

**EXPLORING DEFINITIONS, IMPLEMENTATION, AND INTEGRATION OF
ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION IN NORTH AMERICAN CHRISTIAN
RESIDENT CAMPS**

Emily J. Huguenin

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Montreat College, Montreat, NC 28757



This is to certify that the following professors have examined this thesis by
Emily Huguenin
in final form for submission as partial requirements for a
Master of Science in Environmental Education Degree.

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Brad Davis".

Committee Chair, name

November 30, 2012

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Andrew J. Schly".

Committee Member, name

November 30, 2012

Montreat College Final Approval and Acceptance:

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Marshall E. Flowers".

Senior Vice President and Provost, Dr. Marshall Flowers

November 30, 2012

ABSTRACT

Studies indicate a decline in environmental literacy among adolescents that is connected to a decline in outdoor experiences during childhood. Summer camps have traditionally offered outdoor opportunities for children, and these positive experiences have been shown to play a role in the cultivation of environmental literacy among youth. One type of camp that could be building environmentally literate youth is the Christian resident camp. Since there is a lack of research regarding the quality of environmental education in North American Christian camps, this study investigated the ways that these camps define, implement, and integrate environmental education. Focus group interviews and camp website analyses were used to explore the perceptions of Christian camp staff about environmental education at their resident camps. The research revealed that the staff interviewed tended to have preconceived ideas about the meaning of environmental education, and did not feel that their camp programs were effectively utilizing environmental education at the time of the interview. The participants expressed concerns about environmentalism, concerns that the Church is not fulfilling its biblical role of environmental stewardship, desire to see children more connected to creation, desire to see children in deeper relationship with God, and confusion about how to better integrate environmental education in their summer camp programs. These individuals also expressed interest in further developing environmental education for their camp programs, if training resources were made available to them. The intent of this study is to lay a foundation for future practices that may help cultivate environmental literacy among the youth attending Christian camps in North America.

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CHAPTER 1.

INTRODUCTION

Background

In 1949, a Wisconsin farmer's collection of nature notes and scribbled essays was published one year after his death. This seminal work, Aldo Leopold's (1949) *A Sand County Almanac*, presented a passionate plea for a responsible ethic in the human relationship with the land. Leopold recognized the growing shift of society away from "an intense consciousness of land" toward "many middlemen... and innumerable physical gadgets" (p. 189), and warned against a perception of the land in merely economic terms. Leopold's land ethic helped reshape the thinking of succeeding generations, but 62 years later, our society is not far removed from the land-abusing, materialistic paradigm that concerned him. Although technology and organizations like the Environmental Protection Agency have made tremendous advances in environmental care, the 2005 National Environmental Education and Training Foundation (NEETF)/Roper reports indicated that only 12% of adults in the United States know enough about environmental processes and issues to pass a basic test (Coyle, 2005). This lack of environmental literacy is most clearly seen in the knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors of adolescents. Studying the perceptions of adolescents over three decades from 1976-2005, Wray-Lake, Flanagan, and Osgood (2008) tracked a decline in conservation behaviors and attitudes about consumer and personal responsibility in recent years. Interestingly, both the Coyle (2005) and Wray-Lake et al. (2008) surveys report that adults and adolescents generally have positive attitudes about the environment. Louv (2006) and Sobel (2008) propose that people are ignorant about the natural world and its

problems, not out of antagonism toward the environment, but because they no longer spend their childhood engaging with and exploring the outdoors. A restoration of the nature-child connection seems to hold the answer to the environmental illiteracy—and resulting unintentional abuse—that characterizes our society (Louv, 2006; Sobel, 2008).

How can the connection between children and nature be restored in a way that builds environmental literacy? Studies show that long-term nature experiences during youth are influential in the formation of a child's environmental knowledge, attitude, and behavior (Kruse & Card, 2004; Stern, Powell, & Ardoin, 2008; Watson, 2006; Wells & Lekies, 2006). Many children who engage in long-term or resident outdoor activities encounter these experiences at summer camp. Researchers have explored the significance of some of the components of resident outdoor experiences such as summer camp and their relation to the environmental literacy that results in responsible environmental behavior (Kruse & Card, 2004; Watson, 2006; Wells & Lekies, 2006). These components can be classified as: (a) unstructured play and recreation in the outdoors (Hanna, 1995; Louv, 2006; Watson, 2006; Wells & Lekies, 2006), (b) the role of animals (Kruse & Card, 2004; Watson, 2006), (c) development of self-concept (Dresner & Gill, 1994; Fine, 2005; Watson, 2006; Wray-Lake, Flanagan, & Osgood, 2008), (d) the temporary community (Gillis & Speelman, 2008; Ribbe, 2010; Smith, Steel & Gidlow, 2010), and (e) duration of experience (Kruse & Card, 2004; Mittelstaedt, Sanker, & VanderVeer, 1999; Stern, et al. 2008; Yoshino, 2005).

The summer camp experience clearly plays a significant part in the development of environmental literacy during childhood and youth (Louv, 2006; Wells & Lekies, 2006).

The American Camp Association (ACA) recognizes environmental awareness as a key outcome of the camp experience, yet the ACA admitted that in a large scale national research project, few camps cited an increase in environmental awareness as one of their top three targeted outcomes and, on average, campers did not report any increase in environmental awareness between pre-camp and post-camp surveys (Burkhardt, et al. 2005). Ribbe (2010) identified the importance of the outdoor setting at camp in the development of a sense of creation stewardship, which he called “our God-given responsibility from the beginning of time” (p. 156). A biblical understanding of mankind’s God-given dominion over the earth (Genesis 1:28) indicates that humans are the God-ordained caretakers of creation, and that we are held accountable to tend and keep the earth that belongs to the LORD (Genesis 2:15, Psalm 24:1). Despite this responsibility, societal pressures of fear, convenience, and creature comforts, as well as a different theological interpretation of the dominion imperative, are some of the factors driving much of camp programming indoors. As a result, Christians are losing touch with the environmental care and responsibility that some would say is expected of them (Ribbe, 2010). A biblical basis of environmentalism suggests that Christians should be leaders in environmental stewardship as they seek to glorify God through their lives. However, the author could not find any research in the Christian community regarding the environmental outcomes of Christian camp programs.

Environmental literacy is a necessity in a world under escalating ecological stress. If, as Fine (2005) has suggested, resident outdoor experiences truly are some of the most effective avenues for fostering environmental attitudes that lead to behavior, then more

research in this area is essential to ensure that the desired outcomes of literacy are being reached. Christian camps in particular need to know whether their goals of physical, social, emotional, mental, and spiritual development are being reached, and environmental literacy is an important component spanning each of these domains. Churches and parents also need to know the efficacy of the Christian camp in producing environmentally responsible, God-glorifying citizens of the future.

Therefore, this study was designed to explore the definitions, implementation, and integration of environmental education in Christian resident camp programs in North America. By discovering the quality of environmental education within Christian camps, the study aims to contribute to the cultivation of environmental literacy among our nation's children and youth.

Definitions

Throughout this study the following terms will be used extensively. All definitions adhere closely to the traditional definitions used within the fields of environmental education and camp ministry.

Environmental Education. “Environmental education teaches children and adults how to learn about and investigate their environment, and to make intelligent, informed decisions about how they can take care of it” (NAAEE, 2012, para. 1).

