10-22-2021

Making a Difference in Children's Lives: Lessons Learned from Planning and Implementing a Virtual Summer Camp During the COVID-19 Pandemic

Andrea McDonald Ph.D.
Prairie View A&M University, anmcdonald@pvamu.edu

Burnett Camille
Prairie View A&M University, csburnett@pvamu.edu

Sonia Boone
Prairie View A&M University, skboone@pvamu.edu

Angela Branch-Vital
Prairie View A&M University, albranch-vital@pvamu.edu

Michael McFrazier
Prairie View A&M University, mlmcfrazier@pvamu.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.library.tmc.edu/jfs

Making a Difference in Children's Lives: Lessons Learned from Planning and Implementing a Virtual Summer Camp During the COVID-19 Pandemic

Andrea McDonald, Ph.D., Department of Health & Kinesiology, Prairie View A&M University, Prairie View, TX, USA.
Email: anmcdonald@pvamu.edu.

Camille Burnett, Ph.D., Department of Curriculum and Instruction, Prairie View A&M University, Prairie View, TX, USA.
Email: csburnett@pvamu.edu.

Sonia Boone, Ph.D., Department of Curriculum and Instruction, Prairie View A&M University, Prairie View, TX, USA.
Email: skboone@pvamu.edu

Angela Branch-Vital, Ph.D., Department of Health & Kinesiology, Prairie View A&M University, Prairie View, TX, USA.
Email: albranch-vital@pvamu.edu.

Michael McFrazier, Ed.D., Whitlowe R. Green College of Education, Prairie View A&M University, Prairie View, TX, USA.
Email: mlmcfrazier@pvamu.edu.

Abstract

Summer camps are known to increase knowledge and engage children during the summer holidays. However, the COVID-19 pandemic placed a freeze on all activities that required face-to-face interaction during the summer of 2020. The purpose of this paper is to describe the planning, implementation, and evaluation of a virtual summer camp for children. Our virtual camp "Whimsical Wednesdays" was hosted by a Historically Black College and University (HBCU) that is dedicated to changing children's lives and providing service to the community. We recruited children aged 6-12 to attend the virtual summer camp through informational flyers posted on the institution's website, Instagram, Facebook, and other social media networks. The camp ran for five consecutive Wednesdays during July 2020 and engaged children in 60-minute sessions between 11:00 a.m. and noon. An average of 20 children participated each week in topics such as performing arts, reading, STEM, health and wellness, and cultural awareness. Overall, the camp demonstrated that children and facilitators were able to engage and interact using the online platforms Zoom and

Nearpod. All participants expressed satisfaction with the program through survey evaluation instruments. Lessons learned include successes and challenges with technology, evaluation, and data collection methods. These lessons will be used to improve future programs.

Keywords: Planning and implementing, virtual summer camp, children

Introduction

Summer is one of the most important times in children's lives. During this time of the year, many families take vacations, connect with other family members, or attend summer camps. However, the global Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic reduced all activities requiring face-to-face interactions. COVID-19 is an acute respiratory syndrome known as coronavirus-2 (SARS-CoV-2) that affects humans worldwide. In early spring of 2020, a mandate was issued to implement social distancing and mask-wearing in public places. This resulted in the closure of several educational institutions and the disruption of developmental activities geared toward helping children socialize and gain practical life skills. Also, many individuals worked from home and children were home-schooled. Educational institutions, including colleges, universities, and K-12 schools, had to act proactively to facilitate the emergency shift of face-to-face classroom instruction to an online format. Teachers redesigned curriculums and created digital learning activities to prevent competency deficits in students' knowledge throughout the various disciplines. Also, many teachers were forced to incorporate digital devices so children could remotely access the material. Thus, the primary purpose of this paper is to describe the planning, implementation, and evaluation of a virtual summer camp and discuss lessons learned. The following literature review highlights some of the challenges African American and Latinx children face, such as digital disparities, limited access to quality education, and systemic racism.

Digital Disparities and Limited Access to Quality Education

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the digital disparities that many African American and Latinx children face. Katz et al (2017) reported that children in low-income households are most likely to have restrictions and limited access to the internet and a digital device. Moreover, studies documented that some children do not own a personal electronic device, such as computers or iPads, to access the internet, especially in rural areas (Kim & Padilla, 2020). Current literature shows that 58% Black, 39% Hispanic, and 37% Native American children do not have access to

computers in their homes while only 5% of White children are without (Auxier & Anderson, 2020). There is an increased concern that some underserved minority children are being disadvantaged when compared to Whites with access to the internet (KewalRamani et al., 2018).The unprecedented impact of COVID-19 and lack of digital access can hinder these children from experiencing social opportunities, such as virtual schooling and virtual summer camps (Katz, Gonzalez, & Clark, 2017). Several school districts have attempted to assist through corporate partnerships by providing electronic devices such as laptops and iPads. Even with these provisions, there is still room for improvement, as African American and Latinx children still struggle to access resources.

