

# Residential Summer Music Camp and its Impact on Youth: A Case Study

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## Abstract

This qualitative case study explored a residential music camp, Camp Encore Coda. The purpose was to better understand that environment's effect on the social and musical developments of its participating youth while contrasting this environment to the traditional classroom. Framed by the concepts of community of practice and holistic education, data were collected using surveys, interviews, focus group, and observations. The study found high levels of social and musical growth among the youth linked to isolation from technology, communal living, and musical immersion within a community of practice.

## Keywords

Music Camps, Community of Practice

## Introduction

For decades parents have been sending their children to residential summer camps<sup>2</sup>. The experience extends for several weeks or even an entire summer and has been mythologized in cartoons, novels, and movies. Characterized by communal living and rural locations far from large population centers<sup>3</sup>, camps have evolved into centers of complex learning, aiding many campers in their transition from childhood to adolescence and adolescence to adulthood. Initially, camps emerged out of dissatisfaction with traditional schooling and a desire for a well-rounded education that included physical exercise, mental challenges, teaching values, and social skills development (Thurber, Scanlin, Scheuler, & Henderson, 2007). Historically, summer camps provided a safe place where children could be sent during the summer months. Their appeal for both parents and youth owes much to the desire for fun educational experiences set apart from familiar cities and suburbs (Ozier, 2009; American Camp Association, 2006). This distinct experience is grounded in holistic learning, immersing participants in a natural environment where they can interact with both peers and mentors in ways that contrast markedly with the academic and social experiences occurring during the other months of the year.

Summer camps in North America can be traced back to 1861 and the founding of The Gunnery Camp in Connecticut (American Camp Association, 2014). Since then, camps have flourished and evolved over time into the wide variety of programs available today. From their early years to the present, camps have also existed as an option for working families in need of day care for their children during the summer. In addition to providing a safe and

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<sup>2</sup> The author recognizes the fact that summer camps cost money to attend and typically have catered to more privileged families.

<sup>3</sup> The author recognizes the fact that summer camp programs do exist in cities, this characterization is of the residential summer camp, a distinction clarified later in the article.

supervised environment, camps have also created an enriching and exhilarating experience for the campers.

The first major summer music camp materialized in 1928 with the inception of “The National Orchestra Camp” in Interlochen, Michigan. Led by the visionary Joseph E. Maddy, professor of music at University of Michigan, this camp emerged from the recognized need to continue instruction and performance in the summer for a select group of high school orchestra players (Our Founding, n.d.).<sup>4</sup> Along with the support of the National Bureau for the Advancement of Music and summer camp pioneer Willis Pennington, “The National Orchestra Camp” began in 1928 with minimal funding and low enrollment, yet the camp saw its enrollment double the following summer (Brandt, 1988). Surviving the Great Depression by exponentially increased endowments, the extensive music camp and organization that exists today is now simply called Interlochen.

The purpose of this camp was to fill a gap in the existing music education offerings the youth received at school, providing an opportunity where highly specialized instruction in an alternative environment was made available. Interlochen’s successful camp model spread rapidly across the country, sparking the emergence of other residential music camps and summer music programs. One such camp of note was the International Music Camp (IMC). Founded in 1956 by Dr. Merton Utgaard at the Peace Gardens of North Dakota, IMC is recognized as one of the first prominent camps to intentionally recruit both domestic and foreign students (Brandt, 1988; Hall, 2000). With the institution of music and arts camps, the 1950s witnessed the establishment of camps with even further specializations, offering focused studies and activities such as baton twirling, pipe organ, dancing, and jazz (Brandt, 1988).

A different camp model can be seen in the intensive summer programs based at colleges, universities, and preparatory schools. These programs thrive today at various universities and music conservatories. For the purpose of this study a distinction is made between a summer music “camp” and a summer music “program.” The intensive music programs on university campuses exhibit many similarities to traditional residential summer music camps, but they differ primarily in that students can either commute to campus daily or they can live on campus in dormitories.

While musical immersion and performance are hallmarks of residential summer music camps, there are other aspects to consider, including socialization, creative exploration, and the components associated with holistic learning within a community of practice. The residential summer music camp, as explored in this study, is modeled after the IMC; music students live together in cabins in the woods in close proximity to a lake, so that living and learning takes place in a natural outdoor location.

