

Influence of a Training Program on Camp Counselors' Perceived Competency When Accounting for Prior Camp Experience

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to evaluate summer camp counselors' perceived competency prior to and after an 8-day training at an independent for-profit overnight camp. The participants in this study were 101 camp counselors who were employed at an overnight summer camp in the northeastern United States. Counselors' perceived competency was measured with a 21-item survey with seven subscales including typical day routine, conflict management, counselor expectations, safe camp environment, relationships, develop camper skills, and behavior management, prior to and following staff training. Results from the survey indicate increases across all constructs were significant, and the three factors with the largest increase after the orientation training were typical day routine, counselor expectations, and developing camper skills. The two factors with the smallest increase were behavior management and creating a safe camp environment. Devoting additional time teaching tangible methods on how to handle conflict and cultivate camp skills may similarly lead to stronger competency in staff. In the future, integrating video module training for staff prior to training may be beneficial.

KEYWORDS: camp counselors; Kirkpatrick's model of evaluation; staff training; summer camp

For a summer camp to find success, the leadership team needs to induct camp staff successfully into the camp's beliefs and objectives. This induction period begins during orientation when staff are trained on specific policies, practices, and skills necessary to be successful as a camp counselor. Although the literature has identified increases in positive self-confidence (DeGraaf & Glover, 2003), increases in sense of responsibility (Dworken, 2004), and significant increases in emotional intelligence as potential positive outcomes of being a camp counselor (Jacobs, 2004), research shows that the effectiveness of a training program hinges on staff members' ability to interpret that message (Cronin, 2006). To date, there has been limited research specifically examining the effectiveness of summer camp training orientations. As researchers posit a positive relationship between perceived ability and learning (Greene & Miller, 1996), further research is necessary to evaluate how staff perceive their own ability level prior to and following camp orientations.

Kirkpatrick's Four-Level Approach of Training Evaluation

Kirkpatrick's four-level model of training evaluation is a classic framework for assessing training effectiveness in a variety of organizational contexts. Although there have been many recent methods and models of training assessment (e.g., Day, Arthur, & Gettman, 2001; Kraiger, Ford, & Salas, 1993), Kirkpatrick's (1959, 1976, 1996) model of training evaluation remains a widely accepted choice among researchers (Praslova, 2010; Salas & Cannon-Bowers, 2001; Van Buren & Erskine, 2002). Researchers have proposed additions to this structure by refining terminology and developing subcategories (Alliger, Tannenbaum, Bennett, Traver, & Shotland, 1997); however, the original model continues to be widely used and appears regularly in education, business, and additional contexts to evaluate training programs.

The four levels in Kirkpatrick's model of training evaluation are reaction criteria, learning criteria, behavior criteria, and results criteria, which are further separated into internal and external criteria. The reaction and learning criteria (internal) emphasize what transpires during a particular training, whereas the behavior and results criteria (external) focus on adjustments that occur outside of and following training (Kirkpatrick, 1959, 1976, 1996). The internal criteria focus primarily on the content learned during training, whereas the external criteria are influenced by all factors outside of the learning that occurs during training.

Kirkpatrick (1959, 1976, 1996) described the reaction criteria as a focus on how participants of a particular training program evaluate their feelings, emotions, perceived competency, and beliefs following a specific program. Specific to this study, the reaction criteria can be further broken down into an affective reaction (how much trainees enjoy the training) and utility judgment (how much they believed they have learned; Alliger et al., 1997). Researchers have postulated a positive relationship between utility judgment and the other levels of criteria; for example, counselors who feel confident in the information learned during training are more likely to perform favorably. Therefore, the focus of this study was on measuring the utility judgment criteria specific to Kirkpatrick's framework, with intent of determining what camp counselors believed that they learned before and following training.

Perception of competence, or perceived competency, is a feeling that one can achieve a desired outcome. When perceived competency is met, there are elevated levels of intrinsic motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2000) and a greater probability that favorable behaviors will occur (Carroll & Loumidis, 2001). Within the camp context, it is suggested that counselors who exhibit high levels of perceived competence will be more determined to succeed and fulfill their responsibilities at higher levels; further, counselors who feel successful in this regard obtain a variety of beneficial outcomes, making for a better experience for campers (Browne & D'Eloia, 2016).

To date, there has been limited research examining Kirkpatrick's other level of criteria within the camping industry. Initial findings indicate that camp counselors' lack of knowledge regarding daily routines (Ducharme & Feldman, 1992), inability to handle conflict between chil-

dren (Scales, 1997), and initial comfort prior to training are dependent on background information received (Brown & Cole, 2009). Although results focused on training are restricted, over the past 15 years there has been burgeoning research concentrated on improving counselors' overall camping experience.

Camp counselors described a sense of enthusiasm, energy, participating with campers, understanding and exceeding expectations, and strong connections with campers and other adults as vital to their staff engagement (Browne & D'Eloia, 2016). Furthermore, counselors who feel engaged in their work are more likely to gain a variety of beneficial outcomes, leading to a more fruitful experience (McCole, Jacobs, Lindley, & McAvoy, 2012). With indications that camp staff who exhibit a sense of community are more likely to return to work at camp the following year (McCole et al., 2012), it is necessary for directors to begin to incorporate these aspects into training.