Prior to COVID-19, several studies suggested that children of African Americans, and Latinx, and other minority groups encountered challenges accessing quality education (de Brey et al., 2019). Types of quality educational programs range from the accelerated curriculum, gifted and talented programs, and summer camps. The National Center for Education Statistics reported in 2019 that approximately 3.5 million students from 5 - 17 are registered in school (de Brey et al., 2019). The data also show that Black and Hispanic students are least likely to complete high school or graduate from college (McFarland, Cui, Rathbun, & Holmes, 2018). In addition, Black and Latino students represent 38% of students in schools that offer Advanced Placement (AP) courses, but only 29% of students enrolled in at least one AP course (de Brey et al., 2019). The data also indicated that Black and Latino students have less access to gifted and talented education programs than White students. Though Black and Latino students represent 42% of student enrollment in schools offering gifted and talented education (GATE) programs, they represent only 28% of the students enrolled in those programs (de Brey et al., 2019). Furthermore, 61% of ACT-tested black students in the 2015 high school graduating class met none of the four ACT college readiness benchmarks.

The challenges in accessing quality education vary within schools. Prior studies have identified that most schools with predominantly children of color have less highly qualified teachers, substandard curriculums, and larger classes (Darling-Hammond, 2004). Recent evidence suggests that African American and Latinx children are disproportionally at risk due to attending schools with high poverty levels, inexperienced teachers, and few to no opportunities to matriculate through advanced courses (Bennett, 2019). Several of these challenges and disparities exist due to systemic racism.

Systemic Racism

Many published studies describe systemic racism that African American and Latinx children face in the public school system (Bauer, Colomer, & Wiemelt, 2020; Cervantes-Soon, Degollado, & Nuñez, 2021). According to Feagin and Bennefield (2002), systemic racism can be defined as a broad and persisting set of racial stereotypes, prejudices, ideologies, images, interpretations and narratives, emotions, and reactions to language accents, as well as racialized inclinations to discriminate. Studies have found that systemic racism is influenced by one counterpart oppressing another to elevate their perceptions and understandings for personal benefit (Brown, 2021; Schell et al., 2020). The United States Department of Education reported in 2016 that Black males are 3.8 times more likely to receive an out-of-school suspension compared to White children. Several studies have linked systemic racism with college readiness, experienced teachers in the classroom, as well as school administration (de Brey et al., 2019). For instance, Blacks and Latino students are more likely to attend schools with higher concentrations of inexperienced teachers and 1.4 times as likely to attend a school without a counselor. Bennett (2019) contends that America's children know about racism and discrimination from personal experience.

Unfortunately, systemic racism is entrenched and normalized in American public-school systems (Kohli et al., 2017). The normalization of systemic racism goes as far back as the socialization of inferiority status in segregated public schools that served African American children (Kohli et al, 2017). Critical Race Theory was developed to explore the mechanisms of oppression of people of color and to provide knowledge and understanding of social, cultural, and legal issues related to race (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). To date, racism has evolved, and it is now witnessed in practices such as referral and acceptance rate in special education programs. Other commonplace practices include blaming children of color and their parents for lack of academic success. This practice appears to be shifting the blame from the reservoir that promotes systemic racism instead of blaming those very structures and policies as they continue to promote it (Valencia, 2012). Systemic racism may serve as a factor that deters African American and Latinx children from participating in programs such as virtual summer enrichment camps.

In addition to digital disparities, limited access to quality education, and systemic racism, African American and Latinx children sometimes have little or no access to quality educational programs, especially during the summer. The curriculum of many summer camps offers enrichment activities and supports student learning through social

interaction. Research suggests that children who are actively engaged in a summer camp either maintain their academic standing or move forward academically compared to children who are not (Alexander, Entwisle, & Olson, 2007; Graham, McNamara, & Van Lankveld, 2011). Also, few studies have documented challenges in implementing science, education, and health programs due to the hands-on learning expectations (Barrett, Bouley, Stoertz, & Stoertz, 2011; Zohar, 2013). Nonetheless, the unexpected COVID-19 pandemic changed the structure of recreational programs for students worldwide.

