

The “Pinball Machine Approach” to Promoting Social Competence: Hitting the target by chance or by design?

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Overview:

- Camp is based on the premise that children move ahead faster and better if we design relevant and fun learning experiences for them instead of leaving their progress up to chance.
- If we agree (a) that it is desirable to promote social competence and character because they form the foundation for success in every area of life, and (b) that camp is one of the best venues in which to do this, then (c) we must give our staff user-friendly tools to work toward this objective.
- We are more likely to achieve our goal of promoting social competence if we take a systematic approach that is based on solid research rather than hoping that the issues will be addressed by chance.
- If we can demonstrate that we have a well-designed plan to address these issues, our camps will be more desirable to consumers. Promoting social skills is an entrepreneurial niche for camps.

Notes:

Questions to be addressed:

- What kinds of social skills do people need? What counts as social skills?
- How do people get these skills?
Informal vs. structured ways.
- Why camp is the right place for people to get these skills: Camp leaders are out-of-the-box thinkers when it comes to education.

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Questions to be addressed, continued:

- The camp director’s dilemma: How can I make this social skills thing happen with any kind of style and grace when I already have too much to do? And I sure don’t want my camp to seem like school.
- So what do we do now?
 - Decide that it matters.
 - Decide to intervene.
 - Equip yourself:
 - Do your homework so you can choose the right tools.
 - Learn the characteristics of good materials.
 - Equip others:
 - Give tools to campers to acquire social competence.
 - Give tools to counselors to lead campers to social competence.
 - Sell it: Help people embrace the goal and the means.
 - Sell it to yourself: Believe that it’s worth pursuing.
 - Sell it to your staff: They’ve got to catch your vision. Be able to answer the inevitable questions: Why do we have to teach this stuff?
 - Sell it to the parents: Give the market what it is demanding.
 - Sell it to the campers: Make sure it is fun and relevant.
 - Reap the benefits. Social competence as a marketing tool.

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