More recently, researchers have solicited camp staff to determine what they believe are the skills necessary to succeed as a counselor. The staff in Halsall, Kendellen, Bean, and Forneris's (2016) study perceive being understanding, maintaining equanimity, having a sense of humor, and being a positive role model as characteristics of effective counselors. Halsall et al. (2016) call for camp administrators to employ tactics to identify and promote these characteristics during staff training. In a study of a summer camp in the Midwest, Baldwin, Duerden, and Witt (2010) retrospectively examined counselors' perceived knowledge at the conclusion of training. Results from this study indicated that experienced counselors and first year counselors started at different levels of understanding, but exhibited high levels of competency following training.

Based upon the research identifying these specific staff needs, further information is necessary on the effectiveness of current camp trainings. Identifying this information might provide meaningful insights into behavior and results criteria, as researchers have established the relationship between utility judgment and the other levels within Kirkpatrick's framework (Alliger et al., 1997). Moreover, identifying counselors' perceived competencies might allow camp directors to place future emphasis on areas with which counselors felt the least comfortable and modify their training based upon these insufficiencies. This gap in the research gives credence to further examination of utility judgment within the summer camp context. Therefore, the purpose of this exploratory study was to evaluate summer camp counselors' perceived competency prior to and after an 8-day training at an independent for-profit overnight summer camp. Differences in perspectives based on whether counselors had prior experience working at the camp were also considered.

Method

Participants and Settings

The study took place at an overnight 51-day summer camp in the northeastern United States. Through convenience sampling, the participants in this study were 101 camp counselors (44 female, 57 male) from Trails End Camp (TEC) with a mean age of 19.96 ($SD = 1.91$). Of the 101 counselors, 30 (29.7%) had preceding involvement working as a summer camp counselor and 71 (70.3%) had no previous experience as a counselor. Although every counselor was required to participate in the 8-day orientation, all participants volunteered to attend this orientation prior to the campers' arrival. Parental consent and assent was obtained for all counselors under age 18, and for all participants over age 18, consent was received before commencement of data collection. The lead author's university institutional review board approved the study.

Orientation Training Content

The training orientation program was 8 days in duration and focused on developing and enhancing counselors' leadership skills, youth development, and physical and emotional safety. The primary objectives of training included improving perceived competency and enhancing counselors' ability to (a) handle conflict, (b) build healthy relationships with campers and fellow

staff members, (c) learn their expectations, and (d) understand typical camp rules and routines. These objectives were grounded in camp literature (Halsall et al., 2016; McCole et al., 2012; Morgan, Sibthorp, & Browne, 2016), and they were chosen because the camp directors believed these attributes were vital to the success of their staff (M. Honigfeld, personal communication, May 15, 2015). Other information covered included creating a safe camp environment, behavior management strategies, and day-off logistics. Each of the intensive 8 days lasted between 12 and 13 hours, with a descriptive account of the entire training in Table 1. Training sessions included case studies, role-playing, modeling effective behaviors, lectures, guest speakers, activities, and whole-camp events. The orientation also included supplemental training provided by a professional trainer who conducted on-site role-playing with each counselor in a small group setting. These role-playing sessions focused on how to build healthy relationships with campers and fellow staff members.

Research Protocols and Instrumentation

All of the camp counselors enrolled in this exploratory study participated in the entire 8-day training orientation. A total of 19 counselors arrived to camp at various points during training and were not included in the study. The initial implementation of the perceived competency survey (Figure 1) was administered during the first day of orientation, prior to any training. The second iteration was administered following the last training session, on the night prior to the campers' arrival. Both implementations included the perceived competency survey in addition to demographic information, which contained previous camp experience, age, and gender. The first author administered each survey in the dining hall at TEC. A total of 101 participants completed the survey fully at both iterations.

In accordance with Kirkpatrick's (1976) four-level approach to training evaluation, specifically the utility judgment criteria, a survey was created for this exploratory study to assess camp counselors' perceived competency. This survey was based upon Baldwin et al.'s (2010) 16-item survey intending to measure the impact of camp counselor training. In this exploratory study, the updated 21-item perceived competency scale kept 12 items from the original scale and removed two items (items 6 and 12) based upon their purpose to assess cultural background, which was not relevant to this study. Two additional items were modified (items 14 and 16) so as not to lead the participants into a positive response. Finally, nine items were added as guided by Kirkpatrick's framework (1959, 1976) and the utility judgment construct to better evaluate counselors' perceived competency in areas not evaluated in the previous survey including conflict management, counselor expectations, and developing relationships. The updated 21-item survey includes three items to measure perceived competence in seven domains that are grounded in the camping literature (Browne & D'Eloia, 2016; Halsall et al., 2016; McCole et al., 2012; Morgan et al., 2016; Roark et al., 2010): (a) knowledge of typical daily routines (e.g., I understand the rules and routines of a typical day at camp), (b) conflict management (e.g., I have confidence in my ability to handle conflict between campers), (c) perceived ability to create a safe camp environment (e.g., I have the skills necessary to provide a safe camp environment), (d) counselor expectations (e.g., I understand what is expected of me as a camp counselor), (e) perceived ability to develop relationships with campers (e.g., I understand how to build trusting relationships with campers), (f) perceived ability to develop camper skills (e.g., I understand how to help campers develop their leadership skills), and (g) behavior management (e.g., I feel comfortable handling behavior issues with my campers). Participants responded to the items on a 10-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (*not at all*) to 10 (*very much*). Internal consistency reliability was adequate (Cronbach's $\alpha > .70$) for each of the seven subscales in this study.