This study was framed by the concept of a community of practice, constructed by a musically immersive environment where learning merges with the formation and development of social relationships. Richards (2007) defines communities of practice by as being “social units that have a common purpose,” where “members interact regularly, share common beliefs and vocabulary, and learn from one another as they engage in mutual activities” (p. 40). With such a learning community, holistic learning foundations emerge, where children and youth are given the space to think critically about the world around them, building meaning in all that they learn through both academic and social endeavors. According to Modell, Deniero, and Rose (2009), “in the context of a holistic learning environment, helping the learner to

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<sup>4</sup> The young musicians who participated played not only for prominent and supportive music educators, but also for President Woodrow Wilson (Brandt, 1988).

learn includes creating an environment where factors that are not directly related to the discipline but that may impact learning are recognized” (p. 37).

In order to understand the comparisons uncovered in this study between Camp Encore Coda and the music learning environments that the campers experienced at their schools, the notion of “traditional classroom” must be delineated. For the purpose of this study, the traditional classroom was defined as the classroom environment prevalent in most public schools in the United States. A walled classroom where learning commonly relies on teacher-led instruction can characterize this context. The traditional classroom typically is based on a predetermined curriculum (Managan, 1989) with core standards assessed by standardized and non-standardized tests. This curriculum is explicit, “manifest in publicly stated goals of education” (Joseph, 2011, p. 50). In the traditional classroom students are taught with students of similar age, and often ability, led by a unified imposed curriculum. In this configuration peer interaction is sometimes limited due to the lecture-based model of instruction and the stratification of content level based on assumptions regarding developmental capacity according to age.

Summer camp can be an important part of many youths’ overall education, expanding their regular school curricula. The outcomes described in the summer camp research literature have provided educators with anecdotal information on the impact these camps have on their attendees; however, research exploring the impact of established music camps within the United States is scarce (Richards, 2007; Thurber et al., 2007; Westervelt, Johnson, Westervelt, & Murrill, 1998).

Music education research that explores the educational and social potential of music camps has been largely limited to investigating particular aspects of the specific. Music camp studies have shown factors that affect a music camp’s success (Hall, 2000), how educators view camps (Belin, 2009), or how camp can influence pedagogy (Diaz & Silveira, 2012).

Hall (2000) investigated The International Music Camp of North Dakota, developing a chronological record of the camp’s developments over time. The study uncovered and defined the components that have led to the camp’s success, indicated by consistent or increasing enrollments, the presence of international participants, hiring a highly qualified staff, and high levels of staff and student retention. Hall’s study suggested issues to examine in this study of Camp Encore.

Belin’s (2009) study of three college-based music faculty members who were summer youth camp instructors, unveiled the importance of participating in a professional learning community and showed how the camp created a valuable space for professional development for the music educators. Belin’s research and the present study share a common theme, as they both rely on the concept of a community of practice. Belin uncovered the importance of a professional learning community as a source of motivation and learning, an aspect of camp that emerged in the present research as one facet to the larger community of practice comprised of youth and faculty.

A recent study by Diaz and Silveira (2012) examined the concepts of flow, “a state in which individuals report enhanced levels of effortless concentration and enjoyment as a product of intense engagement on a given task” (p. 2). Their study sought to identify how flow is achieved in the camp setting so that the processes used in the camp could be applied to the school classroom and other learning environments, attempting to improve overall learning efficiency and retention. Diaz and Silveira found that music/academic activities were more conducive to flow than social activities. Several include participating in large ensembles, elective classes, and attending live concerts.

The data also revealed a low selection rate of TV and computers as eliciting flow among study participants.

The present study explored Camp Encore Coda of Sweden, Maine through an exploratory lens built on several pedagogical frameworks. The study was framed by holistic education rooted in multidimensional growth and the construct of a community of practice. This research sought to better understand the complex learning and interactive dynamics within one music camp environment. In surveying both the social and musical aspects of camp, the aim was to find what, if anything, makes it a unique learning environment, and in which ways the camp facilitates growth elements that may differ from those available within the traditional classroom. This study represents another lens for seeking out ways to create optimal learning conditions, expanding on recent research such as Diaz and Silveira's (2012) study of flow among participants at a summer music camp.