Environmental Literacy. “The attribute of an individual who possesses knowledge about the environment and issues related to it, and who is capable of and inclined toward self-directed environmental learning and/or action” (Fundamentals of Environmental Education, 2011, p.5).

Responsible Environmental Behavior. “Informed individual or group actions that are directed toward the prevention or resolution of environmental problems or issues” (Fundamentals of Environmental Education, 2011, p.18).

Christian Camp. A temporary community using trained leaders in an outdoor setting to achieve spiritual objectives in the lives of guests. The Christian camp exists to edify and serve the Body of Jesus Christ as a parachurch ministry. For the purposes of this study, the Christian Camp will be limited to describe only those organizations that agree with the Christian Camp and Conference Association (CCCA) Statement of Faith (Cairn Series, 2003).

Nature-Deficit Disorder. A range of physical, mental, social, and developmental problems associated with an absence of significant and plentiful interactions with the natural world, especially in childhood (Louv, 2006).

Research Question

This study seeks to answer the following question, “How do North American Christian camps define, implement, and integrate environmental education in their resident camp programs?” Many Christian camps appear to be less proactive than secular camps in environmental education, yet the Christian camps have the structures, personnel, and rationale necessary to create positive guided outdoor encounters that build toward environmental literacy. In the absence of published literature on environmental education at Christian camps, the researcher referred to literature that described research conducted at camps that are not religiously affiliated to see the ways that camp experiences have contributed to environmental literacy.

CHAPTER 2.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Extensive research has been conducted in the fields of environmental and experiential education to determine the benefits or outcomes of long-term outdoor experiences such as summer camp (Burkhardt, et al., 2005; Dresner & Gill, 1994; Fine, 2005; Kruse & Card, 2004; Smith, et al. 2010; Stern, et al. 2008; Watson, 2006; Wells & Lekies, 2006). This literature identifies the role of summer camp in the accumulation of environmental knowledge, development of character, and formation of environmental attitudes and behavior. The summer camp experience includes the following inherent components that contribute to environmental literacy development.

Unstructured Play and Recreation in the Outdoors

The literature supports the concept that unstructured play or extended experiences in wild outdoor places are crucial in the development of a sense of “otherness” as well as caring attitudes that manifest themselves in positive environmental behavior (Fine, 2005; Hanna, 1995; Louv, 2006; Sobel, 2008; Watson, 2006; Wells & Lekies, 2006). Wells and Lekies found that childhood participation with wild nature (hunting, hiking, etc.) and domestic nature (gardening, planting trees, etc.) had a significant effect on the environmental attitudes and behavior of adults. Interaction with wild nature seemed to have a stronger influence on pro-environment behavior, while both wild and domestic nature experiences positively influenced pro-environment attitudes (2006). This correlates well with Hanna’s (1995) Conceptual Model In and For Wilderness, which proposes that responsible environmental behavior begins with predisposing factors—such

as the early childhood life experiences Wells and Lekies (2006) outlined—and beliefs about wilderness. These factors contribute to attitudes about wilderness, which develop into intentions about wilderness that ideally result in responsible environmental behavior (Hanna, 1995).

Interestingly, Wells and Lekies found that childhood experiences in nature with other people and childhood experiences in environmental education were not reported as significant contributors to the attitudes and behavior of the population interviewed (2006). Informal, unstructured, imaginative play in natural places seems to have more effect on the predisposed attitudes of children than does formal education about the natural world. Sobel (2008) recognized the failure of formal education to inspire environmental attitudes and behavior. When education is confined to the classroom and bounded by rote memorization of facts to comply with academic standards, a child's natural, intrinsic love for the earth that is necessary for environmental literacy may be diminished. "What gets lost when we focus on facts are the initiation experiences, the moments of transcendence when the borders between the natural world and ourselves break down... one transcendent experience in the landscape may have the potential for leading to a thousand nature facts" (Sobel, 2008, p. 12). Sobel further identified these essentially important transcendent nature experiences as moments of play usually found in middle childhood. Unstructured outdoor play as initiated by children usually includes an element of adventure, fantasy and imagination, empathetic connections with animals, child-created maps and paths, special places such as forts or cabins, miniature worlds, and hunting/gathering/collecting natural items (Sobel, 2008). Case studies of individual

summer camps reveal that Sobel's child-directed elements of play are evident at camps that optimize the outdoor setting (Fine, 2005; Watson, 2006). Ribbe (2010) states that since the outdoor setting is a key component of camping's formational context, contact and experiences in nature are critical for the restorative quality of Christian camps to be preserved. Further, increased time in creation increases a sense of stewardship and responsibility for creation (Ribbe, 2010).

The Role of Animals

Watson (2006) suggested that experiences in nature, especially those experiences that involve common wild animals, contribute to the camper's concept of nature, his relationship with others, and his concept of place in the *more-than-human world* (p. 137). In addition, Kruse and Card (2004) found that environmental knowledge, behavior, and attitudes increased significantly in the conservation education camps where more time was dedicated to animal husbandry. Kruse and Card inferred from these data that hands-on animal husbandry can be an important contributor to pro-environment knowledge, attitude, and behavior (2004). Interestingly, this correlates with Watson's findings about children's experiences with common wild animals at summer camp. Similarly, Sobel (2008) suggested that *Animal Allies*, or hands-on encounters with wild and domestic animals, are an essential component of childhood nature experiences and should be cultivated. Young children have a strong interest in and empathy for animals, and if this relationship is fostered at an early age it may grow into a sense of responsible care for wildlife and its habitats (Sobel, 2008). Many children, especially those living in urban environments, have no hands-on experience with animals and so the opportunity for the

compassionate relationship is lost. Camps, like the places that Kruse and Card (2004) and Watson (2006) studied, are usually inhabited by a variety of wild and/or domestic animals. Authors have proposed that these animals may be key players in the development of environmental empathy and literacy among children (Kruse & Card, 2004; Sobel, 2008; Watson, 2006).

Development of Self-Concept

In addition to the importance of unstructured play and recreation in the outdoors and the role of animals, researchers have found that the self-concept is a key indicator of environmental literacy, especially as it relates to personal responsibility (Marcinkowski, 1998; NAAEE, 2010; Wray-Lake, et. al, 2008). The survey of adolescents conducted by Wray-Lake and colleagues (2008) revealed that attitudes of personal responsibility for environmental issues among adolescents gradually decreased between 1976 and 2005. Not surprisingly, self-reported environmental behaviors also decreased during this time period. The direct correlation between personal responsibility and environmental behavior revealed by Wray-Lake et al. (2008) makes it clear that a strong sense of personal responsibility for actions toward the environment contributes to environmental literacy, as well as a faith in the ability of one person to make a positive difference.

Marcinkowski (1998) declares an individual locus of control to be one of the five strongest predictors of responsible environmental behavior. In fact, the North American Association for Environmental Education (NAAEE, 2010) recognizes Personal and Civic Responsibility to be so important that it is listed as one of the four key strands of knowledge in their *Excellence in Environmental Education: Guidelines for Learning* (K-

12). Two key objectives within this strand are recognizing efficacy (self-confidence) and accepting personal responsibility for actions (NAAEE, 2010). If environmentally literate and responsibly behaving citizens are the goal, educators must first be sure to nurture the internal locus of control of each individual and guide him to efficacy and personal responsibility (Marcinkowski, 1998; NAAEE, 2010; Wray-Lake, et al., 2006).

