

Project title: *Effectiveness of day camp staff training on preparedness to provide inclusive camp experiences for children with disabilities.*

Purpose: The purpose of this study is to develop and test the effectiveness of training content and materials to prepare summer day camp staff to include children with disabilities in summer day camps.

Research Objective: To test the effectiveness of pre-camp training (content, materials) on the preparedness of day camp staff to include children with disabilities in summer day camps.

Findings:

Three community-based inclusive day camp sites participated in this study.

Subjects (N = 32) ranged in age from 18-25, were female (n = 20) and male (n = 18), and reported as having completed some college (n= 24), an associates degree (n = 1), and bachelors degree (n= 5). Of the participants, 22 reported as being white/non-Hispanic, African American (n = 6), Asian (n = 2), and other (n = 2).

Data analysis showed an overall statistically significant increase in learning outcomes from pre to post tests ($t = 3.022$; $p = .005$). Specifically, day camp counselor's knowledge about including children with I/DD in day camps significantly increased pre (mean = 3.30; $sd = 1.04$) to post test (mean = 4.25; $sd = .96$), following their participation in a training seminar.

The content areas in which the most pre/post increase was found were:

1. Inclusion principles (increasing personal contact so children get to know each other, helping all children and the child with the I/DD only when needed, all make changes for inclusion)
2. ADA information (basic mandates, requirements, linked to principles of best inclusion practices)
3. Characteristic of children with I/DD (typical traits, behaviors, strengths, abilities; methods to foster and facilitate inclusion in day camps for children with I/DD)

There was also a reverse correlation with two test items (children with I/DD do not think the same way as children without I/DD; best inclusion practices are part of counselors' job) which indicates a change in understanding of these knowledge sets from pre to post test.

No statistically significant change was found with items that addressed the counselor's attitudes toward children with I/DD or relative to including children with I/DD in day camps. Upon further examination of the data, it was found that research subjects reported a high positive attitude toward inclusion in pre-tests (mean = 4.21) and a slight increase in the mean at post-test (4.43). Thus, data showed an existing positive attitude among day camp counselors prior to participant in pre-camp training. Even though this increase was not statistically significant, there was an increase in subject's attitude toward including children with I/DD in summer camps at the end of the camp sessions. One interpretation of this finding is that day camp counselors and other program staff believe that children with disabilities should be (e.g., have the right to be included; should be accommodated) included in day camps. This finding challenges current literature that negative attitudes are a significant barrier to inclusion for people with disabilities as it did not hold in this study.

Limitations of this study and caution in use of the findings center on the small number of subjects who participated in this examination. Generalizability of findings to all day camps and other contexts should be done judiciously until a larger subject pool or examination in other inclusive contexts are conducted.

Secondly, reliability and validity of the pre-post test instrument was conducted with subject experts. Further testing of the instrument should be conducted to secure reliability and validity coefficients so quality of data can be assured.

Recommendations

Based on the findings from this study, it is recommended that the following content be included in pre-day camp training:

- Best inclusion practices
 - Facilitate personal contact (e.g., children get to know each other) between campers with and without disabilities
 - Counselors assist all children with needs while at camp and the children with I/DD when they need the assistance only
 - It is all camp staff's responsibilities to facilitate inclusion
 - All campers and staff must make adaptations for inclusion to occur
 - Actual/realistic safety concerns relative to inclusion

- ADA requirements
 - Principles of a reasonable accommodations/adaptations
 - Least restrictive/most inclusive environments

- Characteristics of children with I/DD
 - Respectful/person first language
 - Adaptive skills (e.g., color differentiating)
 - Communication skills
 - Best adaptational practices (e.g., providing hands-on instruction; offering one instruction/direction at a time; using pictures vs. verbal descriptions)
 - Simple positive reinforcement methods and techniques

Additional recommendations:

Add content on applying a strengths-based approach to making adaptations