Table 1*Description of TEC Staff Orientation Training*

Day	Content covered	Training session type (length of session)
1.	Team Building Typical Day Routine Counselor Expectations Relationships	Team-Building Activities (4 hr) Modeling Effective Behaviors (2 hr) Role-Playing (2 hr) Case Studies (1 hr)
2.	Team Building Counselor Expectations Safe Camp Environment Relationships Unpacking	Team-Building Activities (3 hr) Case Studies (1 hr) Case Studies (1 hr) Guest Speaker (1 hr) Unpacking by group (3 hr)
3.	Team Building Counselor Expectations Conflict Management Relationships Behavior Management Unpacking	Team-Building Activities (2 hr) Modeling Effective Behaviors (2 hr) Role-Playing (1 hr) Guest Speaker (2 hr) Lecture (1 hr) Unpacking by group (2 hr)
4.	Team Building Typical Day Routine Conflict Management Relationships Develop Camper Skills Unpacking	Team-Building Activities (2 hr) Modeling Effective Behaviors (1 hr) Lecture (1 hr) Role-Playing (2 hr) Activities (2 hr) Unpacking by group (2 hr)
5.	Team Building Conflict Management Relationships Develop Camper Skills Behavior Management Unpacking	Team-Building Activities (2 hr) Case Studies (1 hr) Activities (2 hr) Guest Speaker (2 hr) Whole-Camp Events (2 hr) Unpacking by group (2 hr)
6.	Team Building Typical Day Routine Safe Camp Environment Develop Camper Skills Unpacking	Team-Building Activities (3 hr) Modeling Effective Behaviors (2 hr) Lecture (1 hr) Case Studies (2 hr) Unpacking by group (3 hr)
7.	Team Building Counselor Expectations Conflict Management Relationships Behavior Management Unpacking	Team-Building Activities (1 hr) Activities (2 hr) Guest Speaker (2 hr) Whole-Camp Events (2 hr) Role-Playing (1 hr) Unpacking by group (2 hr)
8.	Relationships Develop Camper Skills Unpacking	Team-Building Activities (4 hr) Whole-Camp Events (3 hr) Unpacking by group (2 hr)

Name: _____ Years of Experience as Counselor at TEC: _____
 Age: _____ Major at University: _____
 Gender: _____ Role in Camp: _____

Directions: Please read the following statements carefully and respond to each in terms of how you feel about each one. Be certain to take your time and answer as honestly as possible. Circle the number that best represents how you feel.

Using the scale below, please indicate how you feel about each statement.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
not at all		a little bit		somewhat			a lot		very much

Please write the number in the blank that best corresponds to the following statement:

- I understand the rules and routines of a typical day at camp. _____
- I have confidence in my ability to handle conflict between campers. _____
- I have the skills necessary to provide a safe camp environment. _____
- I understand the importance of having high expectations for campers' behavior. _____
- I understand what is expected of me as a camp counselor. _____
- I understand how to help campers build self-confidence. _____
- I can handle conflict with other staff. _____
- I understand how to build trusting relationships with campers. _____
- I understand how to help campers develop their leadership skills. _____
- I have a good understanding of how to perform my role as a counselor. _____
- I understand the importance of my being a role model for the campers I work with. _____
- I am comfortable in my ability to handle a conflict between myself and another camper. _____
- I understand the difference between proper and improper camper behaviors. _____
- I have the knowledge on how to build healthy relationships with campers. _____
- I feel skilled in my job as a counselor. _____
- I understand the camp standards, as addressed in the TEC manual. _____
- I understand how to build campers self-esteem. _____
- I know the difference between properly and improperly speaking to my campers. _____
- I feel comfortable handling behavior issues with my campers. _____
- I feel comfortable building relationships with my co-counselors and supervisors. _____
- I understand how to perform the responsibilities of a camp counselor. _____

Figure 1. Counselor survey.

Data Analysis

All statistical analyses were performed using IBM SPSS 23.0. The data analysis process began with standard procedures for data cleaning and screening (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2013), through which it was determined that the data were appropriate for the use of inferential statistics. Items related to the seven counselor perceived competence domains were then averaged into study constructs. Primary analyses included a series of 2×2 (Time \times Group) mixed ANOVAs, allowing for an examination of pre- to postassessment competency ratings provided by participants while also considering prior camp experience. Partial η^2 was used to estimate effect size in all mixed ANOVA models. A partial η^2 value between .01 and .06 is considered small, between .06 and .14 is considered medium, and $> .14$ is considered large (Warner, 2012). Significant interaction effects were diagnosed with paired-samples t tests to examine changes over time for each group individually (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2013). Cohen's d was used to estimate effect size for all t tests. A Cohen's d value between .15 and .40 is associated with a small effect, between .40 and .75 with a medium effect, and above .75 with a large effect (Cohen, 1992).