An individual locus of control reflects itself in self-efficacy and self-motivation.

These facets of the healthy self-concept are strengthened and developed in the context of resident outdoor experiences, as reported in Fine's (2005) case study of The Hollows Camp. The novel experience, emotionally safe environment, opportunity for autonomous choices, and caring leaders that characterized this resident summer camp created an ideal atmosphere for the cultivation of a healthy self-concept (Fine, 2005). At summer camps, children and youth may undergo a process Watson (2006) called *Becoming-Camper* in which they redefine what it means to be human (p. 138). Watson found that self-guided discovery in a natural setting increased a camper's awareness of other living things as well as a new understanding of himself (2006). Camp may be viewed as a place where youth build their identities and learn self-discipline, self-regulation, and self-awareness (Fine, 2005). One participant explained, "It's like a practice life... finding out who you really want to be. Camp is an opportunity to test who you are" (Fine, 2005, p. 125). Since the camp environment encourages youth to develop identity (Fine, 2005), this truth opens up a golden opportunity for camps to provide youth with the knowledge and experience necessary to build environmental literacy into their identities.

Many aspects of camp may contribute to the development of self-esteem, but Dresner and Gill (1994) found that one of the most significant contributors to the healthy self-concept may be direct, experiential education in nature. Researchers surveyed 28 campers and their parents after Wolf Creek Nature Camp, a two-week resident environmental education camp in Redwood National Park, CA. This camp aimed to equip preteens with environmental awareness, knowledge of ecosystems, and skills in resolving environmental issues (Dresner & Gill, 1994). Parents reported that their children exhibited noticeably different perceptions of themselves after camp; they saw increases in their children's independence, self-reliance, and acceptance of themselves (Dresner & Gill, 1994). One camper wrote in her journal that she felt she was a different person at camp, with freedoms not found at home (Dresner & Gill, 1994). This supports the concept that since camp is different from the everyday experiences of youth, it is a place where campers can be free to exercise new perceptions of themselves (Fine, 2005). In a recent survey of ACA-accredited camps, the ACA (2006) found that youth desire more opportunities at camp to "try on the adult roles that they eventually must assume" (p. 12).

The Wolf Creek Nature Camp case study serves as an example of a camp that purposefully integrated environmental education throughout its program. The NAAEE and National Environmental Education & Training Foundation (NEETF) affirmed in a 2001 report that environment-based educational programs like Wolf Creek Nature Camp (Dresner & Gill, 1994) positively affect the participant's self-concept and character development (NAAEE & NEETF, 2001). The student-directed discovery, adaptation to

multiple intelligences, and action projects that characterize quality environment-based education are highly conducive to the development of confidence in self as well as respect for others (NAAEE & NEETF, 2001). This research indicates that resident camps with a heavy emphasis on hands-on environmental education in which the campers have freedom to exercise choice and self-reliance may contribute to increases in self-esteem (Dresner & Gill, 1994; Fine, 2005; Watson, 2006). In turn, the healthy self-concept developed by environmental experiences at camp is a strong predictor of future responsible environmental behavior (Marcinkowski, 1998). The success of environmental education in developing the camper's self-concept brings to mind the question: Do Christian summer camps integrate environmental education in their programming in similar ways to Wolf Creek Nature Camp and other examples? This is one key component of the research question that is answered in this study.

Temporary Community

The Christian Camp and Conference Association (CCCA) identified the temporary community as one of the hallmarks of Christian summer camp (Cairn Series, 2003). Furthermore, Ribbe (2010) emphasized the importance of the temporary camp community in producing an outcome of change “by relocating [each camper] from his or her permanent context into a community that promotes intimacy, familiarity, and collaboration in a facilitated experience characterized by focused purposes, engagement, and disequilibrium” (p. 153). The unique dynamic of children or teens living together and making group decisions creates a mini-society in which each camper is an active citizen. This society is governed by the campers but facilitated by trained, caring adult

leaders who create an environment of physical and emotional safety (Ribbe, 2010). This novel setting is a place where campers benefit from shared experiences with people in a unique context. After studying 14-15 year old campers in New Zealand school camps, Smith and colleagues (2010) wrote that within the context of a temporary camp community, “the social ‘deck’ can be radically shuffled and reshuffled as those who may lead in the classroom find their skills are less useful in the camp setting. Social alliances and hierarchies change in response to the demands of the environment and the activities taking place within it” (Smith, Steel, & Gidlow, 2010, p. 1).

The concept of a mini-society or temporary community translates seamlessly into programs focused on environmental issues, because students must learn to work together and look at issues from a variety of perspectives in order to make informed judgments about environmental action. Environment-based education fosters the following skills: “cooperation and the ability to act in appropriate, socially acceptable ways; letting all who want to be part of the action participate, either individually or as part of a team or group; showing concern for others; demonstrating active leadership and participation in the democratic process; and connecting to the community” (NAAEE & NEETF, 2001, p. 12). These skills are similar to the very skills that are developed through the challenge course initiatives often implemented at camp. In a recent meta-analysis of challenge course research, Gillis and Speelman (2008) affirmed that one of the highest ranking outcomes of challenge course experiences is group formation (interpersonal dynamics, cohesion, group effectiveness). Since environment-based educational experiences aim to build the same social skills that are intentionally developed through challenge course

programming (NAAEE & NEETF, 2001; Gillis & Speelman, 2008), camps that utilize challenge courses for group formation may be better able to meet their objectives of team unity and leadership development if they implement environment-based education as well.

The American Camp Association (ACA) reported that campers, parents of campers, and camp staff recognized lasting growth in the constructs of leadership, social comfort, friendship skills, and peer relationships after attending day or resident camp (Burkhardt, et al., 2005). Since social development has been an integral component of Christian camp throughout its history, it is apparent that group problem-solving activities found in action-based environmental education and challenge courses would augment the goal of group formation and growth in social skills in the context of the temporary camp community (Burkhardt, et al., 2005; Cairn Series, 2003; Gillis & Speelman, 2008; NAAEE & NEETF, 2001; Ribbe, 2010; Smith, Steel & Gidlow, 2010).

Duration of Experience

The length of resident outdoor experiences such as summer camp has been found to affect the impact on a camper's development of environmental literacy (Kruse & Card, 2004; Mittelstaedt, Sanker & VanderVeer, 1999; Stern, Powell & Ardoin, 2008). Stern and colleagues (2008) tested the development and retention of environmentally literate knowledge, intentions and behavior among youth by administering pre-experience, post-experience, and delayed post-experience (three months after camp) surveys to participants of resident environmental education camps in the Great Smoky Mountains National Park (Stern, Powell & Ardoin, 2008). The researchers found that by the

conclusion of the program the participants demonstrated significant short-term gains in all the outcome areas tested: connection with nature, environmental stewardship, interest in learning and discovery, and awareness of biological diversity (Stern, et al. 2008). Participants in a five-day camp showed greater short-term increases in the areas of stewardship, discovery, and awareness than those attending a three-day experience. Additionally, the campers who participated in the longer five-day camp retained a greater amount of environmental knowledge and awareness after three months (Stern, et al., 2008). This supports previous research conducted by Mittelstaedt and colleagues (1999) at a week-long environmental camp. The campers at the week-long camp exhibited growth in environmental knowledge, attitudes, and intentions toward responsible environmental behavior. Their overall sensitivity to and concern for nature as well as responsibility for their actions appeared to be gradually cultivated throughout the camp week, to a final result of environmental literacy (Mittelstaedt, Sanker & VanderVeer, 1999). Kruse and Card (2004) recommended that conservation education camps could increase the level of growth in environmental knowledge, attitudes, and behavior by extending camp length.