Whimsical Wednesdays

Our Historically Black College and University (HBCU) is committed to educating and supporting the community despite the COVID-19 pandemic. Annually, this HBCU campus offers different summer programs for K-12 children and their current students on campus through various academic departments and colleges. Therefore, the programs often cover different topics, field experiences, and content within science, agriculture, health, education, and engineering, to name a few. When the COVID-19 pandemic changed the entire dynamic and all in-person programs were canceled, the College of Education got creative and launched its first virtual summer camp, "Whimsical Wednesdays". The overall purpose of Whimsical Wednesdays was to provide an accessible quality educational program for minority children and introduce them to the disciplines of performing arts, reading, STEM, health and wellness, and cultural awareness.

To design an accessible quality educational program for the children, a collaborative planning team comprised of faculty and staff from diverse backgrounds was formed. Prior to implementing camp, the planning team met via Zoom for approximately one hour every Friday for two months. The first week started with brainstorming and conceptualizing the summer camp's mission statement and assigning planning team members to various tasks such as developing lesson plans and marketing materials. In the second week, team members presented their ideas to the group for critique and feedback in a virtual round table discussion. Every week thereafter, the same approach was used to refine the camp's agenda. However, in the fifth week, faculty members presented a completed PowerPoint presentation. Technology experts converted the PowerPoint presentations into videos and uploaded them into Nearpod, which allows facilitators to create interactive and engaging learning

activities with assessments that can be implemented in a synchronous or asynchronous environment.

In addition, undergraduate and graduate students from the various programs within the College of Education assisted the technology department with refining and uploading the videos into Nearpod. To ensure the program complied with the university guidelines, all camp personnel (faculty, staff, and students) were mandated to complete the requirements for facilitating Programs for Minors affiliated with our institution. This included background checks and Child Protection Training. These requirements are intended to protect the children who participate in our institution's programs.

The Whimsical Wednesdays Virtual Summer Camp was hosted on Zoom with children from United States, Jamaica, and Africa during summer 2020. The camp ran for five consecutive weeks on a Wednesday throughout July and engaged children in 60-minute sessions between 11:00 a.m. and noon. At the beginning of each session, the children logged into Zoom, a process that included an activated waiting room to ensure the children's cyber safety. The facilitator would admit and welcome the children and then inform them about the day's activities and expectations. The children were provided with an access code for their Nearpod session, which required them to access a second platform in addition to the Zoom platform. During the sessions, the children were engaged in collaborative work and activities as a strategy to build skills, feel a sense of belonging, and form a community. This camp was free to all children who participated. Table 1 provides details about the weekly schedule and topics.

Table 1
Weekly Schedule, Objectives and Activities

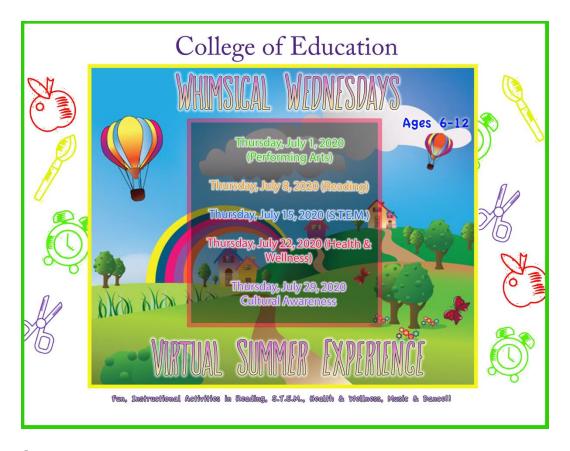| Weekly Schedule	Objectives and Activities
Week 1: Performing Arts	• Explore the history of dance • Review selected styles of dance • Learn different dance moves • Perform a choreographed dance
Week 2: Reading	• Understand the importance of reading • Review reading comprehension strategies • Practice reading fluency • Learn definitions and meaning • Listen to and visualize a story

Week 3: STEM	• Define coding and computer science • Identify key computer science vocabulary • Demonstrate coding skills learned • Identify places to go to continue learning computer science and coding
Week 4: Health and Wellness	• Learn about COVID-19 • Review and understand COVID-19 safety practices • Understand the importance of nutrition and health • Complete a series of physical activities and movements
Week 5: Cultural Awareness	• Define and understand the concepts of culture • Understand why it is important to appreciate and respect other cultures • Know how culture influences our identity • Recognize cultural characteristics of America, Africa, China, and France

Methods

Recruitment and Marketing

In order to recruit children to attend the virtual summer camp, informational flyers (see Figure 1) were posted on the institution's website, Instagram, Facebook, and other social media networks. Email blasts were sent to faculty and families who previously participated in face-to-face summer programs at the institution. Interested families contacted the College of Education via email, and the relevant forms were provided for registration. This recruitment approach was done for all participants.