Results

The results of the 2×2 (Time \times Group) mixed ANOVAs are summarized in Table 2. For *typical daily routine*, the main effect for time was significant, $F(1, 99) = 126.09, p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .560$, which indicates a general increase over time. There was also a significant main effect for group, $F(1, 99) = 52.08, p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .345$, indicating that the group with prior experience had generally higher perceived competence related to the typical daily routine. Both main effects were qualified by a significant Time \times Group interaction effect, $F(1, 99) = 33.69, p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .254$. The means plot for this interaction is displayed in Figure 2 and indicates that the group without prior experience begins with lower perceived competence, but the gap between the two groups shrinks over time. Follow-up paired-samples t tests indicated that the change over time was significant for both the group with prior experience, $t(29) = 4.61, p < .001, d = 1.21$, and the group without prior experience, $t(70) = 14.20, p < .001, d = 2.42$.

For *conflict management*, the main effect for time in the 2×2 mixed ANOVA model was significant, $F(1, 99) = 39.59, p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .286$, which indicates a general increase over time. The main effect for group was also significant, $F(1, 99) = 13.66, p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .121$, indicating that the group with prior experience had generally higher perceived competence related to conflict management. Both main effects were qualified by a significant Time \times Group interaction effect, $F(1, 99) = 5.84, p = .018$, partial $\eta^2 = .056$. The significant interaction effect is displayed in Figure 3 and indicates that the group without experience begins lower, but catches up over time. Follow-up paired-samples t tests for simple effects indicated that both the group with prior experience, $t(29) = 3.47, p = .002, d = .91$, and the group without prior experience, $t(70) = 7.20, p < .001, d = 1.22$, increased over time in perceived competence of conflict management.

Related to *counselor expectations*, the main effect in the mixed ANOVA model was significant, $F(1, 99) = 107.86, p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .521$, indicating that both groups generally increased over time. The main effect for group was also significant, $F(1, 99) = 42.01, p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .298$, indicating that the group with prior experience had generally higher perceived competence related to counselor expectations than the group without prior experience. Both main effects were qualified by a significant Time \times Group interaction effect, $F(1, 99) = 27.18, p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .215$. This interaction, which is displayed in Figure 4, indicates that the group without prior experience begins with lower perceived competence, but catches up over time. Follow-up tests for simple effects indicated that the increase over time was significant for both the group with prior experience, $t(29) = 5.01, p < .001, d = 1.32$, and the group without prior experience, $t(70) = 12.76, p < .001, d = 2.16$.

The mixed ANOVA for *safe camp environment* revealed a significant main effect for time, $F(1, 99) = 52.33, p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .346$, indicating that both groups significantly increased over time. The main effect for group was also significant, $F(1, 99) = 23.87, p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .194$, indicating that the group with prior experience had generally higher perceived competence related to creating a safe camp environment. Both main effects were qualified by a significant Time \times Group interaction effect, $F(1, 99) = 25.06, p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .202$, which is displayed in Figure 5 and indicates that the group without prior experience begins with lower perceived competence, but increases over time. Follow-up tests revealed that increases over time were significant for both the group with prior experience, $t(29) = 2.28, p = .030, d = .60$, and the group without prior experience, $t(70) = 9.95, p < .001, d = 1.68$.

Table 2

Summary Statistics and 2×2 (Time \times Group) Mixed ANOVA Results

Subscale	Course section		ANOVA statistics			
	No experience <i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	Prior experience <i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	Factor	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>	Partial η^2
Typical Daily Routine			Time**	126.09	< .001	.560
Pre	7.06 (1.22)	9.01 (.71)	Group**	52.08	< .001	.345
Post	8.84 (.96)	9.58 (.49)	Interaction**	33.69	< .001	.254
Conflict Management			Time**	39.59	< .001	.286
Pre	7.52 (1.56)	8.64 (.69)	Group**	13.66	< .001	.121
Post	8.62 (1.01)	9.13 (.75)	Interaction*	5.84	.018	.056
Counselor Expectations			Time**	107.86	< .001	.521
Pre	7.19 (1.36)	9.00 (.69)	Group**	42.01	< .001	.298
Post	8.90 (.91)	9.57 (.50)	Interaction**	27.18	< .001	.215
Safe Camp Environment			Time**	52.33	< .001	.346
Pre	7.88 (1.12)	9.20 (.62)	Group**	23.87	< .001	.194
Post	9.04 (.85)	9.41 (.62)	Interaction**	25.06	< .001	.202
Relationships			Time**	62.86	< .001	.388
Pre	7.41 (1.39)	9.00 (.69)	Group**	29.52	< .001	.230
Post	8.81 (.99)	9.44 (.67)	Interaction**	16.86	< .001	.145
Developing Camper Skills			Time**	47.67	< .001	.325
Pre	7.02 (1.60)	8.71 (.69)	Group**	26.66	< .001	.212
Post	8.59 (.91)	9.08 (.78)	Interaction**	18.38	< .001	.157
Behavior Management			Time**	64.19	< .001	.393
Pre	7.77 (1.06)	8.98 (.72)	Group**	24.70	< .001	.200
Post	8.84 (.90)	9.34 (.52)	Interaction**	15.39	< .001	.135

Note. All subscales of the counselor perceived competence survey were measured on a 7-point Likert-type scale ranging from *not at all* (1) to *very much* (10).