Yoshino (2005) seemed to challenge the emphasis placed on the role of wilderness experience in the development of positive environmental attitudes. According to Yoshino's comparison of data from a short-term wilderness trip (five days) with that from a long-term wilderness program (three weeks), the university students enrolled in the long-term program expressed a *decrease* in environmental feelings at the conclusion of the program. Yoshino hypothesized that the long-term participants may have been

exhausted, desensitized, or discouraged by a more difficult and taxing experience (2005). Yoshino's study dealt with older participants, longer trips, and more physically difficult challenges than the resident environmental education camps studied by Stern et al. (2008) and Mittelstaedt et al. (1999). Still, it appears that the effectiveness of a long-term nature experience may be diminished if it is extended too long past a learning threshold, which could vary based on the age of the camper, the type of experience, or other factors. It remains to be studied how many days of resident camp create the ideal environment for development of environmental knowledge, attitudes, and behavior.

Although resident camp experiences vary in length from two days to an entire summer, traditional Christian summer camps tend to offer week-long sessions. Christian camps appear to view the week as an effective time period that is short enough to be an affordable experience for campers while long enough for ample time to accomplish the camp's goals of physical, social, emotional, mental, and spiritual growth in each camper. Considering the studies conducted among environmental education camps and wilderness camps, it seems that the week-long session of many Christian camps could be effectively utilized to help develop environmental literacy if emphasis were placed on nature experiences and quality environmental instruction throughout the week (Kruse & Card, 2004; Mittelstaedt, et al., 1999; Stern, et al., 2008; Yoshino, 2005).

Summary

As we have seen, some of the primary components of resident camp contribute to the development of positive environmental attitudes and behavior. Environmental knowledge and skills for environmental action are essential (Hanna, 1995), but attitudes

and empathy are even more indicative of the responsible environmental behavior that characterizes environmental literacy (Marcinkowski, 1998).

Decreased opportunity for long-term nature experiences in childhood has led to an epidemic of nature-deficit disorder (Louv, 2006), but these types of experiences are still available at resident camps that recognize their value. The Christian camping industry stands equipped with all the necessary tools to address this broken relationship between children and nature: opportunity for unstructured play and recreation in the outdoors, encounters with wild and domestic animals, aims to develop self-concept through a temporary community, and an extended experience that allows time to nurture connections between children and the outdoor setting. Further, a biblical understanding of mankind's role of responsible dominion over God's good earth (Genesis 1:28, 2:15) reveals that a reconciled relationship with God predicates and facilitates reconciled relationships with other humans (Luke 10:27) and with the creation that God loves (Deuteronomy 11:10-15). It stands to reason that Christians, especially those who provide transformative camp experiences for young people, should lead the way toward redemption of responsible care for the earth with which we have been entrusted (Van Dyke, Mahan, Sheldon & Brand, 1996). As Christians seek to inspire young people to lead God-glorifying lives (1 Corinthians 10:31), the arena of environmental responsibility cannot be ignored.

Despite the evident benefits available at many Christian camps for the development of environmental literacy, there is an absence of research about the effect of environmental education integrated throughout the Christian resident camp program. This study sought

to identify the various definitions, forms of implementation, and models of integration of environmental education in Christian resident camps throughout North America.

CHAPTER 3.

METHODOLOGY

The definitions, implementation, and integration of environmental education in resident summer programs at Christian camps in North America are unexplored topics in the environmental and experiential education literature. For this reason, this study utilized qualitative research methods to uncover the meanings and interpretations that Christian camp staff attribute to environmental education, as well as the ways that they carry out this type of education in camp programming. Qualitative research is ideal for exploring an area of study that has not yet been examined and about which no theory has yet been developed (Creswell, 2009). Furthermore, this study has been conducted from the lens of a social constructivist worldview. Social constructivism assumes that individuals develop subjective, complex interpretations of the world based on their cultural and social contexts (Creswell, 2009). The research method that most appropriately allowed for complex meanings and perspectives of the camp staff within a social context was a set of focus group interviews. This study also sought to document the practices of these individuals in a camp context as demonstrated through their promotional websites for their camps.

Population Sample

In order to accurately answer the research question, the researcher needed to collect data from individuals involved in North American Christian camps. The qualitative nature of this study called for a small sample of Christian camp workers who would be available to answer open-ended interview questions in a group setting. For this reason,

the researcher chose to employ a criterion sampling method to narrow the population of North American Christian camp staff to a more manageable sample. She selected two discrete Christian camp conferences as the locations for her focus group interviews, and therefore selected the conferees of each conference as the sample for this study, based on the criteria that they must be involved in Christian camp work and must be in attendance at one of the conferences. Camp directors and program directors were specifically invited to participate, due to their influential roles in the programming and philosophy of the camp; however, other conferees who self-selected themselves to participate in the study were included because of the diversity of perceptions that they lent to the discussions.

Focus Groups

Focus group interviews encourage free-flowing conversation about a certain topic among people who share certain characteristics in common within a non-threatening social context (Krueger & Casey, 2009). In this study, each group consisted of eleven to twelve participants, a moderator, and an assistant, based on the optimal group sizes suggested by Alreck and Settle (1995), Creswell (2009), and Krueger and Casey (2009). Within each group, the moderator's role was to facilitate discussion without attempting to educate or guide the group toward consensus (Alreck & Settle, 1995). Rather than looking for "group think" or collaboration, the moderator sought to "discover and reveal the nature, range, and diversity of positions" among the group members (Alreck & Settle, 1995, p. 400).

Participants. It was important in this study that the focus group participants possessed enough diversity of experience and perspective among themselves to engage in valuable discussion, yet enough homogeneity to create a conversation that each participant could relate to. Miles and Huberman recommended that the socioeconomic composition of the focus group (education level, income, type of career, etc) should be as homogenous as possible, because a group of people from similar backgrounds can more easily communicate with each other and the conversation is more easily focused (1994). Still, the ideal focus group is usually made up of participants who did not know each other prior to the interview (Krueger & Casey, 2009). For the purpose of this study, however, the researcher was interested in discovering diverse perspectives, so the study was designed to leave room for heterogeneous worldviews or opinions.

This study interviewed camp staff in attendance at two discrete Christian camp conferences. Tweakage, a gathering of fundamentalist Christian camp leaders, offered a population of individuals who are quite homogenous in their doctrinal beliefs and practices, yet heterogeneous in their geographic locales and social context. The 2012 Tweakage Rendezvous was hosted by Alpine Ministries in southern West Virginia, with 156 attendees from fundamentalist Christian camps across the country. In contrast, the Carolinas/Virginias Sectional Conference of the Christian Camp and Conference Association provided a population of leaders who were homogenous in their geographic region and more heterogeneous in their doctrinal beliefs and practices. This conference was held at Fort Caswell of the North Carolina Baptist Assembly, in Oak Island, NC, with 84 attendees from CCCA member camps in North Carolina, South Carolina,

Virginia, and West Virginia. Two focus group interviews at the Tweakage conference and one group interview at the CCCA Sectional provided qualitative data from a variety of perspectives.