The following research questions guided the study:

- 1) In what ways, if any, does residential music camp facilitate musical and personal growth?
- 2) In what ways, if any, does the learning experience at residential music camp differ from that of the traditional classroom?
- 3) What do participating youth report about these possible differences?

## Method

This investigation was a case study exploring Camp Encore Coda. Case studies are intensive examinations of the unique qualities present within a unit or environment of study, bounded by time and activity (Creswell, 2003; Stake, 2000). Merriam (1998) suggests that a case study is useful in constructing a holistic description of an environment, rich with experiences, events, interactions, and characteristics, but restricted to a finite time for observations and limited number of interviewees. Data collection consisted of observations, interviews, surveys, and one focus group. As the sole researcher, I collected data from Aug. 4–10, 2013, the last week of camp's final two-week session for 2013. My time on staff at Camp Encore Coda in 2012 laid the groundwork for my interest in this inquiry and established my credibility with the directors, the faculty and staff, and the returning campers.

This camp is co-educational, containing a balance between female and male campers, and averages approximately 140 total campers. Campers are categorized as being part of either lower or upper camp; lower camp distinguished by youth under age 12 and upper camp for those over age 12. Only upper campers were administered surveys and interviewed due to time limitation and a desire for responses from the more experienced portion of the population. The camp population also includes a faculty of 60, comprised of experienced music educators with masters and doctorate degrees, college-age counselors from various parts of the world, and a staff specializing in other crafts necessary for the various activities and overall operation of the camp. Campers primarily come from the northeastern part of the United States (85%); however, there is a small percent of the population coming from other parts of the United States (10%), as well as other countries (5%). Due to the highly specialized instruction provided at Camp Encore Coda, the overall socioeconomic status (SES) tends to be high, but this is not to say there are no youth from families of lower SES, since the camp offers scholarship opportunities to make camp accessible to families who could not otherwise afford the full cost of tuition.

I conducted observations daily encompassing all facets of camp life from meal times to structured and unstructured musical and non-musical activities. These observations included

various activities ranging from large and small ensemble rehearsal, concerts, recreational time, meal times, and various social activities. Every day four to five major activities or classes were observed. A representative day of formal observations may include an orchestra rehearsal, musicianship class, jazz combo rehearsal, musical theatre rehearsal, and an evening camper concert. In addition, informal observations were noted throughout the day, such as observing campers socializing between classes, hanging out around their bunk areas, or making music in the field.

As part of my triangulation of data, I administered a survey to 22 student participants on the first and last day of each session (see appendices for surveys). Surveys administered at the beginning and end of camp were used to ascertain meaningful variation within the sample (Jansen, 2010), such as prior camp experience, which helped guide in selecting participants and in developing specific questions for the individual interviews and a focus group session. The surveys contained both a 5-point Likert-like rating scale and open- and close-ended questions addressing areas of musicality as well as specific social skills such as self-confidence or responsibility. According to Cohen, Manion, and Morrison (2011), acquiring data on attitudes, opinions, behaviors, and experiences is useful in conducting exploratory research. From the pool of survey participants, four upper campers volunteered to participate in a focus group session. The focus group served as a secondary function; the surveys provided preliminary information and the focus group session provided an opportunity to further explore the responses from the surveys. According to Morgan (1996), “what makes the discussion in focus groups more than the sum of separate individual interviews is the fact that the participants both query each other and explain themselves to each other” (p. 139).

I interviewed (see appendices for interview protocol) 14 study participants, including 4 veteran music faculty, 4 veteran counselors, 2 camp directors, and 4 upper camp campers (ages 13+). The administration was a purposive sample to obtain a representative set of experiences. Students were selected based on their survey responses. For example, one camper noted in her survey response that she had been returning to camp for several summers and described camp as her “home away from home.” Interviewing this camper uncovered the reasons why she returned and what factors contributed to Camp Encore Coda being her “home away from home.” The interview brought greater meaning to her survey responses. All students and faculty who were approached agreed to participate in the interviews. Participation was optional and consent forms were distributed and collected before the onset of camp. Ethical concerns such as confidentiality were upheld to the highest extent as this study complied with all IRB regulations.

