

## Camp Counselor Experiences: Personal and Professional Transformations

### Giving meaning to the Camp Counselor Experience

The Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs from the Department of State of the United States promotes the mutual understanding between Americans and people of other countries. One of the programs that BridgeUSA offers is the Camp Counselor Program. As cited by Baker (2020) and among other definitions, Camp Counselors are responsible for the everyday care and safety of campers in their charge (American Camp Association, 1993; Meier & Henderson, 2012). To follow this line, the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) in Colombia has managed the International Camp Counselor Program for over 30 years by giving the opportunity to young people from the country to participate in an intercultural exchange in a summer camp in The United States.

Historically, there has been a considerable and increasing number of participants that come from language teaching academic programs. When revising the existing literature, it has been found that researching the Summer Camp experience has been a topic of interest in countries such as Canada, USA and a couple of papers have been conducted in Colombia. For example, the American Camp Association has its Research line, and the Camping Magazine offers a wide number of articles on several topics around the summer camp experience. Moreover, Baker (2020) wrote a book titled *Becoming and Being a Camp Counsellor: Discourse, Power Relations and Emotions* which raises a call for camp researchers and industry leaders to rethink how camp counselor roles are understood, shaped and embodied, and how reflexive management practices can take part of. Finally, in Colombia, Mesa's investigation (2020) aimed to look deeper into the didactic and pedagogical growth of students participating in the role of Camp Counselors. Nevertheless, there is still a lot to do to academically and formally characterize the personal and professional transformations that language teachers from a private university have at the International Camp Counselor Program.

### Transformations in Research

For some people, summer camp jobs are seen as "fun" jobs and for this reason any person makes the decision to apply. As cited in Baker (2020), Camp counselors are

often studying or seeking careers in fields that are unrelated to outdoor education or outdoor recreation (Magnuson, 1992); hence, summer camp employment is seen as "fun" work rather than career development. Researching about the International Camp Counselor Program could bring value because there could be an interest to show the impact that the program has had in Colombia. Additionally, both organizations in the agreement for developing the program might benefit from the research as well as future participants that may investigate in the future about the Camp Counselor Program.

### The Bridge for the Characterization

All the information that is going to be collected in this research emerges from the daily basis on the camp site. It is going to be based on every single experience. For this reason, this research is framed within the interpretative paradigm and the qualitative approach. Denzin and Lincoln (2000) state that qualitative design involves an interpretive and naturalistic approach, stating that "qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or to interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them" (p. 2).

The researcher has decided on narratives and semi-structured interviews to characterize the different personal and professional aspects that the intercultural experiences leave behind.

### References

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