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The 4-H Summer Cultural Arts Day Camp: Bringing The World to "My World"

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Abstract

This article describes a community-based 4-H Cultural Arts Day Camp designed to address the out of school time needs of youth in a rural, isolated area. The camp was conducted in collaboration with several local agencies and the Oregon State University Extension Service, and is intended to provide intercultural awareness through the artistic exploration of various world cultures. An evaluation of the camp in 2003 concluded that participating youth were actively learning about other cultures. The camp clearly meets an important need, both in terms of raising intercultural awareness and providing much needed summer opportunities for rural youth.

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Ah, summertime, and the living is . . . tough . . . at least for youth in isolated communities and neighborhoods of western Washington County, Oregon. Families in this area have few affordable, accessible, and appropriate activities available for their children in the summer. In addition, the area has a significant Latino population and a higher than average number of immigrant families. Many families have limited resources, and there are few public transportation options available.

My World, a 4-H Summer Cultural Arts day camp was developed in an effort to address the summertime needs of youth and families and to provide educational programming to increase intercultural understanding. In doing so, the camp provides a safe and engaging place for youth to spend their free summer time and also contributes to the development of cultural competence in youth. Helping youth use time constructively and developing cultural competence are two key development assets identified for positive youth development identified by the Search Institute (Benson, 1997).

My World is a cooperative effort led by the Extension 4-H staff and numerous supporters and cooperators that enables Washington County children to participate in worthwhile summer programming at minimal or no-cost. Participation in the camp reflects the economic and ethnic demographics of the area. Over the past 5 summers, hundreds of youth have participated. In 2003, there were 5 separate summer camp settings with an enrollment of around 135 children.

Staffing and Funding

Bi-cultural/bi-lingual staff are hired through Oregon State University's PROMISE program (a minority student summer internship) and the Mexican Consulate. This allows the camp to control staffing costs and to locate staff with multi-cultural experiences and languages. A program director is hired each summer and is responsible for overseeing the actual day-to-day management of the camp as well as supervising the high-school aged staff assistants. The director also works with Extension staff to determine curriculum for each of the camp themes.

Program financial support comes from many sources, reaching a total of nearly \$65,000 for the last 3 years. Supporters include the Oregon 4-H Foundation, Washington County 4-H Leaders Association, The Juan Young Trust, INTEL Corporation, The Spirit Mountain Community Fund, OSU Extension Administration (PROMISE salaries), and The Portland Trailblazers Community Builders Youth Corp. The grant writing process by Extension staff begins early in the year, and the number of camp settings depends on the total amount of grants received.

In addition to financial contributions, cooperation and in-kind assistance are extensive. All spaces used are free of charge. Family Resources Centers, school districts, Boys and Girls Clubs, and parks districts supply additional staff when camps are located at their facilities.

Program Plan and Method

Half-day camp sessions are held at multiple sites for 2 weeks. The educational goals of the camp are to:

- Provide a positive, supervised, learning environment for elementary school youth during summer vacation.
- Provide children living in communities with limited resources with the opportunity to experience fun, educational activities for a nominal cost or free of charge.
- Provide children of bi-lingual, bi-cultural families with the opportunity to participate in activities with staff and supervisors able to communicate and assist them.
- Teach community children about traditional 4-H projects, a variety of cultures, technology, and the natural environment through experiential, hands-on activities, crafts, foods, and active games.

Sessions take place at local elementary schools or youth service centers, allowing local children without available transportation to attend. School counselors and program staff help recruit the children who would benefit most from involvement. The camp program director also goes to churches, apartments, and community centers where parents of children in the appropriate age range are located so that she can introduce herself, share information about the camps verbally, and answer any questions parents might have.

Establishing contact and a relationship with families in this way has greatly enhanced participation at the camps by children whose parents have limited English language skills. This is especially important when working with Latino families (Hobbs, 2001).

The camp activities are designed to inform participants about different cultures from around the world. Children are taught that each culture has unique aspects that can be shared and appreciated by all. Arts, crafts, games, dances, traditions, and foods are included. Each activity is introduced with background information regarding the history and application in its native country or ethnic group. American culture is included as well. Each day has a focus, sometimes a continent or country, or a theme common to multiple cultures. Activities include:

- Creating Japanese Carp Kites, Gyotaku (fish prints), African rainsticks, and Huichol Indian yarn art pictures.
- Learning Ballet Folkloric and Native American dances.
- Making fry bread and piñatas.
- Participating in an American Independence Day parade, watermelon seed spitting contests, and sack races.
- Learning to do sand art (rangoli, mandalas), and mask carving.
- Exploring the "culture" of technology, including learning to use laptop computers and peripherals (microscopes, printers, disk drives).

Program Evaluation

In 2003, an end of program evaluation was conducted to assess how well the camp participants met the learning objectives for the camp. Because of the age of the campers, and in some cases the language differences, the evaluation was conducted through an embedded assessment of a camp activity in which the campers were asked to draw a picture and write a sentence or two about what they learned at camp. Two program sites participated in the evaluation, 28 3rd and 4th graders at the first site and 18 2nd to 5th graders at the other site. The artwork was collected and given to an independent evaluator to assess how well the campers' art and statements matched the learning objectives. It is clear from the analysis of the pictures that participants met the learning objectives for the camp.

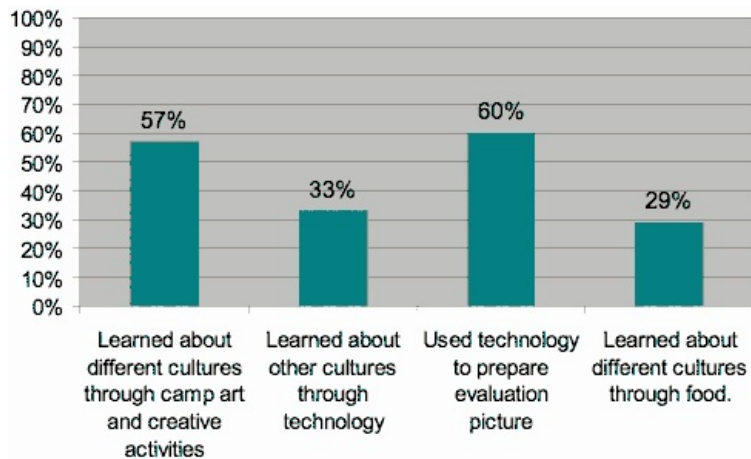
Specifically, the evaluations revealed that the children learned a great deal about the customs of other cultures through the craft activities in which they participated (N= 26; 57%) (Figure 1). In

many cases participants explicitly stated the connection between the craft they made and the custom it represented. For example, one participant reported that: "On Wednesday we made worry dolls. What they say in Guatemala is that before bed you tell the worry doll your worries and in the morning your worries are gone"

Participants also reported learning about other cultures through technology, such as microscopes digital cameras, and computer programs (N= 16; 33%); 29 of the participants (60%) prepared their evaluations on the computer with a program called "Kid Pix" (Figure 1).

Finally, 14 (29%) reported learning about the different foods from different countries they made and ate (Figure 1). "For every day we study 2 new countries and we eat what the people from the country eats. We ate Sushi and Rice Crackers! It was so fun!"

Figure 1.
Percent of Youth Sharing the Ways They Learned About Other Cultures



Summary

Through the My World camp program, hundreds of children have spent their summer time learning about other cultures in a safe, supervised summer setting. In recognition of its impact, the My World summer day camp program received the NAE4-HA National Diversity Programming Award in 2002.

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