Throughout the investigative process I recorded analytical and self-reflective memos, thereby enriching the process, documenting thoughts and making implicit ideas explicit (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) in order to build theoretical frameworks to explain the collected data (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). I analyzed the data by separating it into themes and sub themes, using a process known as axial coding to make conceptual connections between a category and its subcategories findings. The axial coding process involved tracking recurring themes that emerged in the data and organizing them in a mind map format. Some of these themes included environment, community, choices, musical immersion, and structure. The themes were than interwoven in a logical way, one constructed on a theoretical framework rooted in the concept of ‘Community of Practice’. The themes determined to be most significant, those which were analyzed and discussed in the findings, emerged in the data as frequently recurring, showing clear signs of pattern. Other themes that surfaced less frequently, such

as dissatisfaction with aspects of the camp experience, or contradictions to other participant opinions were also included.

Validity was established by using converging lines of inquiry, which make conclusions more convincing and ultimately more accurate (Yin, 2003). This was accomplished using multiple sources of evidence, repeatedly corroborating the different sources. According to Yin (2009), “with data triangulation, the potential problems of construct validity also can be addressed because the multiple sources of evidence essentially provide multiple measures of the same phenomenon” (p. 117). In addition to three university professors reviewing the raw data, the two directors of the camp and two study participants from the camp’s music faculty conducted a member-check process.

## **Results and Discussion**

### *Camp Setting*

The residential camp environment created by Camp Encore Coda can be seen in several ways: the natural setting, the staff, the clearly defined daily camper schedule, the interaction between youth living together, the interaction of youth with staff, and the overall structure and learning philosophy that the camp promotes. It is within the strategically organized interweaving of these components that a distinctive environment is formed. Campers within this setting not only receive specialized instruction and daily intensive practice, but they also get to “just be kids” for several weeks. Here, youth are away from home, sleeping in a cabin with several others similar in age, enjoying campfires at nighttime, eating in a dining hall as a group, engaging in silly camp games, making new friendships, and developing and discovering who they are, as individuals.

Upon arrival at Camp Encore Coda the feeling of entering an isolated world in the woods, away from the familiarities of modern society, becomes immediately apparent. The use of vehicles on camp grounds is limited to a few camp staff members and the occasional visitor. Scattered around camp are various brown, well-preserved, wooden structures, accessible through a connection of dirt paths. The wooden structures where most of the teaching and activities take place have electricity, but no heating or air conditioning. These structures include small practice huts/lesson studios, large rehearsal and performance halls, health lodge, dining hall, bathroom facilities, and cabins for living.

Camp Encore Coda is located in the woods of Sweden, Maine, off the beaten path and approximately fifteen minutes by car to the nearest town. The camp property is situated on the edge of Stearns Pond, one of many fresh bodies of water in the area. The property is engulfed by a forest containing numerous species of trees, plant life, and the occasional roaming creatures typically found living in this woodland environment. One can best understand the size of the camp grounds traveling by foot, taking approximately no more than ten minutes to move from one end of camp to the other. Along this walk of mostly dirt paths that roll up and down, depending on the terrain, the occasional area of open grass area, the recreation/sports field, or the well-maintained green area in front of the administration building, interrupts the ebb and flow of movement.

### *Cabin Living*

At Camp Encore Coda campers are divided into upper and lower camp, terminology that distinguishes between campers finishing grades three through six for lower camp and grades seven through twelve for upper camp. Campers of similar age are grouped together into

their respective cabins for the summer. The cabin is a home base and central hub for every camper. This is the place where many initial and often close and long-lasting friendships occur. This is where campers may relax and socialize, where they practice alone or with peers, and where they sleep. The cabin represents a sub-structure of the larger camp community, a place where the youth tend to establish strong bonds and sense of belonging. As this is the campers' first introduction to the residential camp experience, integration into the cabin may be easy for some, while for others, a challenge that must be overcome. Ultimately, what is observed here is a group of youth living together in a cabin, forming a cohesive unit built on the common interest of music. Communal living plays an integral part to the overall experience at Camp Encore Coda. This element proves to be foundational to the camp experience, and is consistent with other residential camp studies positing that living together with peers in a residential camp environment fosters development of interpersonal skills, self-confidence, self-concept, independence, problem solving, team work, and self-empowerment (American Camp Association, 2006; Bieleschki, Younger, Henderson, Ewing, & Casey, 2002; Ozier, 2009; Thurber et al., 2007; Westervelt et al., 1998). In this living situation members interact as a unit, including socializing, cleaning, eating, and negotiating daily struggles that might arise. The constant interaction among peers in close quarters creates an environment completely different from what the campers experience the other months of the year. Living in a cabin, peers are forced to interact, work together, share ideas, and struggle through the daily challenges of living away from home. This confluence of events results in the formation of a cohesive unit where strong bonds of friendship are formed, one where tensions need to be managed and resolved.

