month following the end of camp. Nearly all of the campers enjoyed the experience of receiving their letter and stated that it reminded them of their TLC experiences. Patrick was the only camper who did not find the letter useful to him because he wrote very little due to his dislike of writing. He did, however, believe the purpose of the letter was to help campers remember TLC. Finally, Amanda and Kage thought that the interviews carried out for the current research project helped to remind them of their TLC experience and learning. Amanda said that the interviewing "reminds you of what you have to get done." Similarly, Kage said, "…this interview right here is really making me remember what we did. And I have to think. I remember what we did. I remember what I felt. And again it makes me want to help my community."

Campers reported that time was the primary barrier for them to reach the civic engagement goals they had set upon leaving TLC. They expressed that they did not have adequate time to devote to community contribution. School was the main focus of the campers' time. Dustin said, "Most of us that are in it are either freshmen or sophomores. It definitely impacted us but we're probably all leaning more towards school and kinda forgetting about the things TLC taught us." Georgia explained, "I've been so busy in school. To get good grades. And the stress. Oh my God, it's ridiculous." Other things that occupied campers' time, preventing them from contributing to their community, were extracurricular activities and vacations. Part of lack of time was the ability to have time to practice what they learned in TLC. For example, Amanda expressed, "I was hard kind of because like…um…it was kinda hard to like take what we learned and take it to my real life because summer is kinda like a break from everything and then once school started, you forget how hard it was and so you get distracted. And like I guess it got pretty hard to practice." Lack of time was the most reported barrier to civic engagement reported by campers.

Discussion of civic engagement outcomes three months following camp and the related supports and barriers. Campers and parents reported that campers stayed the same or increased their contribution to their community after camp. Importantly, campers and parents seemed not only to consider the civic activities they carried out in their concept of civic engagement but they also included an aware civic mindset in that description. Parents and campers saw campers' increased confidence to contribute, their new knowledge of community organizations, and their heightened awareness of community needs as important parts of their idea of community contribution. Gruenewald and Smith (2008) argued that in order for youth to become civically engaged,

they must develop a "readiness for social action" (p. xx). Campers and parents seemed to think that TLC afforded campers a readiness for civic engagement that they did not possess before TLC. Further, this idea of an aware mindset seems to align with definitions of civic engagement, such as Flanagan and Faison (2001) who discussed a feeling of mattering and a desire to contribute to a community as part of a broader conceptualization of civic engagement.

A few features of TLC could help explain the civic engagement outcomes experienced by campers. First, campers themselves discussed the opportunities they had to practice their new skills and ideas during TLC as a supporting factor of their ability to maintain learning from TLC in the months following camp. Several researchers have indicated that giving participants a place to practice is a key feature of civic engagement and social capital building contexts (Sherrod et al., 2002; Smith & Sobel, 2010; Yuen et al., 2005; Zaff et al., 2008). Campers also explained that the written self-letters reminded them of their learning after camp. These findings emphasize the importance of intentionally designing programs to aid participants in transferring learning beyond the experience (American Camp Association, 2006; Bialeschki, et al., 2007; Deschenes, McDonald, & McLaughlin, 2004; Marsh, 1999; Thurber et al., 2007). Programmers could consider post-camp experiences that will assist campers in processing and transferring their learning from the camp environment, like the self-letter used in TLC or other opportunities such as post-camp service projects or off-season meetings (Bialeschki, et al., 2007; Gass, 1999; McKenzie, 2000). As Gass (1999) envisioned, such methods could act as "…a device to excite students by showing them the future value of their current learning experiences. This motivation, provided by the opportunity to use their learning again, can furnish one of the strongest incentives for our students' continued learning and the field's success" (p. 233). Finally, two campers thought the interviews used for this study helped them remember what they learned and reinvigorated their motivation to act on their learning. This finding suggests that regular program evaluation could not only provide practitioners with understanding of their programs' outcomes, but could also help to achieve the aims of the program itself by helping participants to maintain their learning beyond the program.