Krueger and Casey (2009) advised that participants in focus groups be hand-selected. Marshall (1996) acknowledged that the random sampling techniques used in quantitative research rarely accomplish the goals of qualitative research, so the qualitative researcher should use purposive sampling techniques such as using criterion sampling to narrow down the list of qualified participants to a small, manageable sample. For this study, the nature of the conferences themselves helped narrow the population down to a sample that effectively informed the research question. Eleven individuals volunteered to participate in Focus Group One, twelve participated in Focus Group Two, and another twelve attended Focus Group Three. The researcher initially invited camp directors to attend the focus group, but the session was open to any conferee that had an interest in the topic. This meant that the actual composition of the sample included other camp staff such as interns and maintenance directors, as well as camp directors and program directors. This wider range of perspectives served to enhance the diversity of the discussion beyond the researcher's initial anticipation. Table 1 indicates the diversity of individuals who contributed to each focus group.

Table 1

Demographic Information of Focus Group Participants

	Focus Group 1	Focus Group 2	Focus Group 3	Total
# Participants	11	12	12	35
# Camp Directors	2	1	1	4
# Program Directors	4	7	1	12
# Other Camp Staff	5	3	10	18
18-25 Age Group	4	2	7	13
26-35 Age Group	2	4	2	8
36-50 Age Group	2	4	0	6
51-60 Age Group	1	1	2	4
61+ Age Group	2	0	1	3
# States Represented	7	5	4	12

Data Collection. Following the focus group protocol set forth by Krueger and Casey (2009), the moderator facilitated the discussion of twelve open-ended questions while the assistant operated a digital voice recorder and took notes. The questions were formulated to guide participants to share their honest thoughts, opinions, agreements, and disagreements. In the original research design, two focus groups, each consisting of eight to twelve members, were to be conducted at each of the two conferences. However, logistics allowed for only one focus group session at the CCCA Carolinas/Virginias Sectional and two sessions at the Tweakage conference. A total of 35 participants from 21 Christian camps participated in the three focus group sessions, providing a wealth of

rich perspectives and responses that were used in the study. The researcher and assistant compiled the audio and written data after each focus group to be analyzed at a later date.

Data Analysis. Patton (2002) explained that properly analyzed and reported qualitative studies possess “the capacity to open up a world to the reader through rich, detailed, and concrete descriptions of people and places... in such a way that we can understand the phenomenon studied and draw our own interpretations about meaning and significance” (p. 438). The researcher categorized the data along emerging themes and ascribed codes to the findings. A code list generated from the first focus group was applied to the subsequent data, so that converging themes among the data could be identified. This method follows the *emergent-systematic* focus group design of Onwuegbuzie, Dickinson, Leech and Zoran (2009), which allows the codes to emerge from the first focus group and then be applied to the following focus groups for verification of the accuracy of the codes. To solidify the codes as accurate and verify the reliability of the analysis, an inter-coder applied the original list of codes to a random selection of 20% of the data, with a final agreement score of 80% of the codes selected by both researchers. This procedure followed the process outlined by Miles and Huberman (1994). Finally, the codes were assimilated into larger themes to give meaning to the data. The final product is a rich description of the findings, with representative quotes included for each theme.

Camp Website Analysis

In order to better understand the programs offered by each camp, the researcher asked focus group participants to submit their camp promotional documents and websites for

analysis. Since not every camp had a brochure or document about environmental education, but every camp had a website, the researcher chose to limit the analysis to only study the website of each camp. The primary researcher analyzed these websites following the qualitative data analysis process described by Creswell (2009). First, the researcher read through all the data published on the camps' websites with the intent of understanding the big picture of the information. Analysis then became more detailed as the researcher organized units of data according to codes created in the focus group data analysis process. The researcher used the codes from the focus group interview data to inform the website analysis. This ensured consistency of interpretation among the varying types of data. At the conclusion of the coding process, the researcher sorted the codes into the larger themes that surfaced in the focus group data analysis and created a detailed description of the meaning of the information based on these themes. Finally, the researcher interpreted the meaning of the data, looking for lessons to be learned, conclusions to be drawn, or new questions to be answered (Creswell, 2009).

Limitations

Due to the qualitative nature of this research design, broad generalizations cannot be drawn from the data. The purpose is not to construct an overall definition of environmental education in Christian camping, but to reveal rich, complex ideas and themes from a select group. One of the limitations of this method is that the sample size was small and self-selected in scope. Only those who chose to attend the two Christian camp conferences used in this study were able to volunteer their participation. Therefore, the perceptions, practices, and emerging themes are only reflective of a small sample of

the Christian camping field in North America. A similar study conducted on another sample of Christian camps may produce completely different results. Another limitation is the subjective nature of focus group discussions. Due to differences in understanding and background, participants may define similar terms in different ways that could skew the data. For this reason, care was taken during the focus group interviews to ensure that participants defined their terms and understood the terms that the moderator was using. Also, the phenomenon of “group think”, which appears when people begin to shape their answers to match the opinions of the group as a whole, rather than maintaining their individuality, is a common limitation of focus group interviews. The researcher strove to guard against group think by emphasizing the importance of a diversity of viewpoints. Since this study was designed to discover the perceptions of Christian camp leaders, it was expected that their responses would be subjective in nature, and participants were encouraged to express their own subjective opinions as much as possible so that they would not be influenced by any bias from the moderator.

Ethical Considerations

As with any social study, there were ethical issues within this research design that were considered. Interviews, especially about a sensitive topic like environmental education, can be stressful to participants and therefore the researcher needed to weigh the value of the interview process in improving the human situation, contributing to scientific knowledge, and any positive or negative impacts that the research could have on the interviewees and their groups (Creswell, 2009). Ideally, this exploration into the beliefs and practices of camp leaders will lay the groundwork for future research in the

field of environmental education related to Christian camping. The study provided reciprocal benefit to both the participants and the field of research (Creswell, 2009), so this reciprocity helped justify the potentially intrusive method of focus group interviews. Still, the researcher had a responsibility to make the interview process as comfortable, confidential, and emotionally safe as possible. For these reasons, the focus groups were voluntary, conducted in a comfortable, non-threatening room and confidentiality was ensured. Each participant signed a consent form, a document/website analysis authorization form, and an anonymous demographic form prior to participation (see Appendix A). These forms informed the participant of the confidentiality measures that were taken. To further ensure that the research design was ethical and had the best interests of both the participants and the scientific body of knowledge in mind, the research process did not begin until the proposal was officially reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board at Montreat College. This approval was finalized on January 31, 2011.

CHAPTER 4.

RESULTS

The three focus group interviews from this study yielded a variety of perspectives on environmental education and insights into the current state of environmental education in select North American Christian camps. The researcher asked three questions to analyze the data from these interviews: 1) How do the data answer the initial research question? 2) What themes emerge from the discussions? 3) How do the data connect to previous research mentioned in the literature review?