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .001$.

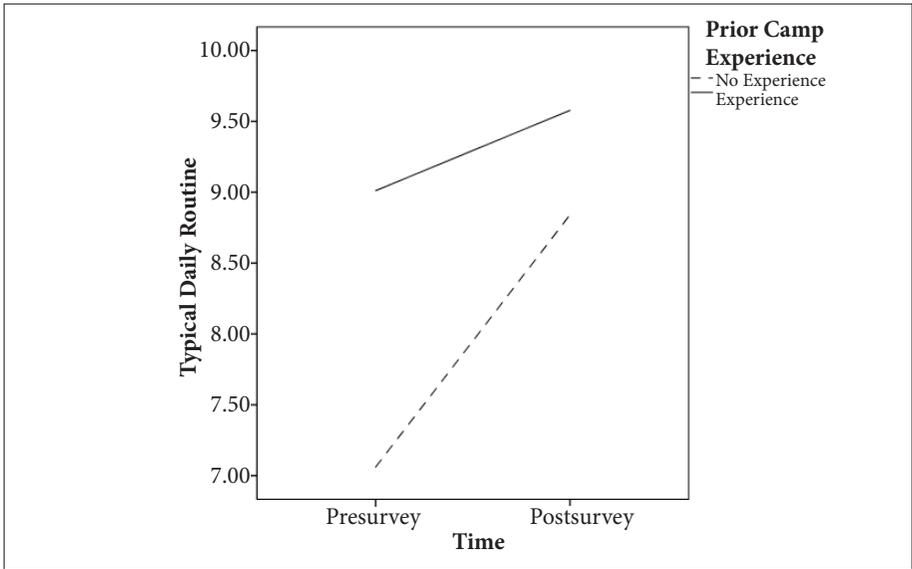


Figure 2. Means plot displaying significant Time \times Group interactions for typical daily routine.

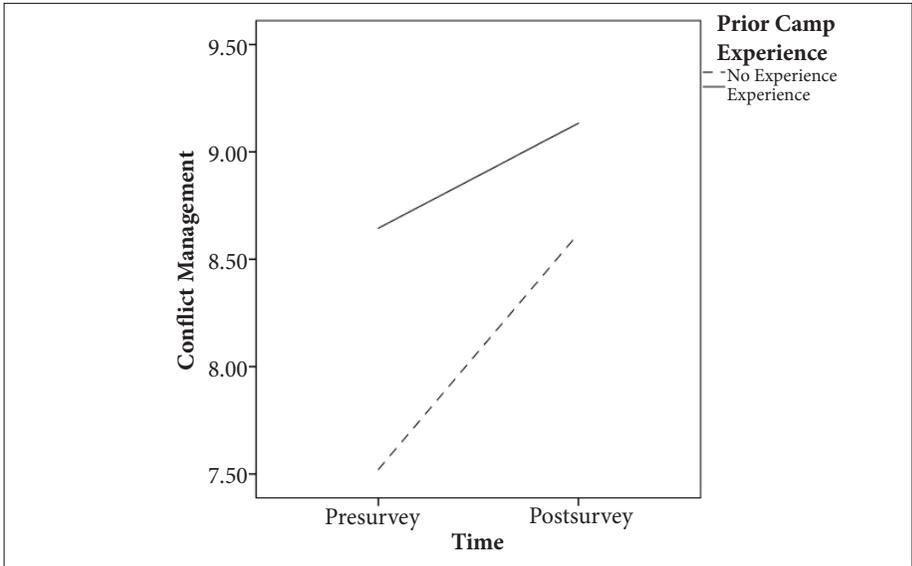


Figure 3. Means plot displaying significant Time \times Group interactions for conflict management.

