

HOW THE CRADLE BEACH SUMMER ENRICHMENT PROGRAM INFLUENCES EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE AND ACADEMIC SUCCESS



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Emotional Intelligence and Student Success

Prepared by:

Steven J. Harvey, Ph.D.
**Center for Educational and Career
Advancement (CECA), Inc.**

Gregory R. Wood, Ph.D.
HausMark Research Services

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EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE AND STUDENT SUCCESS

ABSTRACT

Founded in 1888, Cradle Beach has a well-deserved reputation for serving disadvantaged children from Buffalo, NY by giving them an opportunity for a summer camp experience traditionally available only to children from higher income families.

The goal of this particular study was to examine the Summer Enrichment Program (SEP) with regard to four Immediate Outcome variables listed in the organization's logic model:

- **Self-Awareness** - the ability to detect and decipher emotions in faces, pictures, voices, and cultural artifacts—including the ability to identify one's own emotions. Self-Awareness represents a basic aspect of emotional intelligence, as it makes all other processing of emotional information possible.
- **Self-Management (Self-Control)** - the ability to harness emotions to facilitate various cognitive activities, such as thinking and problem solving. The emotionally intelligent person can capitalize fully upon his or her changing moods in order to best fit the task at hand.
- **Social Awareness** - the ability to comprehend the emotional language of others and to appreciate complicated relationships among emotions. For example, understanding emotions encompasses the ability to be sensitive to slight variations between emotions, other people's needs and the ability to recognize and describe how other people's emotions evolve over time.
- **Relationship Management (Social Competency)** the ability to regulate emotions in both ourselves and in others. Therefore, the emotionally intelligent person can harness emotions, even negative ones, and manage them to achieve intended goals and cultivate relationships.

METHODOLOGY

The study sample consisted of 529 campers who attended Cradle Beach during the summer of 2012. Campers ranged in age from 8 to 17 (grades 3 to 12). The group was almost evenly divided between boys and girls (49% male, 51% female). Campers came from a variety of ethnic groups: 50.0% White, 39.3% African-American, 10% Hispanic, 7.9% Native American, 0.8% Hispanic, and 9.1% "Other". (The percentages do not add to 100% because many children indicated that they identify with more than one ethnic group, reflecting the growing number of mixed race people in our society).

Campers completed surveys at the beginning and end of their camp experience. The surveys measured their standing on four scales that correspond to the Outcome variables described above.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Research indicates that Cradle Beach works. Cradle Beach programs are grounded in multiple disciplines which combine to have an exponential impact. From the field of education, researchers like Winkler, De Vita, Carol, et al., 2010; Afterschool Alliance, 2010; Costley, 2011; Black, Somers, and Doolittle, 2009 have demonstrated the need for engaging environments that ensure a deeper more meaningful experience for youth that not only enhance content learning but also promote the development of deeper level skills recently identified by *Academically Adrift: Limited Learning on College Campuses* (University of Chicago Press, 2011) and a number of other publications as grossly lacking in American youth. Cradle Beach programming provides opportunities for youth to engage in activities that complement the classroom while simultaneously developing higher level skills like critical thinking, problem solving, complex reasoning, decision making, and data analysis that are nearly impossible to develop solely through today's educational environment. Enhancing this educational framing is the field of social work. For instance, Long and Bos (1998) demonstrate in their research that multiple venue approaches achieve greater results than programs which focus on one setting and one type of programming. Finally, the world of neuroscience and psychology come together in an in-depth analysis of emotional intelligence and the value of purposeful efforts to develop emotional intelligence in youth, informing programming decisions and outcomes analysis by Cradle Beach (Goleman, 2008; Goleman, Boyatzis, & McKee, 2002; Collins, 2001). This interdisciplinary approach has informed the multi-faceted programs of Cradle Beach, the development of multiple higher level skill sets in students, and the development of this proposal.

