

## **Summer Camps Develop Competencies in the 3 Cs - Collaboration, Creativity and Critical Thinking.**

### **Skills for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century – Daniella Garran**

Now, more than ever, America's youth is being treated as adults-in-training rather than as children and teenagers. Parents are rightly concerned about preparing their children for college and a career but often forget to let their children enjoy childhood. In today's schools, teachers are forced to focus on content mastery and standardized tests rather than on fostering creativity and curiosity among their students. However, being able to solve Calculus problems, recite the Preamble to the Constitution and achieve high standardized test scores does not necessarily mean that one is prepared socially, emotionally, or even intellectually for what lies ahead. Enter summer camps.

Some families may be reluctant to send their children to traditional camps because they believe that an internship or long list of experiences will look better on a college application or resume. But parents must ask themselves what they want their children to gain through such an experience. Are they looking for work experience? Are they hoping to pique the child's interest in a certain field? Or are they simply trying to keep the child occupied for the summer? In fact, summer camps provide a set of experiences and skills which may prove to be even more valuable than an internship at a law firm or volunteering for a political candidate. In fact, research shows summer camps to be proven training grounds for success.

The Partnership for 21st Century Skills is a national organization of leading world employers that advocates for 21st century readiness for every student. By fusing content with learning and thinking skills, ICT literacy and life skills, P21 strives to educate the whole individual. In fact, there is no better place to develop and master these skills than at summer camp.

*21<sup>st</sup> Century Content* (global awareness, financial literacy, civic literacy, health and wellness awareness and environmental literacy)

- Campers must also take responsibility for maintaining their health while away from home. Keeping their bunk and cabin clean, sorting their laundry and eating healthily are just a few examples of the opportunities camp provides children that they may not otherwise have at home.
- Many American summer camps attract international campers which provide an amazing opportunity for raising cultural awareness and sensitivity. In fact, many campers make lifelong international friendships which are often rekindled during family vacations and college semesters abroad. Whereas 20 years ago, letters were sent to overseas camp friends via air mail, today the click of a mouse allows an instant transcontinental visit via Skype, e-mail or Facebook.
- Finally, many camps are located in spectacular environments where campers must have respect for the lake, pond, forest, beach or mountain. Raising awareness about the environment and how to protect it can be an especially valuable lesson for campers from urban areas where they may not necessarily be as aware of environmental hazards and the need to recycle and preserve the environment.

*Learning and Thinking Skills* (critical thinking and problem solving skills, communication skills, creativity and innovation skills, collaboration skills, information and media literacy skills and contextual learning skills)

- Campers are given daily opportunities to problem solve and think critically while honing their communication skills. For example, they may participate in a variety of team building activities which require them to think logically, troubleshoot, incorporate others' ideas and so on. While some individuals may be reluctant to engage in sports at school because of their competitive nature, camp provides a great opportunity for "low stakes" participation in intramural sports and activities (e.g.: color wars, Gaga, dodgeball, scavenger hunts, ultimate Frisbee). This kind of activity is extremely beneficial with regard to fostering communication with peers and developing one's analytical abilities).
- Camp also exposes children and teens to new activities and skills that they may not have the opportunity to develop in school. For example, many camps offer sailing programs, tennis instruction, pottery classes and drama. Campers' schools may not have the resources or facilities to offer watersports (which generally aren't offered in the winter months anyway) or their schedules may not allow them to take an arts elective. In short, camp offers access to new and different activities while also providing instruction at different levels for more traditional interests such as swimming.

*Life Skills* (leadership, ethics, accountability, adaptability, personal productivity, personal responsibility, people skills, self direction and social responsibility)

- There are few other settings in which children and teens can develop life skills better than they can at camp. For many children, coming to summer camp is their first time on their own. Each day, they are given opportunities to work with other people, take responsibility for themselves and for their actions, display leadership among their peers, behave in an ethical fashion and adapt to a variety of situations, some of which may be challenging for them.

In a recent [USA Today article](#) by Peg Smith, CEO of the American Camp Association, Peg expounds on the ability of summer camps to fill a void in development that seems to have been lost in recent school-aged populations. *"Without a doubt, we need citizens who think in optimal ways — producing original concepts, processes, and changes that will enhance a future beyond what we have experienced in the last century....There is a great deal of research that validates the educational, social, and emotional impacts of a positive camp experience — impacts that address the precursors needed as well as the 21st Century skills required for success."*

Summer camp is one of the most valuable gifts you can give a child. Not only does it encourage kids to be kids, but it also reinforces many of the behaviors and skills that are required in our 21<sup>st</sup> century world. To learn more about The Partnership for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills, visit <http://www.p21.org/>.

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