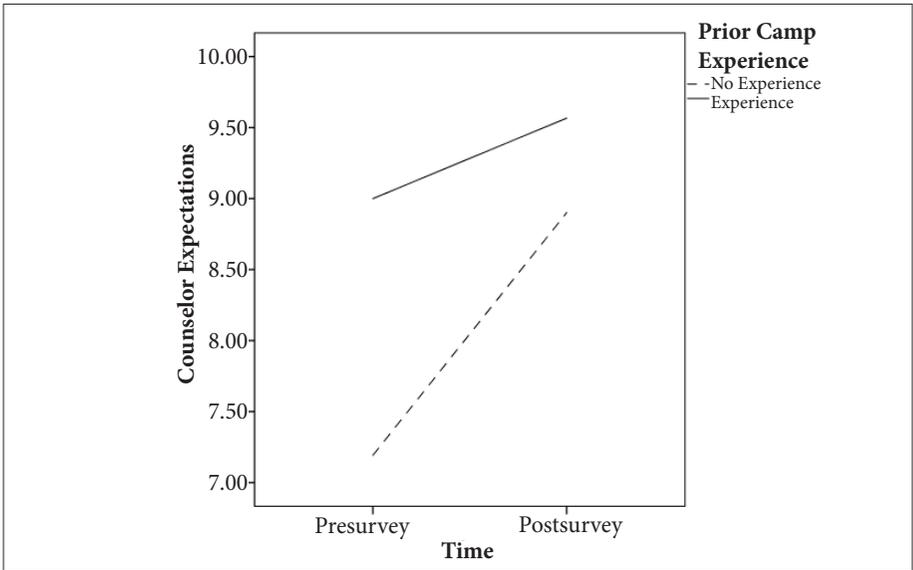


Figure 4. Means plot displaying significant Time × Group interactions for counselor expectations.

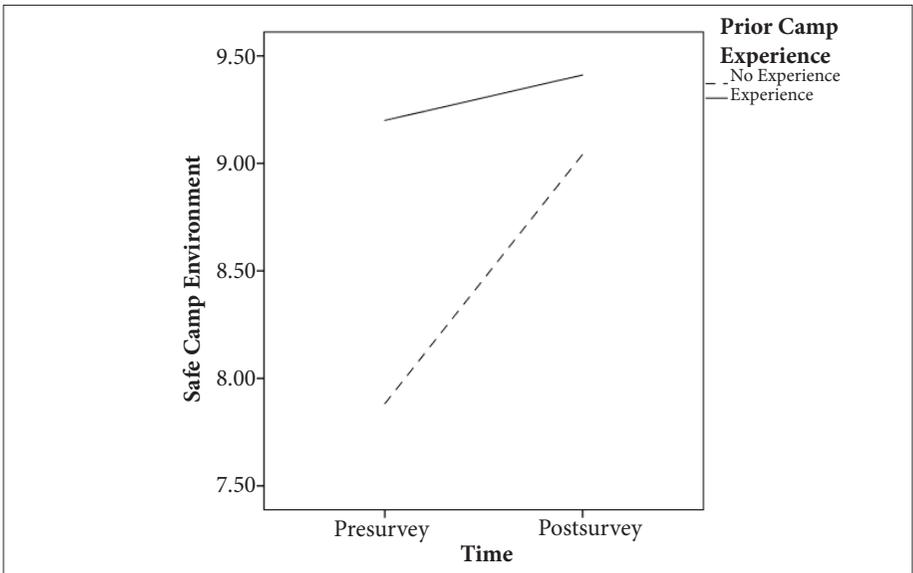


Figure 5. Means plot displaying significant Time × Group interactions for safe camp environment.

For *relationships*, the mixed ANOVA model revealed a significant main effect for time, $F(1, 99) = 62.86, p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .388$, which indicates that both groups generally increased over time. There was also a significant main effect for group, $F(1, 99) = 29.52, p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .230$, indicating that the group with prior experience had generally higher perceived competence related to building relationships with the campers. Both main effects were qualified by a significant Time \times Group interaction effect, $F(1, 99) = 16.86, p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .145$. The interaction is depicted in Figure 6 and indicates that the group without prior experience started out with lower perceived competence, but caught up over time. Follow-up tests for simple effects indicated that both the group with prior experience, $t(29) = 3.55, p = .001, d = .93$, and the group without prior experience, $t(70) = 9.90, p < .001, d = 1.67$, increased over time in perceived competence of building relationships.

The mixed ANOVA for *developing camper skills* indicated a significant main effect for time, $F(1, 99) = 47.67, p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .325$, indicating a significant increase in time for both groups. There was also a significant main effect for group, $F(1, 99) = 26.66, p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .212$, which indicates that the group with prior experience generally had higher perceived competence related to developing camper skills. Both main effects were qualified by a significant Time \times Group interaction effect, $F(1, 99) = 18.38, p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .157$, which is displayed in Figure 7 and indicates that the group without experience started with lower perceived competence related to developing camper skills and caught up over time. Follow-up paired-samples t tests indicated that the increase over time was significant for both the group with prior experience, $t(29) = 2.43, p = .022, d = .64$, and the group without prior experience, $t(70) = 9.21, p < .001, d = 1.56$.

Finally, for *behavior management*, the mixed ANOVA indicated a significant main effect for time, $F(1, 99) = 64.19, p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .393$, which indicates that both groups generally increased over time. There was also a significant main effect for group, $F(1, 99) = 24.70, p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .200$, indicating that the group with prior experience had higher perceived competence related to behavior management than the group without prior experience. Both main effects were qualified by a significant Time \times Group interaction effect, $F(1, 99) = 15.39, p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .135$. This interaction is displayed graphically in Figure 8 and indicates that the group without experience initially had lower perceived competence related to behavior management, but caught up over time. Follow-up tests for simple effects indicated that both the group with prior experience, $t(29) = 2.98, p = .006, d = .78$, and the group without prior experience, $t(70) = 10.27, p < .001, d = 1.74$, increased over time in perceived competence of behavior management.