Extending our understanding of multi-venue impact and emotional intelligence is the body of research that examines the impact that our environment plays on our personal development. Bonnett (2004) states that the "incomplete learning" that occurs within students can and should be attributed to the "technologizing of education" (pg. 125) that "emphasizes abstract knowledge over social process" (Zandviet, 2012). The literature places a great deal of emphasis on "place-based" learning environments that provide for social processes and enriching environments that result in long-term benefits in children (Zandviet, 2012). For example, when students engage in environmental education, they gain a greater understanding and ability to analyze, conceptualize, hypothesize, problem solve, and develop strategies or solutions to problems (Basile, 2000; Corral-Verdugo and Frais-Armenta, 1996; Cummins and Snively, 2000; Kenney et al., 2003; Lieberman and Hoody, 2000; Lord, 1999). Furthermore, and most critical to today's society where students are most often labelled, "unmotivated," place-based learning leads to intrinsic motivation (Basile, 2000; Cummins and Snively, 2000; Kenney et al., 2003; Lord, 1999). Other outcomes to place-based learning is the development of social and collaborative skills (Johnson and Johnson, 2003), cultivation of ideas through meaningful dialogue (Zandviet, 2012), and low and medium performing students that often demonstrate greater leadership characteristics as compared to traditional educational environments (Cummins and Snively, 2000; Kenney et al., 2003). In summary, place-based learning results in an ability within students to view the interconnectivity of the world and environment they occupy (Zandviet, 2007) and will result in the development of attributes that will allow students to effectively generate sustainable solutions to the pressing environmental, social, and economic issues of today (Zandviet, 2012, UNESCO, 2007).

Within place-based learning is the element of inquiry-based learning. This educational practice is a more natural way to learn and process new content, ideas, and concepts while enriching the experience of students and ensuring a more meaningful understanding of what is being examined (Lofgren et al., 2013). However, when inquiry-based learning was implemented in the traditional classroom at the elementary level, the challenges are great and often do not lead to enhancements of academic outcomes (Lofgren et al., 2013). The challenge remains connected to the concept of place-based learning and when combined with inquiry-based learning, expands the development of higher order skill sets required in today's heuristic or more

organic work environments where daily tasks no longer break down into a linear or sequential order (Pink, 2009; Watson, 2002; Bergqvist and Saljo, 1994). Within the research, there is strong evidence that inquiry-based learning results in stronger academic outcomes for students when implemented simultaneously with place-based learning and should be a part of any productive educational environment and experience (Zandvriet, 2012; Crawford, 1997; Harlen, 2009; NRC, 2001). Finally, like place-based learning, inquiry-based learning promotes intrinsic motivation and positive attitudes toward subject matter (Brown, 2000; Kubiack, 2005).

In addition to the previous research, there has been an evolving body of literature that examines the impact of programs on emotional intelligence and its influence over academic achievement. Ashdown and Bernard (2012) examined the impact of a program on elementary grade students that purposefully sought to develop emotional intelligence skills and, as a result, increased academic achievement. The Center on the Social Emotional Foundations for Early Learning (CSEFEL) for young children defines “social-emotional development as developing the capacity...to form close and secure adult relationships; experience, regulate, and express emotions in socially and culturally appropriate ways; and explore the environment and learn” (2008). CASEL (The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning) has outlined five core social and emotional competencies that are “important foundations for young people’s well-being: self-awareness, social awareness, self-management, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making” (Ashdown and Bernard, pg. 397, 2012). As young people develop these skills they too expand their perspectives, develop confidence, expand their ability to develop health adult and peer relationships, resolve conflicts, increase their ability to persevere in the face of adversity, cope well with anger and hurt, and more times than not, successfully manage their emotions (Shonkoff and Philips, 2000; Parlakian, 2003). These findings coincide with a variety of researchers who have conducted extensive studies on the development of emotional intelligence in adults like Goleman, Boyatzis, McKee (2002) and Collins (2001). The contrast in what the overall impact on emotional intelligence ultimately influences is not as great as one would expect given the age differences. Essentially, those who are capable of recognizing their own feelings and managing those feelings are better positioned to recognize other’s feelings and emotions and develop positive relationships based on those recognitions and abilities. Whether young or old, the context in which one develops positive relationships is essentially the same with similar influences over abilities and achievements.

For young children, evidence suggests that when a child successfully developed his or her emotional intelligence, they are more likely to realize positive outcomes on academic success. Research supports that “in conjunction with cognitive competence (reading, writing, and critical thinking skills), social emotional competence (collaboration skills, motivation, and study skills) is an important predictor of academic achievement” (Ashdown and Bernard, pg. 398, 2012; DiPerna and Elliot, 2002). Bernard (2004) explained that students who demonstrated higher levels of emotional intelligence, particularly those who were at-risk, demonstrated greater levels of academic achievement in comparison to those students with low emotional intelligence. These findings have been similarly demonstrated by Payton et. al. 2008; Joseph and Strain 2003). In a meta-analysis examining 34 academic sites, Nelson et al. (2003) “found that, overall, social and emotional learning programs had positive effects on both cognitive and academic outcomes in the short term (pre-school), medium term (primary school) and the long term (high school) (Ashdown and Bernard, pg. 398, 2012). Therefore, and with a significant amount of research backing up the findings, emotional intelligence (social emotional learning) has a long-term positive influence over academic achievement.