Figure 1
Informational Flyer

Survey

We administered a post-survey to the virtual summer camp's planning team, children, and families. Two planning team members, with experience in qualitative and quantitative evaluation, developed three separate instruments to capture the camp's progress and success. All three surveys had closed- and open-ended questions and were administered through Qualtrics. The planning team's survey was designed to document learned experiences during planning and implementation. There were four closed-ended questions and 12 open-ended questions. The first set of questions was closed-ended, allowing the planning committee to share a profile of themselves. The last set included open-ended questions that asked planning committee members to describe their experiences and observations with planning and implementation. The survey was administered within nine months of camp implementation.

After every Wednesday session, a survey was administered that assessed the participating children's experience with content delivered on that specific day. The closed-ended questions asked the children about their grade level, type of technology device used, and whether they used their

own device or needed to share with a family member. The closed-ended questions also asked the children to indicate their level of satisfaction with the day's activity using a Likert scale. The children were aged 6-12, so the Likert scale included the corresponding emojis as the pictorial representations for strongly agree, agree, undecided, disagree, and strongly disagree. The open-ended questions asked the children to describe what they liked or did not like about the day's activities. These surveys were administered in the last 10 minutes of each session. The questions were read to the children in anticipation of varying reading and comprehension levels within the group of participants.

The instrument developed for the children's families consisted of eight closed- and three open-ended questions, which measured the experience and satisfaction of the families. The closed-ended questions asked the families to share their family profile and respond to questions about recruitment and marketing strategies, registration processes, satisfaction with the overall camp, and willingness to participate the following year. The final set of questions asked the families to share any concerns or suggestions for subsequent implementation. These surveys were emailed to the families at the end of the five-week camp.

Analysis

Using descriptive statistics, we summarized responses to all closed-ended questions for the planning team, children, and families separately. The team members responsible for the evaluation assigned a number to each team member and family during data collection. All participants' responses to the open-ended questions were compiled into one document to create a reflection artifact. An inductive approach was used to identify emerging themes.

Results

Planning Team

The planning team (see Table 2) was composed of nine (N=9) members, of which seven (n=7) were female, and two (n=2) were male. Three members had more than 10 years of experience in the K-12 setting, and five members had more than 10 years' experience in higher education. Five members who responded to the race/ethnicity question self-identified as African American, one as mixed, one as other, and the remaining two did not respond.

Prior to Whimsical Wednesdays, two-thirds of the planning team had experiences with face-to-face summer camp, and they all described their role differently. For instance, two members stated that Whimsical Wednesdays was their first virtual camp, and it was very rewarding to them to see the camp emerge. One male team member mentioned that he was responsible for developing the summer camp schedule and conveying information to the participants and colleagues. "*I did the scheduling and sending out the information to participants and the instructors" (male).* The other female team member was responsible for designing the health and wellness section curriculum and providing weekly feedback during the planning session. All the planning committee members admitted the overall experience provided opportunities to engage and learn from each other. For example, *"I was pleasured with the diversity of the curriculum as it relates to the content area. The weekly meetings allowed all committee members the opportunity to provide feedback to enhance the quality of the overall presentations" (female).*

Table 2
Profile of Planning Team

Team Member	Gender	Race/ Ethnicity	Role	K-12 Experience (Years)	Higher Education Experience (Years)	Content Background/ Area of Expertise	Experience with F2F Camp
1	Female	No response	Faculty	Above 15	11-15	No response	Yes
2	Male	African American	Administrator	1-5	Above 15	Music	Yes
3	Male	African American	Staff	No response	No response	No response	No
4	Female	Mixed	Faculty	6-10	6-10	Math/Math Education	Yes
5	Female	Other	Staff	Above 15	1-5	No response	Yes
6	Female	African American	Faculty	None	11-15	Health and Nutrition	Yes
7	Female	African American	Faculty	None	11-15	Public Health	No
8	Female	African American	Faculty	Above 15	11-15	Curriculum & Instruction	Yes
9	No response	No response	No response	No response	No response	No response	No response

Children

The children's weekly participation was captured through Nearpod activities and survey completion in Qualtrics. The survey response rates varied each

week with a mean response rate of 68.4% for Weeks 1 through 4. There was "no data" available for Nearpod participation in Week 5, and therefore it was not possible to calculate the survey response rate. Table 3 provides an overview of the children's weekly participation and distribution of their grade level. Some children did not indicate their grade level and are accounted for in the "No response" column.