### *Choice*

At the onset of each camp session, the campers design their own schedule, choosing the musical activities and recreational activities in which they want to participate. Creating schedules provides each camper with a daily structure to follow for the next three weeks. This initial step lays the groundwork and sets the tone for a camp experience where student decision-making is an integral part of daily life. The importance of having choices was articulated by several campers, one saying "I am mostly looking forward to choosing my ensemble" (Camper Survey) and another stating "It's very good that campers can decide their classes. We can be much more independent" (Camper Survey). The sense of having responsibility for oneself, particularly via the opportunity to make personal curricular decisions, is very important at camp. This inclination toward more independent choices begins to emerge as a distinct trait of the camp experience, best expressed by a third camper who states that, "Without parents, you can make a lot more of your own choices" (Camper Interview).

### *Responsibility*

While life at camp is filled with choices, structure and guidance are nevertheless a constant. During the three weeks a camper is at camp they fall into a daily routine. A day in the life of a typical camper begins around 7:00 a.m. with wakeup and cleanup. Campers are expected to rise at the same time so that everyone can prepare for the day, clean the cabin and bathroom facilities, and arrive on time together for breakfast by 7:30 a.m. Restroom facilities are fully maintained by the campers, each cabin takes turns assuming cleaning duty in the morning before breakfast. This cleaning duty is in addition to the daily expectation of group cabin cleanup.

Cleanliness and responsibility for individual and group living areas is rigidly upheld at camp and publicly recognized when cabin clean up points are announced at chosen meal times: winners at the end of a session receive an ice cream party for placing first in the clean-up competition.

### *Structure*

There are two scheduled times for each meal during the day, one for upper camp and one for lower. Meals are served in the dining hall, a building where campers sit by cabin and eat all of their meals together. The food is prepared on-site and consists of a variety of options, accommodating multiple diet preferences. There is no restriction for the campers on what they can eat and how much, however, counselors of younger campers do provide guidance when deemed necessary. Mealtimes at camp are a time for both food and mental nutrition. While campers eat they are also socializing, often discussing happenings from their various classes, rehearsals, and other activities. This time of coming together as a cabin, after parting ways to attend each ones' own unique schedule, represents a time of further communal bonding. Between breakfast and lunch and lunch and dinner, campers attend their classes, rehearsals, and activities. There is a multitude of activities from which to choose, ensuring that every camper is accommodated and has a full schedule every day. The majority of this time is spent immersed in musical activities, with one to two hours a day available for non-musical activities. Several activities that comprise this schedule include large ensemble rehearsals, private lessons, musicianship classes, musical drama rehearsal, chamber group rehearsals, swimming/lessons, boating, field sports, arts and crafts, or model rocketry. Campers take responsibility for getting to their scheduled destinations, walking to their various activities without a chaperone. This plethora of activities offered within the daily structural framework makes camp feel like a living and breathing experience, where staying busy and productive at a rapid and constant rate is the norm.

After a full day of activities and dinner, campers have pre-planned social activities, concerts, and personal down time. Several special social events include casino/game night (fake money), Rhino Night (lip sync contest), and the camp dance. Campfire night is one particular activity that many campers really enjoy, encompassing a combination of music and skits (often on the comical side), performed by staff and campers.

### *Mutual Support*

An outside observer will certainly and easily notice the non-competitive environment fostered by this camp and remark on its possible supporting role in the openness toward the act of performing evident in most, if not all, campers. The support campers experience emanates from many sources, namely music teachers, counselors, and peers. Particularly apparent is peer support. Spanning all age ranges, this can be easily observed as eight-year-old violinists watch and cheer for high school jazz band players and vice versa. The concerts prove to be very special times; a time of coming together and enjoying all the hard work everyone has been engaged in day after day. These concerts are more than just performances, but rather emotionally charged experiences where campers and staff can be seen laughing, cheering, relaxing, examining, bonding, and at times, shedding tears.