Definitions of Environmental Education

Thirty-two focus group participants at the three focus groups wrote out personal definitions of environmental education. The table below indicates how many definitions included some form of the key terms listed: Creator/Creation (CR), Nature/Natural/Outdoors/Outside (NA), Environment/Environmental (EN), Surroundings/World Around Us (SU), Interactions of Humans and Nature/Effects of Humans on Nature (IN), Growth in Knowledge, Understanding, Appreciation, and/or Care for Creation and/or for God (GR), or Stewardship/Responsibility/Care (ST).

Table 2

Key Terms Used in Participants' Definitions of Environmental Education

Terms:	CR	NA	EN	SU	IN	GR	ST
Group 1	7	6	3	1	3	9	3
Group 2	5	4	3	3	2	9	4
Group 3	1	7	5	3	5	10	2
Total	13	17	11	7	10	28	9

Although the participants agreed on several aspects of the definition of environmental education, their understandings and interpretations of the term were quite heterogeneous.

One participant described his perception of the term *environmental education*:

Not a specific term I would use. I feel it leans too much in the direction of 'Tree Huggers' and gives a negative image for many people. However, as a Christian camp, I think it's vital to use God's creation to teach biblical concepts and creation science to draw us closer to the Creator (Male, Focus Group Two).

Some definitions highlighted the method of education, like this example: *Experiencing hands-on the wonders and responsibility of our natural surroundings. We can learn from them and care for them (Male, Focus Group Three).*

Finally, some emphasized the knowledge of God through a deeper knowledge of creation: *Teaching people to recognize the power and beauty of the Creator by studying His creation. Also teaching them to recognize, learn more about, and care for what God has given us in creation (Male, Focus Group One).* The diversity of definitions in one small sample of the Christian camp community reveals that Christian camp leaders across the country have varying understandings and preconceived ideas about environmental education.

Emergent Themes

Prominent, recurring themes emerged from the data collected from each of the focus groups, suggesting patterns of thought and practice among the participants. Not every participant contributed to one or more of the themes, and there were variances of opinion within each theme among the participants. However, after examining the data the

researcher found that the following themes best captured the main topics that emerged in the focus group discussions. Table 3 reveals the codes (keywords that characterized units of data) that the researcher used to organize the data and the resulting themes that emerged.

Table 3

Focus Group Themes and Codes

Theme	Reactions to the term “environmentalism” and the concept of environmental care.	Using nature to encourage spiritual development.	Needs and interests of campers.	Types of environmental education in camp programming.	Challenges to environmental education in Christian camps.
Code	Balance	Bible	Camp environment	Animals	Considering EE for my camp
Code	Global warming	Christ	Comfort	Chapel messages	Camp director
Code	Go green	Creation	Curiosity	Camp as education	Full schedule
Code	Interactions between man and nature	Encounter God	Fun	Nature hike	Laws
Code	Natural	Purpose or priority of camp	Nature deficit	Not structured in camp program	Location
Code	Negative	Spiritual truth	Play	Outsourced	Different purpose
Code	Not environmentalist		Relationships	Science	Staff
Code	Political		Safety	Should be part of main camp program	
Code	Too far			Survival skills	
Code	Weak			Wilderness trips	
Code	Worship			Ecology	

Reactions to the Term *Environmentalism* and the Concept of Environmental

Care. In each focus group, participants were asked “What comes to your mind when you hear the word *environment*?” Some common responses that emerged were *negative political connotations* associated with the word, *people who value the creation more than the Creator, natural surroundings, nature hikes, or even anything involved in the camp setting: the camp environment.*

Negative political connotations associated with the environment were a primary topic of discussion in each focus group. Some of the contributing factors mentioned were people who worship the creation, calling it *Gaia* or *Mother Earth*, people who use the environment to advance politically, global warming, and *tree huggers*. These types of people were largely referred to as *environmentalists*. A camp director expressed, *Sometimes environment is used in a way to promote an agenda that can stop development of things that are necessary to human life* (Male, Focus Group One). Another participant surmised that *most environmentalists are probably not creationists. And so I think that’s where we get back into that different term, the environmentalists. I think we must steer away from that concept* (Male, Focus Group One).

Because of the perceived negative connotations of environmentalism, some participants mentioned that they would rather use a different term than *environmental* to describe their outdoor learning experiences. Still, camp staff expressed the importance of caring for the environment from a biblical perspective. A participant explained:

We talk a lot about using the beauty of creation to point people to Christ. But how much time do we actually take to teach about that? ...We’re supposed to be good

stewards of what God's given to us. And I think that in our reaction to environmentalism, we haven't taken the time to teach how to be good stewards (Male, Focus Group One).

Another mentioned that creation care is: *part of the biblical mandate that we, for the most part, have forgotten (Male, Focus Group Three).* A staff member from a camp in Colorado agreed, saying:

In the Bible God does command us to go out and subdue the Earth, and to take care of it, really, and I think in a lot of ways Christians in general have failed in that... but really it's a Christian responsibility... we need to be out there teaching kids about how to take care of the world, how environment and environmental education can bring us closer to God, but since we've kind of neglected that responsibility in some ways the world's taken over that and so it's become the world's thing (Male, Focus Group Two).

When asked if environmental education belongs at a Christian camp, a participant answered:

I think it's really important, especially in this day and age.... It's important to teach children now coming into the world that God gave us this earth and it's okay to appreciate it and study it and understand it. You can do that with godly principles.... It's important to get them out there and realize it's not an un-Christian thing to love the environment (Female, Focus Group Three).

In summary, the focus group sessions revealed that these Christian camp leaders were often hesitant to use the term *environmental* because of perceived negative connotations

with the term *environmentalism*. They were much more comfortable using the words *outdoor*, *nature*, or *creation* to describe their programming. Still, a common theme that emerged from the focus groups was the perception that responsible care for the environment is mandated by God and a responsibility that Christians have largely ignored. Participants expressed a desire to better connect children to nature and to their environmental responsibility because of its ability to reveal God as Creator. This discussion led into the next theme that emerged: the use of nature to encourage spiritual growth in campers.

Using Nature to Encourage Christian Spiritual Development. All of the participants interviewed in the focus groups were either full-time, intern, or volunteer employees of Christian camps at the time of each interview. Although the participants were not asked about their personal religious affiliation, each one indicated through his or her service at a Christian camp that he or she agreed with the statement of faith set forth by his or her camp, most of which were members of the Christian Camp and Conference Association. For this reason, it is not surprising that the majority of the time in the focus group discussions was spent talking about spiritual issues, specifically from the perspective of fundamentalist biblical Christianity often associated with Bible and Baptist organizations.

Many of the focus group participants expressed that the primary purpose of Christian camp is to point campers to Jesus Christ for a life-changing relationship with Him. A program director shared:

For us as a camp, our mission is to reach young people for the Lord, strengthen the family, and serve the local church.... We will use all sorts of different things to do that.... Summer camp is really word-centric and it's focused around God's Word (Female, Focus Group Two).

Throughout the conversations, camp workers tended to refer to the outdoor natural environment as *creation* rather than as *nature* or *the outdoor environment*, emphasizing the importance of recognizing God the Creator as the origin of all things. One camp director specified, *I think what the non-Christian would call environment I would tend to call creation. That's my bias* (Male, Focus Group One).