Table 3
Profile of Children

Week	Nearpod Participation (N)	Survey Participation (N)	Distribution of Students by Grade Level Per Survey							No response
			K	1	2	3	4	5	6	
1	23	17	0	3	3	2	3	5	1	0
2	21	6	0	1	0	0	2	2	0	1
3	17	14	0	2	1	2	4	3	2	0
4	18	16	1	3	2	3	3	3	0	1
5	No data	11	0	1	1	1	3	3	2	0

Children's Families

The overall response rate to the survey administered to the children's families was very poor. Only 6 out of 34 families responded, of which 5 self-identified as Black/African American and one as Asian. One family had two children who participated, while the other five families had one child each.

The Successes and Challenges Planning and Implementing the Virtual Summer Camp

Successes

The planning team members, children and families expressed satisfaction with the overall camp experiences. Both survey and observation results indicated the virtual camp was fun and educational. All planning team members expressed their experiences in different ways, such as

"It was a great experience" (Female).

"It was great to collaborate with other faculty in the different field". (Female)

"The use of remote learning software is a great way to capture learning impact." (Male).,

The planning team members who had experience planning and implementing virtual and face-to-face camps also agreed that Whimsical Wednesdays was a great experience for them and the participants. One planning team member admitted that the overall process appeared very confusing during the planning sessions. She had difficulty visualizing a virtual camp with 6- and 12-year-old children. However, the weekly discussions and positive feedback were very useful in refining the entire camp and content delivered over the 5 weeks.

> *"I could not visualize the end product as clearly as my teammates, which sometimes made it difficult to express an opinion. I was also very concerned with protocol and procedure as it pertains to minors, as well as student learning outcomes" (Female).*

In addition, the planning team perceived and described the virtual camp successes in various ways. They all agreed that attending the scheduled weekly meetings was one of the most effective planning process components. Others believed that using technology to implement instructional activities and conduct the meetings helped accomplish the camp's success. Some team members felt the breakout rooms, used in Week 5, increased interactions and allowed team members to work with the children in small groups, and therefore, increased student-teacher interactions. For example, it was observed that smaller children were more comfortable and outspoken in those sessions compared to the large group settings.

The children also shared their views about the meetings on Zoom and activities completed in Nearpod. Some children described the camp as fun and indicated that they learned a lot about culture, coding, and different dance moves. The children expressed that they were more engaged in the breakout rooms as they were allowed to talk. The statements in Figure 2 were captured during the camp meeting days.

Figure 2
Children's Perceptions of the Virtual Summer Camp

Children perceptions of the Virtual Summer Camp
It was fun.
I had so much fun and learned a lot.
I liked talking in breakout rooms.
I got to learn about diff[e]rent dances.
I liked learning how to code.
I liked the workout and dance.

I learn[ed] about culture.

Data from the survey conducted with the families of the children reinforced the children's virtual experiences of the camp activities. A majority of families expressed satisfaction with the weekly activities and the use of the virtual learning environment. They believed the environment and activities were appropriate for their children. For example, one family stated, "*Both girls enjoyed Whimsical Wednesday's, however the youngest (age 7) enjoyed it much more than the oldest (age 10). My youngest is sad that it is over! :-)."* Another parent mentioned that, *"The instructions were easy, and my children were able to log in with no issues."* The children's families also stated they enjoyed the camp as it provided a different type of experience for them and their children. More specifically, a family indicated that they are looking forward to attending the camp next year. *"I look forward to participating in the future. This was very informative and allowed the children to participate in a different experience."*

Challenges

Although the camp was a great experience and the planning team, children, and children's families perceived it to be successful, a few challenges were identified during the planning and implementation. The planning team members observed that several children did not own a personal computer or device, and some siblings shared computers during the session. Also, a few children could not access Nearpod, the platform that hosted the daily learning activities and games. The team mentioned that several children did not understand how to switch from Zoom to Nearpod. One member described her observations as follows:

> *"One challenge that I did observe during the sessions was not all kids owned their mobile devices, and internet access appears to be unstable for some children. Also, some students had some challenges while switching from the Nearpod to classrooms, especially younger ones." (Female)*

Team members observed technical difficulties with the camp. During the first segment of the camp, the children were placed in a common area on Zoom where the day's activities were discussed. Some team members found that this structure was ineffective because the smaller children had technical difficulties joining the Zoom session. Also, the younger children sometimes unmuted their microphones, and background noises disrupted the sessions.

