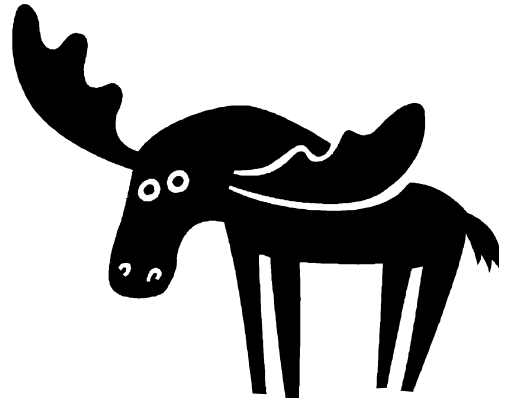


Operation Wet the Moose: Playing, Pretending, and Storytelling your way through camp

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Why play and pretend?

- FUN – Ways to connect with kids
- Kid's need it to learn
- They have fewer opportunities to do this now
- 'Last child in the woods' ideology – community is suffering & physical space is decreasing
- Opportunity for you to develop camp culture

A recent ACA research study¹ described the #1 attribute of the best Camp counselors as “[The] ability to connect quickly one-on-one with individual campers.”

Community, culture, and mission

Your mission, goals, & objectives (youth development) frame everything. When it comes to playing and pretending nothing should be an obstacle if you let be a guide.

For example:

Soccer camp – Mission is to give kids soccer specific program

- Create theme days and change sports related activities to reflect that theme
- Tell stories where losing is OK (sportsmanship)
- Play non-competitive games during down time

YMCA camp – Mission to provide recreation with a focus on values and character

- Tell stories that have a morale
- Go on adventures that include everyone in the group – give each camper a job/responsibility

Camp for kids with special needs – Mission is to provide recreation opportunities for specific demographic, that couldn't get the same experience at a typical camp

¹ Reported by Tom Madeyski, 2006 YMCA Mid-America Camping Conference



- “Invent” new ways of doing activities (accessibility)
- Tell stories about being unique

The idea is that your mission, goals, objectives, philosophy should INFORM your program, which includes playing, pretending, and storytelling.

Building **Community**

“Go outside and play!”

~ Scott’s Mom (circa 1984)

The way community has evolved has restricted opportunities for kids to use their imagination. Playing & pretending at camp helps to cultivate it.

My “Theory of Stuff & Things” – the more stuff we have the less imagination we use, but the opposite isn’t always true, because it isn’t about the quantity or amount of stuff it is about the culture you create around it.

Culture formula: **knowledge + participation = membership**

Culture = the way we are in groups (no matter what the size)

Examples you know:

- When you enter an elevator with strangers, how do you position or body and what do you look at? (towards the front and you look up)
- When you are walking down the street, which way do you angle so you don’t run directly into someone else? (right)
- When you are meeting someone for the first time, what part of their body do you get to touch? (hand)

Examples you DON’T or may not know:

- If you’re on a bus in Kingston, Jamaica, who holds your backpack? (anybody sitting down, even if they are not right next to you)
- If you’re in Japan, when can you tell your boss what you really think of them? (if you are raging drunk)
- When you’re in Alabama and someone asks if you want a Coke, what are your options? (sprite, dr. pepper, and the rest)



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Camp Culture: Myths, legends, and storytelling (knowledge + participation = membership)
Every camp has them. Myths and legends (not necessarily ghost stories) tell the story of camp. Creation, destruction, change, evolution, relations, connections, and the like are all explained and maintained by storytelling.

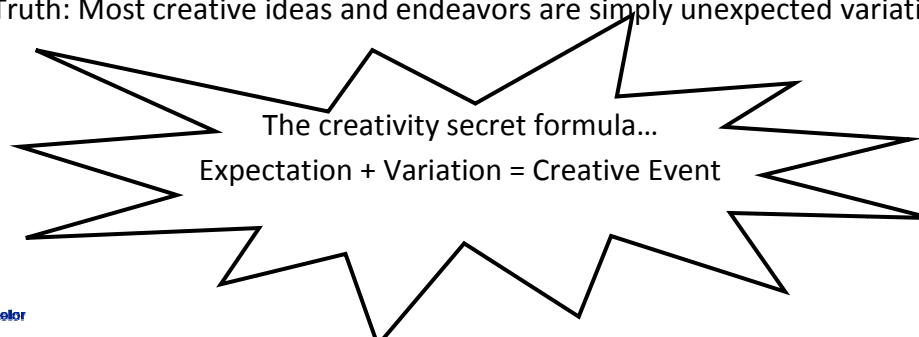
What's your story? How can we effect what campers KNOW about our culture and how they DO (or participate in) our culture?

1. Tell a good story
 - Before
 - Thing that happens
 - After
2. Teach storytelling
 - Storytelling program/activity
 - Campfire stories
 - Group storytelling
 - Reading
 - Camper involvement – decision making, self-expression, and creativity
3. Teach the Art of Play & how to engage the imagination
 - Get on kids level – emotionally and physically
 - Games, activities, programs that are age appropriate
 - Practice life skills through every activity
 - Role model – acting silly, overcoming inhibitions, being “uncomfortable”, pretending
 - Get on the ground (the actual ground)
 - Beach balls, raccoon circles, bandanas, Frisbees, other random things

Creativity, enthusiasm, and teaching – Skills for the Art of Play

Cracking the **Creativity** Code

Myth: Creativity is doing something brand new, unheard of, ground breaking, and earth shattering. Truth: Most creative ideas and endeavors are simply unexpected variations.



Enthusiasm

The best part about really enthusiastic people is that the energy is contagious. It's tough to be genuinely enthusiastic all of the time, because real enthusiasm has to do with passion. However, the only way to really create or build passion is to do it and enjoy it as much as possible. Fake it til' you make it. It's ok to practice before your perfect.

What do they DO?

Move around when speaking
Vary voice speed and volume
Randomly jump
Walk quickly to activities and programs
Keep talking about an activity afterwards
Do each activity different EVERY time
Smile
Talk about benefits and 'silver linings' of things
Get enough sleep, eat appropriately, & actually rest on time off

What do they SAY?

"WOW!"
"SWEET!"
"What did you make at A&C earlier..."
"This is my favorite activity!"
"How can I help?"
"Could you help me with..."

A note on **Teaching**...It's about the Learner not the Teacher

- Visual, auditory, tactile, through action or process, etc.
- Expectations versus rules
 - Not just covering "what not to do"
 - Help develop ways to be successful... the "how to do"
- Plan, Do & Review (Time to practice)
- KISS – Keep It Simple Stupid (Break things down to the basics)
- Tricks & tips are memorable
- The more people talking the better (leaders & learners)