### *Immersion*

Camp Encore Coda possesses a distinctive trait of fully enculturating the students in a musical environment. One aspect of this is the constant playing, listening, and exposure



to music learning opportunities every camper receives. However, this musically immersive environment is not only defined by a place where the youth are making music all the time, but also by the presence of music during social and recreational activities. The denotation of musical immersion is expressed by one camper who states “I like having the [practice] studios and walking by and everybody is just playing stuff” (Camper Interview), indicating that even as a passerby on foot, individuals at camp always have music around them. A visitor to camp would experience this as they walk to various locations, hearing the jazz band rehearsing off in the distance and simultaneously a vocal or string group rehearsing nearby under a tree.

Total musical immersion seems to be attributed to several factors. The most obvious is the overall common interest in music. This interest is combined with the desire to be surrounded by other like-minded individuals who also seek to expand their musicianship, particularly in ways they may not be able to do so the rest of the year. As one camper expressed, “the best thing about being here is that you are here with people who also like music” (Camper Interview).

### *Isolation*

Another contextual element to emerge throughout the data as impactful on learning was the geographical isolation of camp. The data indicate that isolation from society in an outdoor/woodsy location is an integral component of the camp experience, supporting Diaz and Silveira’s research (2012), which reports heightened flow levels among music camp participants in such an environment. The connection to flow is evidenced in one camper’s comment noting, “The fun outdoor camp environment probably helps me stay concentrated” (Camper Interview). In this setting campers are removed from familiar technologies such as phone and computer. It is important to note, however, that the one technology permitted, in addition to electric lighting, is IPOD music. One camper describes this aspect saying, “You are never truly indoors here because there are screen doors and everything; you are never truly out of the fresh air into some stuffy room” (Camper Interview). Every rehearsal space at Camp Encore Coda has a degree of audibility and visibility from the outside in and vice versa. The environment is set up in a way that does not confine students indoors the way they would be in a traditional classroom. Consequently, if one is present on the camp property, they are constantly reminded it is a music camp by the always-present musical happenings occurring throughout. Several faculty members at Camp Encore Coda corroborate this, describing life at camp as “living in the camp bubble” (Faculty/Staff Interviews). This “bubble” is not only constructed through the musical engagements at camp, but also the social interactions that emerge within the community of practice context and the philosophy upheld by the camp. A faculty member explains this culture:

[The directors] try to and do create a community where we respect people, regardless of how long they’ve studied music, regardless of what language they speak, regardless of how many years they have been at camp, regardless if they have medical, physical, and social problems, very open minded to all forms of music and all forms of people.  
(Faculty Interview)

The directors at Camp Encore Coda embrace and promote this culture, so much that it deeply influences the curriculum at camp, both the explicit and the hidden.

### *Socialization*

Social engagements of all sorts take place during camp in a diversity of situations. These interactions perform a catalyst role linking background experience to personal and communal ones, and thus facilitating bonding, sharing, and trust. During an outdoor dinner cookout I observed a group of adolescent boys sitting together at a picnic table. The table was comprised of several American born youth and two campers from South American countries whose first language is Spanish. A discussion unfolded, where they engaged in teaching each other various words in Spanish and English. This sparked the interest of another camper at the table who had studied French in school, furthering the language learning to include both French and Spanish. This happening exemplified the plurality of social engagements at camp, where youth with different backgrounds and understandings come together through the common interest of music, subsequently sharing information and experiences.

The prolonged period of social and life skill development experienced at camp should come as no surprise, since many summer camps in North America, as the literature articulates, provide similar opportunities. Thurber et al. (2007) mentions the building of life skills as a trait that characterizes the camp setting. Such skill acquisitions support the all-encompassing observation that camp personnel have created a rich and meaningful learning environment for the youth. It is evident from the data that such a communal living experience creates what might amount to a sociological space that optimizes the possibility for a transformative learning experience.

### **Conclusions**

This study was conducted to dissect the components that make up Camp Encore Coda and construct a theoretical framework that divulges the ways in which this particular environment facilitates learning. Through the questions below, the existence of Camp Encore Coda is brought to life as the findings are interwoven and presented in large interconnected pedagogical themes. The following research questions bring clarity to this examination, illuminating the relevance of the findings for Camp Encore Coda and for music educators in a variety of contexts.