Whimsical Wednesdays utilized Zoom and Nearpod platforms to facilitate the camp. However, the planning team members had mixed

opinions about using Nearpod and Zoom together. Some team members felt Nearpod was an excellent tool to engage the children, as it contained activities and games that were prebuilt and easy to navigate. On the other hand, some members realized Nearpod might not be a great tool to engage children in the 6 to 8 age group. The facilitators found that the transition time between Zoom and Nearpod took a long time, and many students had questions about getting into Nearpod. The team members realized that providing the code immediately before class time to access Nearpod is not a great idea. They reported these technical issues take-away time from the overall camp. Some team members suggested sending the codes to children prior to the activity might be more appropriate.

> *"We experienced technical difficulties. The wide range in ages should be considered regarding core content. (Female)*
> *"There were challenges with accessing Nearpod - the STEM team lost the entire lesson created in Nearpod and had to re-create the whole thing. None of the STEM team members had actually taught coding before, much less to elementary-aged children in a virtual environment. Thus, we had to self-teach ourselves quite a bit and support each other throughout the process." (Female)*

The children did not report any challenges but offered a few items that they did not like. For instanc*e,* one child expressed, *"I did not like when we were waiting for the meeting to start.* This implies that the time in the waiting room was too long*.* Other children stated*, "I didn't like how we had [to] stop [coding]," which implies the children wanted more activity time for daily activities.*

Although they did not identify any challenges, the families stated that the children enjoyed the camp as it provided a different type of experience. One family further acknowledged that the Zoom platform was familiar to them, while another family indicated that Nearpod was a new experience for them and their children. Two different families commented:

> "*The Nearpod was a new experience."*
> *"I look forward to participating in the future. This was very informative and allowed the children to participate in a different experience."*

Even though the family members talked about their overall experience with the instructional technology, they also reported some dislikes about the camp. The families expressed concern about the lack of communication during the registration process and the time their children spent in the Zoom waiting room before the start of the day's activities. They believed that more interaction and communication are needed to reduce their children's questions. Also, they suggested a training or orientation for the Nearpod platform prior to the camp. Two of the families asserted:

"The time in the waiting room is a bit too long. Need someone to talk to the students while they are waiting in the waiting room or a little music to keep them waiting."

"I did not like that communication was not sent out promptly. Many emails I sent got no response. It was actually discouraging."

Lessons Learned

There were multiple lessons learned from the planning team, children and families about planning and implementing a virtual summer camp for children. The majority of the planning team members reported lessons centered around successes and challenges using technology (Zoom and Nearpod) and cultural experiences. The team members believed that planning, implementing, and coordinating a virtual summer camp is very essential for reaching children locally and internationally. For example, some of the children who participated in Whimsical Wednesdays were from different countries and time zones. Therefore, facilitators worked with the children and families to help connect with the sessions' lessons. This was done by designing the lessons and incorporating the children's cultural practices, such as religion, food consumed, and major holidays with symbols or meaning. Some children created a video to showcase different skills. Overall, this approach helps to use technology to us reach children and their families, locally and internationally.

Another lesson learned was related to evaluation and data collection methods. We found that some surveys were incomplete during the first week of evaluation, particularly among the younger children. This was due to allowing all the children to complete the survey without assistance. After that week, the planning team modified the survey administration process to include reading the survey to the children. Also, the planning team realized that the children were from different grade levels, and therefore reading and comprehension levels were different and could create problems associated with completing the survey. To address this issue, we realized more reminders will be needed to encourage family participation to increase the low response rate among the family survey.

Additionally, the evaluation team noticed a lack of specific data points. There were no questions about race and ethnicity included in the original data collection instruments. The team will reconstruct the instruments for future implementations to ensure all relevant data is collected. For the reflection survey administered to the planning team members, we learned that a follow-up focus group will be needed to gain more insight to improve planning and implementation for subsequent years. To help maintain the free virtual camp in universities with students in need

of volunteer hours, this would be a great way to gain experience in program planning and evaluation. For future camps, it is essential to assign individuals to assist the children in eliminating the multi-grade level virtual classroom.

The final lesson learned focuses on the structure of the camp. As previously mentioned, the children were placed in a multi-grade level virtual classroom, which was problematic for survey administration purposes. This posed challenges during the implementation of activities as younger children had several questions about the content. Even in the face-to-face setting, multi-grade level classrooms have both pros and cons. For future camps, it is important to assign individuals to assist the children and possibly eliminate the multi-grade level virtual classroom.

Discussion

In light of the fact that many institutions are being encouraged to provide global experiences for their students, Whimsical Wednesdays Virtual Summer Camp demonstrated that students, staff, faculty, and children can engage and interact during an educational session while using the Zoom platform. Whimsical Wednesdays is the first virtual camp at this HBCU institution in the College of Education. The overall planning and implementation process were successful for the participating children and the university. Faculty with diverse backgrounds were able to work collaboratively to develop effective strategies to engage the children. In addition, Whimsical Wednesdays successfully responded to the need for virtual summer camps during the COVID-19 pandemic. The camp provided meaningful summer learning necessary for children to either maintain their academic standing or move forward academically. These findings are well documented in previous literature (Alexander et al., 2007; Graham et al., 2011).