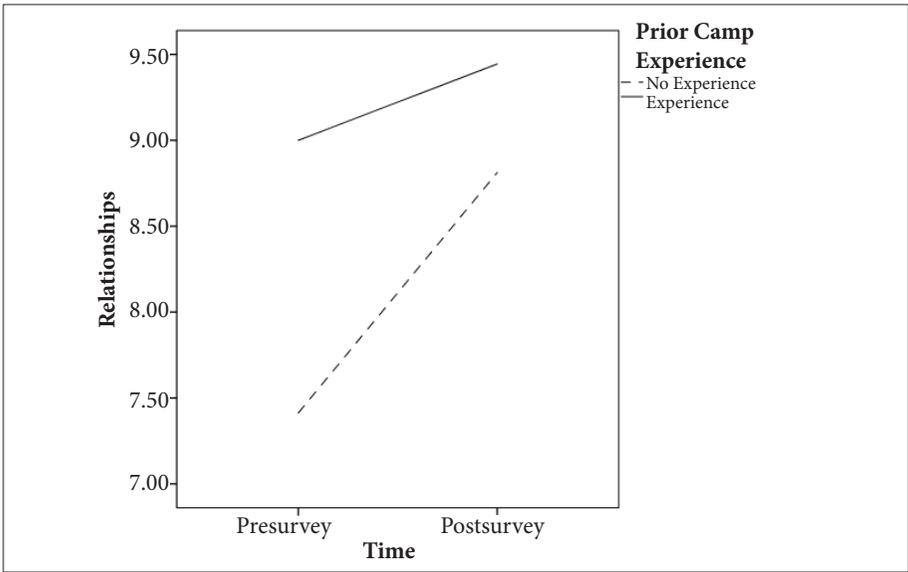


Figure 6. Means plots displaying significant Time × Group interactions for relationships.

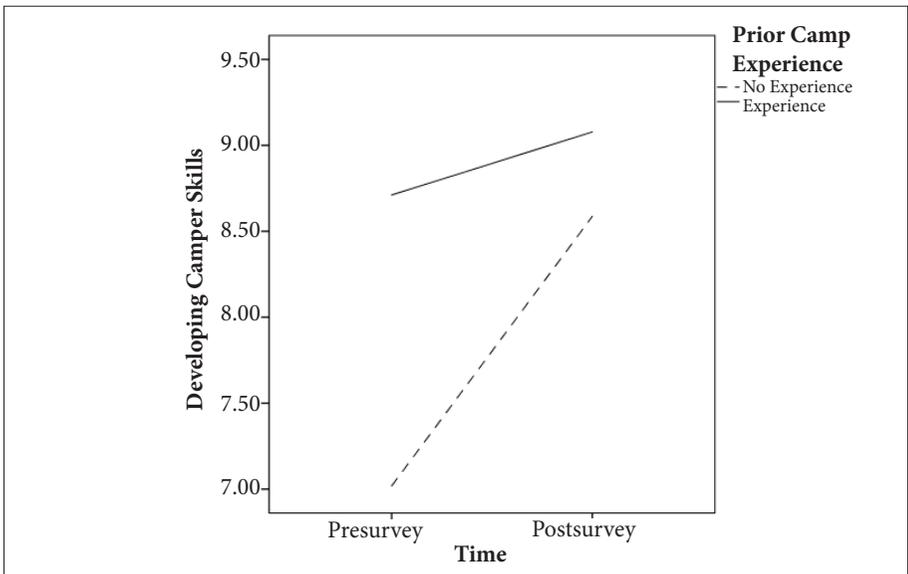


Figure 7. Means plots displaying significant Time × Group interactions for developing camper relationships.

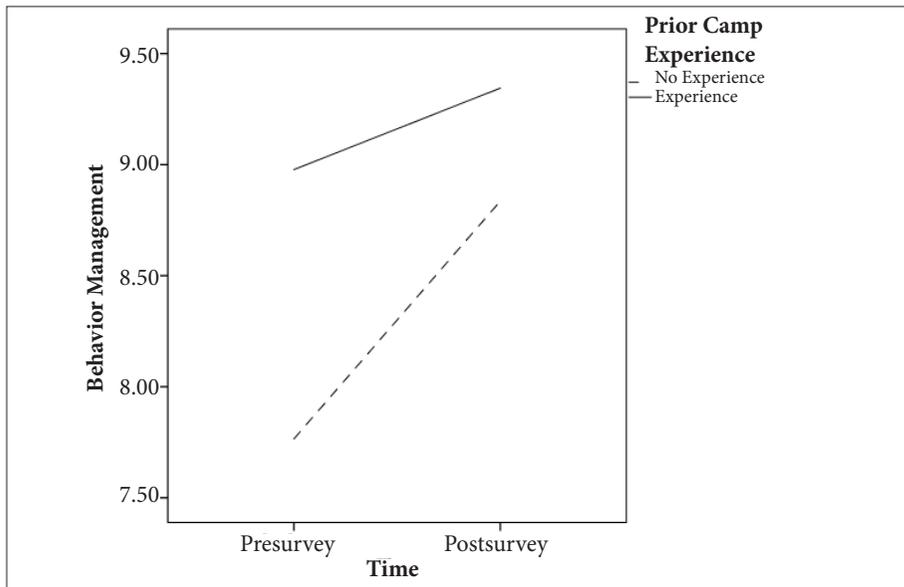


Figure 8. Means plots displaying significant Time \times Group interactions for behavior management.