Beyond the features of the program itself, TLC occurred in a day camp setting, which has the benefit of proximity to campers' home communities. Jarrett, Sullivan, and Watkins (2005) emphasized programs' physical proximity to community as a crucial asset in sustaining newly developed civic skills. Day camps are typically located within driving distance of campers' home communities. This proximity offers an opportunity to situate civic learning in the communities in which campers live. Consequently, all of the learning in TLC was intentionally linked to the local community, in which all but one camper lived. Both campers and parents reported that campers were more aware of the specific organizations and needs in their own community. This process mirrors

the Place- and Community-Based Education (PCBE) literature, which grounds learning in the local places that are most relevant to participants in order to increase the utility of their learning (Gruenewald & Smith, 2008; Melaville, Berg, & Blank, 2006; Smith & Sobel, 2010).

Despite campers and parents reporting an aware civic mindset after camp ended, less frequent were reports of increased active civic engagement such as volunteering, joining community groups, etc. One of the primary barriers to such action, from the perception of campers, was finding time in busy schedules to pursue increased activities. Though TLC seemed to provide motivation for such activity, the program did not include a specific skill session related to prioritizing and managing time for civic engagement. During the Organizing Skills session, several of the activities focused on time management skills, but those skills were directed toward agenda planning for the community leaders meeting, rather than prioritizing time for civic engagement. Since campers struggled with prioritizing time after camp, perhaps an added activity or session about strategies for fitting civic engagement into campers' busy schedules is warranted. Such a session could help campers develop specific strategies for time management that would allow them to include increased civic activity in their already busy lives.

Limitations

A few limitations of the current study point to potential areas for future research. First, this study focused on one iteration of the TLC program with eight study participants, with one facilitator, in one camp environment. Though this small sample was ideal for the success of the TLC program and allowed the use of methods that provided a rich understanding of the program, future research could duplicate the current study to better understand TLC as a program and camp as a context for civic engagement and social capital development. Pawson and Tilley (1997) argued, "…if a cardinal purpose of evaluations is to feed into improvements in policy and practice, they too need to be oriented to cumulation" (p. 115). Future research could examine the TLC program in different types of camps with different types of campers. Further, while the day camp setting is particularly suited to lessons about civic engagement due to their typical proximity to campers' home community, development of similar outcomes should be considered in a residential camp setting. Second, the final interviews were administered about three months after camp ended. While this time period did allow some understanding of the impact of TLC after camp, the time period limits the extent to which the researcher can observe longitudinal changes in attitudes and behaviors in the participants. Future research could consider following campers throughout the year following camp, until their next camp experience to have an expanded understand of the impact of the program over time. Third, while the current study documented other in-

fluences on camper outcomes beyond the TLC programming from the camp-
er perspective, it did not include an independent contrast group of campers
or comparable youth who did not go through the TLC program. A contrast
group could help researchers understand if the amount of change in civic in-
volvement was due to TLC programming or due to participants' maturation or
other activity involvement. Further, future research could use several contrast
groups to examine the efficacy of several different post-camp reminder activ-
ities aimed to remind campers of their learning, such as the self-letter, online
discussion boards, post-camp reunions, or follow-up mini camps or service
projects throughout the year.

Conclusion

Scholars and programmers need to collaborate to create environments
where youth can learn their place in their communities and can learn the val-
ue of connecting with others and their communities. This study represented
one attempt to leverage the power of intentional summer camp programming
to explore such programming as a context to foster youths' civic engagement
and social capital in their home communities. Campers and parents in the
Teens Leading & Connecting camp program reported that campers sustained
an aware and confident civic mindset in the months after TLC, with the sup-
port of a few program and contextual features; however, several barriers existed
for campers to act upon their sustained mindset or stay in contact with the
campers or adults involved in TLC. Consequently, this study demonstrated
that intentional summer camp programming has promise to achieve civic en-
gagement and social capital outcomes beyond camp but more research and
program development on these crucial societal topics is needed.

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