Based on our evaluation, Zoom is an effective tool to reach children worldwide and provides an opportunity for children to learn from different cultures. Unfortunately, Whimsical Wednesdays highlighted digital disparities based on race. These finding are very similar to Katz et al. (2017) regarding access to a digital device and the internet. It was evident to the planning team members that children had to share their technology devices as planning team members could see two or more children on one camera. The number of children who were excluded from the virtual summer camp is unknown because of lack of internet access.

Studies show that children of color are at a disadvantage in education (Skiba, Knesting, & Bush, 2002; Small, 2020). Whimsical Wednesdays offered a quality summer education program that many African American and Latinx children are often unable to access, as was described in the literature (Sheasley, C. 2021). This free virtual summer experience attempted to close the gap by providing education and exposing the children to different topics during the COVID-19 pandemic. Our evaluation finds that Zoom is an effective platform to host virtual summer camp although it has some disadvantages associated with usage. Some families who do not have access to the internet may be at a disadvantage or may not obtain quality education. This idea is well supported in the literature (Bauer et al., 2020; KewalRamani et al., 2018). These children may not fully grasp the content or experience the full effect of a virtual camp as they were sharing during the games and activities.

Limitations and Strength
The results from this summer camp are promising, especially using a virtual platform to reach children. However, the camp was limited in several ways. First, the camp only recruited the target population for approximately three weeks and used a convenience sample. Therefore, our sessions were very small. Another limitation of this camp was several families were interested in participating but did not complete all the required online registration processes, which led to them being ineligible to benefit from the camp. There were also limitations with the data collected during camp assessment. Our response rate was very low, especially from the children's families. This may be due to the gap between the follow-up time and data obtained through a self-reported questionnaire, leading to potential information bias. The self-reported questionnaires may cause participants to select socially desirable responses rather than report the truth.

Although the camp has some limitations, there are a few strengths that are worth discussing. For instance, we successfully implemented the entire curriculum online during the pandemic and educated children on an international level with children from the United States, Nigeria, Jamaica, and other countries. In addition, the entire curriculum is available via YouTube, which allows us to expand our platform and reach more participants. In the future, this camp will be available in a face-to-face and virtual format.

Future Directions and Recommendations
The Coronavirus brought significant interruption to established schedules and routines worldwide. This ushered in a new way of conducting summer

camp for children that will undoubtedly remain. The adage "when life gives you lemons, make lemonade" is appropriate to describe the paradigm shift that prompted the creation of the Whimsical Wednesdays Virtual Summer Camp.

Although The pandemic drove Whimsical Wednesdays, this paradigm shift was necessary and congruent with the world's technological advances and the use of technology in society. Technology and technological advances are deeply integrated into the fabric of daily life. Previously, the Erikson Institute conducted a national study to determine the technology used by young children. A total of 1,000 parents across the United States completed the study and 85% of parents reported that they allowed their young children to use technology, which includes television, tablets, smartphones, and computers (Erikson Institute, 2016). The survey also revealed that 86% of parents said they are satisfied with how their young children accessed and used technology. Perceived benefits include positive child development, increased literacy, school readiness, and school success. (Erikson Institute, 2016)

Based on the tremendous success of the 2020 Whimsical Wednesdays Virtual Experience, this summer enrichment camp for children will be held annually. The faculty, staff, and administration are diligently working to identify internal and external resources and partnerships that will increase student participation, mitigate technology access issues and technical problems, and incorporate innovative and interactive software to enhance the overall summer enrichment experience. All efforts are designed to provide greater access and opportunity for disadvantaged and underserved populations, thereby enhancing the acquisition of knowledge and skills.

Conclusion

This paper highlighted the planning, designing, and implementation process of a virtual summer camp for children between the ages of 6 and 12. Our camp suggested that Zoom can be an effective tool for planning and implementing a virtual camp. Further research is needed to examine the lasting impacts of participation.

References

Alexander, K. L., Entwisle, D. R., & Olson, L. S. (2007). Summer learning and its implications: Insights from the Beginning School Study. *New Directions for Youth Development, 2007*(114), 11-32.

Auxier, B., & Anderson, M. (2020). As schools close due to the coronavirus, some US students face a digital 'homework gap'. *Pew Research Center, 16*, 1-8.