FINDINGS

The findings of this study clearly demonstrate a positive impact on the participants of the Summer Enrichment Program (SEP) implemented by Cradle Beach.

Four key findings emerged from the study:

1. The Outcome variables appear to be highly interrelated. In other words, a child's level on one of the outcome variables appears to be related to their level on one or more of the other outcome variables. Not surprisingly, the 2 variables dealing with Self-awareness and Self-control are highly correlated and the 2 variables dealing with social skills and relationships are highly correlated. Finally, the variables dealing with individual emotions and behavior are highly correlated with the 2 variables dealing with social skills and relationships, suggesting that the ability to regulate one's personal emotions and behavior has some influence on one's success in social situations.
2. The 4 Outcome variables assessed in this study appear to be related to academic achievement. Each of the variables is positively correlated with grade average. While the magnitude of the correlations between the Outcome variables and grade average is not large, all of the pre-test and post-test scores on the four Outcome variables were positive and statistically significant.
3. The Summer Enrichment Program (SEP) appears to have an impact on changing camper's standing on the four outcome variables. However, the nature of this impact varies depending on the camper's starting point on the variables. Generally, campers who come to Cradle Beach with low or moderate levels of each Outcome variable seem to end the camp experience with higher levels. Campers who come to Cradle Beach with high levels on the variables appear to experience a slight decrease in scale value, although this decline is very small.
4. The current study provides additional evidence to support a finding in earlier studies that suggest in Buffalo public schools, academic performance declines as students get older and rise to higher grade levels. Grade average was negatively correlated with both age and grade level. The finding was statistically significant.

DISCUSSION

The Summer Enrichment Program (SEP) designed and implemented by Cradle Beach, has provided significant evidence through evidence-based research that it does positively influence the emotional intelligence of its SEP participants. This impact on emotional intelligence then extends to positively influencing the academic achievement of SEP participants. The evidence disseminated in the Findings section support this conclusion.

As a result of these findings, the study concludes that:

- It is appropriate for Cradle Beach to include the four Initial Outcome variables explored in this study in the organization's logical model – the conceptual framework for its programming.
- The Summer Enrichment Program has a positive impact in terms of enhancing these characteristics in students who need help the most – those who come to camp with only low or moderate levels of the Outcome variables. Further research is needed to understand why students who come to camp with high levels experience a slight decline. The organization might consider ways to target students who are already high on these variables and reinforce their existing strengths. At the same time, the organization should continue to explore ways to have an even greater impact on students who come to camp with low or moderate levels of the four variables – these are the groups most in need of attention.
- Finally, the finding that academic performance drops as students get older provides additional support for the idea that early interventions are important as well as the idea that building Developmental Assets

that lead to academic achievement is a process that must be addressed at all grade levels – not just the early grades.

While these findings provide significant evidence of the positive impact of Cradle Beach programming on individuals with disabilities and individuals who come from some of the poorest parts of the WNY region, it would be beneficial to replicate this research, albeit on a smaller sampling, to test the reliability of the findings. As the process to replicate the findings is conducted, the research would benefit from a detailed list of any changes made to the program as a result of these or similar research findings. This accounting will allow the reader to assess the fidelity of the replication of the research.

CONCLUSION

Similar to research before it and a growing number of studies linking emotional intelligence to short-term and long-term academic achievement, this study provides support for the work being accomplished by Cradle Beach at its Summer Enrichment Program and the positive impacts outlined in this study.

In conclusion, the overall impact of the Summer Enrichment Program allows for the following interpretation: The Cradle Beach Summer Enrichment Program (SEP) positively influences the Emotional Intelligence of SEP participants. In addition, the research indicates a positive link to Academic Achievement. Therefore, SEP participants will enjoy positive gains in their Emotional Intelligence that will result in their improved Academic Achievement both in the short- and long-term.

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