When speaking of creation, representatives from several camps indicated that the environment or creation is a powerful tool to help accomplish their purpose of pointing campers to Christ. A staff member from a camp in Arizona mentioned that his camp uses the beauty of their location to point to Christ. He expressed concern that camps should do a better job at investigating and learning about the creation for this purpose, sharing:

This is something God has given us to reveal Himself, but we just tend to look at the surface. And because of everything we've been talking about, because of the negative connotations of the environmentalism, I think we've reacted pretty strongly against that, and just not taken the time to study and to share in the glories of it with our campers (Male, Focus Group One).

Another participant said that the definition for environmental education, when applied to Christian camps, should be focused on the God of creation:

God gave us creation to reveal Himself to us. I think part of that definition has to be not only learning about the creation but learning what it tells us about Him. You know, the beauty of creation, the order of it, and the complexity of it, they all tell us things about God. And so, not only do we need to learn about our environment but we need to learn more about God through it (Male, Focus Group One).

One participant suggested that environmental education be used to teach the biblical account of creation:

Maybe this thought I'm about to present would help directors—camp directors that aren't leaning toward environmental education.... As Christians we're supposed to be about the work of reconciliation. Bringing campers to a knowledge of Christ, reconciling them to God. They'll never fully understand redemption unless they first understand the fall. And the Genesis account... God's creation.... That's the whole picture (Male, Focus Group One).

A program director in North Carolina described his reasoning for using the creation to create experiences where campers can encounter God:

Imagine a doorway. You have a building surrounded with man-made things as opposed to creation full of God-made things. You know, it's not that God speaks to kids more when they're in the wilderness, it's just easier to hear Him. When they're completely surrounded by things that God has directly put in their path for them to run into, I think it's just out of their zone of knowledge, what they're used to day by day—you know, getting out there in the woods. They're seeing directly, firsthand—not what man put up—in their path.... And they're seeing how the systems that form

the tree...can reflect the body as a whole of Christians.... You can pull so many lessons directly from the Bible through what God has given us. You don't need anything really beyond that... if you know how to look for it (Male, Focus Group One).

Besides giving campers the opportunity to encounter God, environmental education can be used to teach campers about God's attributes, His character, faith lessons, origins of the universe, personal character, and relationships with God and others, according to the focus group conversations. A camp director summarized his thoughts: *they [environmentalists] are trying to take care of it—the environment. We're trying to learn from it, that we might take care of our own lives in light of Who created it (Male, Focus Group One).*

Needs and Interests of Campers. A prominent theme in the discussion about environmental education in Christian camps involved the needs and interests of the campers themselves. Camper safety was mentioned as a concern, especially when marketing the camp experience to parents. Even though participants expressed opinions that parents often *blow out of proportion* the risks involved with ventures into the outdoors, they suggested that some camps may be hesitant to implement environmental programming, especially in the wilderness, because of the concerns of the campers' parents.

Along with safety, fun and comfort was determined to be a primary interest for the campers. Most focus group participants agreed that campers come to camp looking for fun, and a camp director said: *the element of fun also demands an element of comfort*

(Male, Focus Group One). This desire for comfort was seen as a barrier to outdoor environmental activities, because campers were perceived to be more comfortable inside than outside. A program director remarked:

Sometimes a hindrance is just even getting the kids past the buildings. They're very comfortable in the buildings, or other things that you offer that are somewhat similar to home, and sometimes stretching them beyond that... to take a hike is something that's a little too much for them (Male, Focus Group Two).

Another participant mentioned that one of his goals during camp backpacking trips was *to get them to feel comfortable in the woods. Not scared. Just to get comfortable in any kind of weather, and be at ease* (Male, Focus Group One). A program director used the popular term *Nature-Deficit Disorder* coined by Richard Louv to describe the perceived disconnect between campers and the environment. Others agreed that children and youth today seem to be less eager to spend extended periods of time outside learning about nature than they did in the past. A participant lamented:

Twenty years ago it was nothing to get two dozen or three dozen campers to sign up [for wilderness trips] and we'd do some excellent trips. I mean, we were all over West Virginia and everywhere and when they were done, they loved it! They said, 'Yes! We'll do it again! 'Til next year!' But, gradually the numbers have been going down over the last 20 years and now, nobody signs up, and we can't keep it going (Male, Focus Group One).

Others mentioned that the environment that the campers come from, i.e. a city or a less environmentally conscious region, could affect their environmental literacy and comfort. A camp director testified:

We had a number of... inner city kids. You know, their environment was hearing gunshots and cars backfire and that sort of thing, they've never heard an owl in the middle of the night. So they were terrified when they'd come and hear those things (Male, Focus Group Three).

Despite the widespread Nature-Deficit Disorder perceived among many campers, environmental education can still be an effective tool with young people because of their natural curiosity in wild things, according to the focus group discussions. A participant remarked:

Kids are extremely curious about nature.... You put a bug in front of them, and they just go nuts! And so if you segue off that curiosity, and use that as a main focus... then I think you'll really grab their attention, 'cause that's what they're interested in.... Kids want to learn about something that they're interested in. And nature, kids are fascinated with nature (Male, Focus Group One).

A program director noted that children need unstructured, unhurried time in nature for their spiritual development. She explained:

It's really important in our programming that we give the kids time to stop and consider. So there has to be something built into the program that is quiet and outside in some way that they're not so busy doing things with stuff we've built but

sometime during the week that they'd be outside in God's creation. It seems to be a big part of the impact of camp (Female, Focus Group Two).

Another participant explained that campers need to be met at the level where they are to draw them into connection with the environment:

Rather than just say, 'Well you guys aren't interested in this anymore', let's find out where they're at, and let's find out new ways that we can teach the truth. Because the reason it's important for them to learn those truths is, it is God's creation and it does reveal something about it. And so if it's really important, then let's figure out how to do it in a way that they'll be excited about (Male, Focus Group One).

Camper needs and interests were a common concern to Christian camp staff. While the participants recognized that environmental education can effectively meet the needs and interests of today's campers, they expressed that their campers may not recognize their own need for experiences in nature. Environmental education, if it is to be included in a camp program, must be designed in such a way that it will capture the camper's curiosity without sacrificing safety or comfort. At this point, the discussion moved on to the varying types of environmental education as it is implemented in camp programs.

Types of Environmental Education in Camp Programming. When asked if environmental education was implemented at their camps, several participants initially shared that their camps did not include any kind of structured environmental education in their resident summer camp programs. Others mentioned that they offer outdoor education/science camps in the spring that are separate from their main summer camp programs. Another group of camp staff mentioned that they have previously worked at

camps that offered structured environmental education programs for class groups during the school year (one of these was specified as a Christian camp, the others were not specified). Another trend was that some camps offered structured environmental education experiences that were one-day programs and not connected at all to the summer camp ministry. One of these camp representatives explained:

We haven't made the jump really effectively from lesson plans, structured kind of day [programs] in the spring and fall to the summer program.... The summer program is on your own time... very unstructured, teachable moment kind of education, if the counselors are even inclined to do that (Male, Focus Group Three).