Barrett, M. A., Bouley, T. A., Stoertz, A. H., & Stoertz, R. W. (2011). Integrating a One Health approach in education to address global health and sustainability challenges. *Frontiers in Ecology and the Environment, 9*(4), 239-245.

Bauer, E. B., Colomer, S. E., & Wiemelt, J. (2020). Biliteracy of African American and Latinx kindergarten students in a dual-language program: Understanding students' translanguaging practices across informal assessments. *Urban Education, 55*(3), 331-361.

Bennett, C. I. (2019). Comprehensive multicultural education: theory and practice. (9th ed.). Pearson.

Burnett, C*.,* McDonald, A., Boone, S., Branch-Vital, A., McFrazier, M., Oliver, V., Harper, S., & Smith, L. (2021, February). *Children's Experience at a Virtual Summer Camp at an HBCU* [Conference session]. Research Association of Minority Professors 2021 Virtual Symposium.

Brown, C. (2021). Racism. *Dialogue and Universalism*(1), 5-8.

Cervantes-Soon, C. G., Degollado, E. D., & Nuñez, I. (2021). 9 The Black and Brown Search for Agency: African American and Latinx Children's Plight to Bilingualism in a Two-Way Dual Language Program. In *Bilingualism for All?* (pp. 199-219): Multilingual Matters.

Darling-Hammond, L. (2004). The color line in American education: Race, resources, and student achievement. *Du Bois Review: Social Science Research on Race, 1*(2), 213-246.

de Brey, C., Musu, L., McFarland, J., Wilkinson-Flicker, S., Diliberti, M., Zhang, A., . . . Wang, X. (2019). Status and Trends in the Education of Racial and Ethnic Groups 2018. NCES 2019-038. *National Center for Education Statistics*.

Delgado, R., & Stefancic, J. (2017). *Critical race theory*: New York University Press.

Erikson Institute (2016). Technology and young children in the digital age, A Report from the Erikson Institute.

Feagin J, Bennefield Z. Systemic racism and US health care. Soc Sci Med. 2014;103:7–14.

Feagin JR. The white racial frame: Centuries of racial framing and counter-framing. Routledge; 2013.

Graham, A., McNamara, J. K., & Van Lankveld, J. (2011). Closing the summer learning gap for vulnerable learners: An exploratory study of a summer

literacy programme for kindergarten children at-risk for reading difficulties. *Early Child Development and Care, 181*(5), 575-585.

Katz, V. S., Gonzalez, C., & Clark, K. (2017). Digital inequality and developmental trajectories of low-income, immigrant, and minority children. *Pediatrics, 140*(Supplement 2), S132-S136.

KewalRamani, A., Zhang, J., Wang, X., Rathbun, A., Corcoran, L., Diliberti, M., & Zhang, J. (2018). Student Access to Digital Learning Resources outside of the Classroom. NCES 2017-098. *National Center for Education Statistics*.

Kim, C. J. H., & Padilla, A. M. (2020). Technology for educational purposes among low-income latino children living in a mobile park in Silicon Valley: A case study before and during COVID-19. *Hispanic Journal of Behavioral Sciences, 42*(4), 497-514.

Kohli, R., Pizarro, M., & Nevarez, A. (2017). The "new racism" of K-12 schools: Centering critical research on racism. *Review of Research in Education. AERA*. 41, 182-202.

McFarland, J., Cui, J., Rathbun, A., & Holmes, J. (2018). Trends in High School Dropout and Completion Rates in the United States: 2018. Compendium Report. NCES 2019-117. *National Center for Education Statistics*.

Sheasley, C. (2021). Broadband boosters. Mission to the digital divide*. MIT Technology Review*. 124(2), 64-67.

Schell, C. J., Dyson, K., Fuentes, T. L., Des Roches, S., Harris, N. C., Miller, D. S., . . . Lambert, M. R. (2020). The ecological and evolutionary consequences of systemic racism in urban environments. *Science, 369*(6510).

Skiba, R. J., Knesting, K., & Bush, L. D. (2002). Culturally competent assessment: More than nonbiased tests. *Journal of Child and Family Studies, 11*(1), 61-78.

Small, D. (2020). *The hidden curriculum in public schools and its disadvantage to minority students.* Paper presented at the Int. Forum Teach. Stud.

Valencia, R. R. (Ed.). (2012). *The evolution of deficit thinking: Educational thought and practice*. 160-210.New York, NY: RoutledgeFalmer

Zohar, A. (2013). Challenges in wide scale implementation efforts to foster higher order thinking (HOT) in science education across a whole school system. *Thinking Skills and Creativity, 10*, 233-249.