#### *Research Question 1. In what ways, if any, does residential music camp facilitate musical and personal growth?*

The key element to emerge out of this question is the link between the formation of a community of practice and facilitation of musical and personal growth. Within this community, students showed themselves to be driven by different motivations: some seek to improve their musicianship, some hope for new experiences, and some anticipate the social interactions that might result from being away from home, in the woods, with peers who also love making music. Regardless of the campers' intent, they were all connected by music-making in a communal living context. Music is a common thread attracting the youth to a learning environment that reaps multidimensional growth outcomes. A key notion underlying participation in this context is that the youth want to be there. The initial motivation to attend camp is further propelled by the marked growth experienced in a new environment with musical progress and the formation of social relationships as the underlying stimuli. Desire to attend camp supports the multi-layered levels of growth campers experience during their three weeks on-site and is connected to the major themes uncovered in this study. Immersion-enculturation, communal living, structure, and isolation, are among the important themes that emerge from this study.

While not speaking directly about camps, Benedict (2009) presents a description that illuminates the significance of the kind of communal learning environment established at camp settings, stating, “These aren’t just communities of young vibrant musicians of all kinds; rather, these are vibrant musicians who engage critically with the world around them and who realize potentiality beyond musical engagements” (p. 164).

The formation of multifaceted social relationships within a continuously busy daily routine, form the basis for both the social and musical skills development experienced by campers, consequently providing a place where youth can stretch themselves and discover the abilities they may not have recognized prior to the camp experience.

Through the established structure and self-reliance formed at camp augmented by complex interactions, youth develop a sense of belonging. Growth is both sociological and skill-based, linking back to a holistic education that allows students to experience a more diverse and complex kind of learning. The learning outcomes can be traced to the intensive daily instruction and informal learning, often peer-driven or unplanned, stemming from interactions that occur throughout the day in and out of classes. The intersection of “academic learning” with socialization follows Schmidt’s (2012) assertion that “musical education must be interwoven with other concerns and other more encompassing constructs if it is to build robust, meaningful, and complex learning outcomes” (p. 52).

*Research Question 2. In what ways, if any, does the learning experience at residential music camp differ from that of the traditional classroom?*

The growth that participants experience during their time at camp reinforces pre-existing knowledge, building on familiarity, while also creating a space to try new things and make decisions they normally do not have the opportunity to make during the rest of the year. There are several distinct ways in which the learning experiences at Camp Encore Coda parallel and contrast with those of the traditional classroom. The perceptions and overall feelings that campers share concerning the various facets of camp illustrate why they attend, what makes camp unique, and how they view camp compared to their traditional classrooms at home. Camp exists as an extension of their learning in school, presenting opportunities to develop through the support of a community of practice. While schools have and will retain their own, often rigid, structures, the data from this study suggests that finding ways to replicate the sense of connection and ownership that many campers yearn for is worth pursuing. Within Camp Encore Coda, campers exhibit ownership over their musical learning as well as the community, taking pride in belonging to a place they feel they can fit in and thrive. This sense of ownership may be attributed to a camp structure that enables numerous opportunities for daily choice making, with greater freedoms of choice than one might experience in a school setting. The wide array of options at camp comes as a unique aspect to this environment, one that perhaps cannot occur in another context where multiple academic disciplines are also studied.

This leads to the notion of time, an ever present reality and challenge in schools. At camp, continuous and intense learning is collapsed into three weeks. The musical education is interwoven with social concerns and consequently fosters information sharing from the moment campers wake up to when they finally go to sleep at night. At school student learning typically ends when the bell rings. The absence of “learning time” limitation in the camp context affords students ample amount of time to perform teacher and self-assigned tasks in a considerably shorter time frame than they would in school settings.

Lastly, at camp students push themselves in ways they may not at home. This particular kind of motivation is evident in the analysis and seems to emanate from the community support.

The external motivation of community builds upon the every student's natural enjoyment of music. Compared to school, camp offers new experiences in the context of a low pressure, noncompetitive environment, yet, yields more complex, highly focused engagements and relationships than normally occurs in the school classroom. It is important to note, however, that understanding the depth of engagement in all schools cannot be established without full analysis of specific schools. Finally, comparative findings in this study are solely based on the experiences and reports by Camp Encore participants regarding their schools at home.