Discussion

There is extensive research within the camping industry that demonstrates the benefits of residential summer camps; however, much less is known about camp staff members and those who oversee such camps (Thurber, Scanlin, Scheuler, & Henderson, 2007). There have been several calls within the camping industry for research focusing on the effectiveness of staff training (Cronin, 2006; M. Honigfeld, personal communication, September 1, 2014). This study answers this call and provides an important contribution to our understanding of the perceived competency of summer camp counselors as well as differences in perspectives based on whether counselors had prior experience working at camp. This is the only study to date that (a) has examined counselors' perceived competency, (b) surveyed all participants prior to and following training, and (c) evaluated differences between counselors with and without prior camp experience.

The results of this study suggest that prior to staff training, counselors with and without previous camp experience demonstrated the lowest level of competency in conflict management, counselor expectations, and developing camper skills. These findings are in line with previous literature (Baldwin et al., 2010) indicating that prior to training counselors are not as confident in their abilities. These outcomes are noteworthy as counselors in a previous study expressed creating connections with campers, being a positive role model, and exceeding expectations as characteristics of an effective counselor (Browne & D'Eloia, 2016). These findings may indicate that closer attention needs to be placed on staff prior to their arrival at camp, and directors may choose to require all staff to complete mandatory video module-based training to complement the upcoming on-site training. These supplemental trainings may prove beneficial if targeted toward areas in which staff expressed initial low perceived competency.

The results of the survey revealed that prior to training new camp counselors communicated the lowest levels of perceived competency in their comprehension of typical daily routines and overall camp knowledge. These findings are similar to other findings in which counselors

expressed a lack of understanding of rules and typical daily routines prior to training (Baldwin et al., 2010; Ducharme & Feldman, 1992). This supports the argument that precamp informational packets should be given to all newly hired staff, as counselors who feel a sense of community are more likely to work at camp year after year (McCole et al., 2012). Such packets not only provide additional background information about the camp and increase levels of comfort prior to camp (Brown & Cole, 2009), but also may begin to create a sense of community among camp staff. Because the results of this study posit that counselors exhibit high levels of comfort with basic procedures and rules of camp following training, removing these informational sessions throughout training may provide additional time directors can spend reinforcing other important content areas.

Similar to counselors in previous reports (Baldwin et al., 2010; Scales, 1997), counselors in this iteration expressed the lowest perceived competency in their ability to develop camper skills following training. Both returning and new counselors identified a shortage of confidence in their ability to help campers build self-confidence as well as self-esteem. With research supporting camps as a positive youth development setting to help build these skills (Thurber et al., 2007), and with camp staff having significant impact on campers' development, these results are problematic. Although significant growth was developed within the 8-day training, staff displayed low confidence in their capability to develop such characteristics. These results indicate that camp directors should continue to monitor their staff's ability and provide ongoing feedback and trainings throughout camp (Morgan et al., 2016). Furthermore, this lack of confidence suggests that developing camper skills should be emphasized during training by employing case studies, role-playing, and modeling proper behavior to create the most realistic learning environment possible. Additionally, devoting additional time teaching tangible methods on how to handle conflict and cultivate camp skills may similarly lead to stronger competency in staff.

The returning counselors in this study exhibited overall higher perceived competence prior to participating in staff training than those who were first time staff members, which may be attributed to job uncertainty or initial apprehensions. Additionally, the perceived competency of both groups increased significantly over time. As expected, new staff members made larger gains as this was their first time going through the training; however, the perceived competency of both groups increased significantly over time. These findings provide justification that returning staff members should continue to be included in trainings. Further, the returning counselors expressed their lowest confidence in their ability to handle conflict and developing camper skills. With previous findings suggesting that the majority of workplace stress (Ferrari & McNeely, 2007) and burnout (Wahl-Alexander, Richards, & Washburn, in press) occur because of camper-staff conflict, purposeful sessions targeting these areas are warranted.

The conclusions in this study are made cautiously given that this was an exploratory study with a relatively small group of counselors employed at one summer camp over one summer. More studies are needed to see if the results found in this research transfer to other contexts and to determine if it is possible to improve the scale used to measure counselors' perceived competency. Further, future research directed at determining the reliability and validity of this scale is prudent.

In the future, further research is needed examining the utilization of precamp training in the areas in which counselors exhibited lower competency prior to and following training. Supplementing on-site training with video modules may aid in the development of camp staff, and future endeavors examining the benefits of integrating such trainings are important. Furthermore, although researchers have suggested causal links between competency and skill (Alliger et al., 1997; Greene & Miller, 1996), research relating counselors' perceived competency to their final staff evaluations would provide additional understandings of the relationship between competency and ability.

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