*Research Question 3. What do participating youth report about these possible differences?*

The structure and pedagogical orientation of school classrooms exhibit distinct contrasts to those of camp. It is the intersection of the familiar and unfamiliar that defines this particular learning environment. The youth realize that through the intersection of different and varied pedagogical approaches in a more holistically grounded context, they have opportunities to grow in ways they do not during the other months of the year. They seem quite aware of this distinction.

Campers felt the support of living and working in a community of practice and expressed heightened motivation from their experience in an environment where everyone practiced music. Within this context the youth look up to their teachers, feeding off of their shared energy and passion for music. Campers found that the relationships formed resulting from environmental and camp cultural influences were very important to them. The lack of formality extended to everyone, including faculty—who were referred to by campers and colleagues on a first name basis—furthered the connection that campers felt to the community. As a result, camper-staff relationships fostered multidimensional learning, which was perceived by the campers, who felt comfortable seeking advice from their mentors inside and outside of class. Campers expressed that these relationships contributed to an environment that portrayed differences between school and camp.

The youth further realized the importance of functioning as their own learning agent, embracing the opportunities at camp to make decisions they normally cannot make at home or in school. Campers felt empowered by these opportunities, realizing that they were capable of learning on their own, and accomplishing tasks they may have not attempted or thought they could conquer in the past. The sense of confidence was demonstrated in their performances and constant engagement with peers and staff around camp.

While this study explored in some detail many of the themes pertaining to residential music camp, particularly of a positive nature, issues I did not anticipate and nor have time to investigate still remain. Some are negative. These include time constraints, the notion of “forced” practice, and the challenges of an unwritten curriculum that is consequently unevenly enforced.

*Future Research*

The significance of this research lies not only in uncovering and addressing the present questions, but also the opening of doorways for future investigative endeavors. This study of one camp may pave the way for future research regarding camp environs as well as pedagogical or curricular issues found within them.

First, expanding on the data collected in this study, a future study could seek parental perceptions of campers, exploring what they feel the impact of camp is upon the growth of their children.

As the “payers” who send their children away for the summer, and in many cases multiple summers in a row, it would be interesting to inquire why parents feel camp is “worthwhile.”

Second, camp is not only a place for development among youth, but also a breeding and training ground for young as well as experienced teachers. According to Richards (2007), training teachers to be prepared for working with diverse populations is an existing challenge in our educational system. The significance of the time teachers spend teaching music in the summer months may not only impact the youth at the camps, but also the quality of our entire music education system as it facilitates teachers’ consistent sharpening of their skills in a variety of educational settings. Additional studies, such as the investigation of the staff experience would be a meaningful extension of this initial survey.

Though this study examined only one residential music camp, several other North American camps exhibit many of the same characteristics as Camp Encore Coda while maintaining their own unique traits. Two examples of traits found unique to Camp Encore Coda which may or may not be embraced at other camps are the aim for a non-competitive environment and the small size of the camp; the physical site and total population. A comparative study of other camps would expand the current findings, broadening the way we see how camps function and exist as an important part of music education.

Lastly, more specific issues concerning music learning emerged in the data and stand as worthy constructs for additional research. One of these is the issue of ordering social interaction with or through music. Further exploration might offer insight into the social as well as subjective lives of youth interested in music. Furthermore, this kind of purposeful social ordering leads us to consider the notion of agency and the multifaceted ways in which it can be constructed by youth.

Representing just a few potential pathways for future investigation, there numerous lenses from which a researcher can pursue related work in the future. The exploration of Camp Encore Coda uncovered environmental and relational complexities that transcend solely one context, but rather, expose possibilities for future research and applications of findings to educational contexts of all kinds.

### *Final Remarks*

Camp Encore Coda has created an experience that caters to a diversity of youth from different cultures, socioeconomic status, and musical abilities, some who go on to pursue music, and many who forge ahead into other fields of study such as math, science, writing, and technology. Much deeper than its impact on the improvement of musical and social skills, the camp is a place that nurtures and catapults tomorrow’s thinkers out into the world. Providing much more than simply a new learning opportunity, residential music camp creates a second home for many of its participants, a place where learning and socialization are conjoined, where individuals can embrace their own passions and dreams, sharing them with others without judgment, enabling the youth to grow into their own shoes in a way that works for them.

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