As the discussion progressed, several camp directors and program directors described elements of their programming that could partially fulfill the NAAEE definition of environmental education: “Environmental education teaches children and adults how to learn about and investigate their environment, and to make intelligent, informed decisions about how they can take care of it” (NAAEE, 2012). They found that even if they did not have a structured environmental education program designed into the camp schedule, many aspects of the camp experience could contribute to environmental appreciation and learning. Some mentioned the natural location of the camp itself as a tool for exposing campers to outdoor experiences. A few camps identified ornithology classes, horse science classes, and survival skills classes as part of their summer camp curriculum.

Guided nature hikes were the most commonly mentioned type of education in the summer camp context. A program director explained:

On a hike, all of a sudden [the campers] become curious about something that their hike leader is curious about and they stop and they notice... they start to pick up on it and notice it. It's kind of contagious, but it has to happen on the way to some place (Female, Focus Group Two).

Another participant shared an example of a one-day activity that educates campers about botany, ecology, and litter clean up, all while hiking to a river. He summarized, *Even a little bit, even a one-day experience can have a significant impact* (Male, Focus Group Three). Although nature hikes were generally seen as effective and easily implemented forms of environmental education, some participants expressed a desire to more creatively program these hikes to keep them from becoming boring. Other camps shared that they use a guided nature hike model for canoe, backpack, or horseback riding trips.

Horses were identified as a major draw for campers and also as an opportunity to teach horse science and some aspects of ecology. Turtles, lizards, frogs, and domestic and exotic pets were mentioned as animals that are used to help build environmental awareness within campers. A participant who uses exotic pets in his program shared, *There is nothing that draws children in faster, with more interest, when you're talking about even the environment and natural settings, than using live animals that they're not familiar with* (Male, Focus Group Two).

One of the keystone program elements of the traditional Christian camp is the chapel service. Some camps indicated that they utilize their chapel services as opportunities to

teach about creation and the Creator, especially when the chapel speaker is an individual who is experienced in teaching about the environment. A camp director related:

We went ahead and researched ecosystems and we teach ecosystems, we went and we found hundreds and hundreds of animals that we researched all the facts about, and then we came up with all the faith lessons about what this teaches us about God and His...attributes and character.... We actually go and find out what the speakers are going to talk about, go out in creation... we're just going out and showing [the campers] all these wonderful things, then [the speaker] uses those as illustrations in his sermon, and they're engaged (Male, Focus Group One).

Another participant explained that his camp once hosted a missionary speaker who brought skeletons, skulls, and aquariums for housing animals from the pond for the campers to examine during free time. The missionary would take the campers on nature hikes and explain ecology to them as he spent time with them. Several participants in the focus group interview agreed that the chapel service is a primary part of the summer camp program, so they approved of the integration of creation lessons into the chapel services.

Wilderness camp-outs were mentioned as a type of environmental education. A program director explained:

As far as environmental goes, it's more along the lines of minimalist survival skills. Where all that comes to play is being able to take nature into your own dominion, you know, use what nature provides—still having a leave no trace ethic—but using what

nature provides to survive and have a good head knowledge of the outdoors (Male, Focus Group One).

Although none of the camps mentioned direct instruction of environmental ethics, several participants recognized that responsible camp practices can be learning experiences for campers. A camp director suggested:

There's things that we do in the camping ministry that we probably don't even think is connected to environmental education... recycling. We make our campers aware of that kind of stuff... I mean, there are things that we do all the time in our daily lives as resident camp staff that we don't necessarily think is something we would teach the kids that are around us (Male, Focus Group One).

Another participant suggested a food waste program that teaches campers to be more aware and responsible for their choices. In order to effectively teach environmental practices, however, the camps must exemplify these practices. A program director suggested:

It almost has to be written in as part of the camp's mission or purpose in order for it to be integrated... it's part of the culture of the camp. Where they know that you're always looking for opportunities and ways to teach and to care and... it doesn't have to be 'green', it doesn't have to be 'environmental', but it's a better way that we can care for creation and the environment by doing it this way. You know--a rain barrel... I mean that's just sensible! We don't have one. But it is a sensible way to preserve, you know, a water bill. And if that's the culture of your ministry, and your

camp, then you're able to do that. Um, I don't think that's where most are right now, though (Male, Focus Group Two).

The consensus of the focus group participants was that environmental education is not integrated as effectively into the traditional resident summer camp program as it could be. Some participants expressed that environmental education should be more integrated into a traditional week of summer camp; while others shared that it would be more effective in a separate, off-season program.

A camp director related:

I think you also need to look at how we integrate not just environmental education into a program that we can use just so we are getting some financial resources during our off season, but how can we incorporate some of that education into our own programs, our own summer programs? And that's a new territory in recent years, for camp ministries to look at as well.... Not just doing a separate program from your summer camps, but really trying to integrate some of it together (Male, Focus Group Three).

A program director differed in her opinion of integrated environmental education:

Our normal summer camp program... there's no room for it. We're busy doing other things, focusing on their devotions and the chapels, and our other activities, so for a small camp with small staff, we would want to make that a separate focus... Our local Christian schools, they'd come down for a few days during the school year. And so, it wouldn't be one staff member dedicated to it, it'd be our staff who does our

summer, then also doing our outdoor or environmental education....It'd definitely be a different time for us (Female, Focus Group Two).

Another program director explained:

I think I've typically seen [camp programming] be either one kind or the other. Either you're a camp that does outdoor adventure education or environmental education, or you're a camp that does something else and might have that as part of what they do as a side.... Now, myself, I would like to see it more integrated, but I think that's my perception of how people see it, either one or the other (Male, Focus Group Two).

Some participants saw environmental education as an avenue to accomplish their spiritual goals for summer camp, and so they wanted to see more environmental education integrated into the summer program. One participant responded:

Our desire is to point people back to God and reveal what He has [done]. I think [environmental education] should be a part of the camp program. We're outside, looking; we need to use as much as we can. Especially the junior campers can get really excited about it (Male, Focus Group One).

In summary, none of the camp staff interviewed mentioned structured environmental education programs during resident camp sessions. However, they shared that there are plenty of teachable moments available during resident camp for environmental education opportunities. Some participants mentioned types of environmental education that could be incorporated into the traditional summer camp program, mainly emphasizing environmental awareness and appreciation. It seems that voluntary, unstructured

environmental education, led by the camp counselors, is the preferred style of environmental education among the camps involved in this study. Some participants mentioned that they would like to provide more environmental education, but they face challenges to implementing this type of program. The next theme deals with these challenges.

Challenges to Environmental Education in Christian Camps. Out of all the challenges to environmental education that were discussed in the focus groups, challenges related to camp staff were mentioned the most frequently. A camp director related an experience where he received severe opposition from the camp board for moving forward with an environmental education program that reached out to public schools during the off-season. Another shared that some Baptist churches are very cautious about the *go green* movement. He explained:

In a Christian camp with staff and board members and stuff like that, I think that you do have to be careful what you say and how you say it because it might not be what's coming out of your mind or your heart, but it might be... their previous experience hearing about certain things (Male, Focus Group Three).

A fellow camp director, who referred to himself as a member of an older generation, agreed:

The generation that's going to be on your board or maybe some of your upper level management ... is going to be from a different generation where we have been tainted by some of the past thoughts and stuff so it's an important thing for you to be aware of (Male, Focus Group Three).

The *past thoughts* that the director was referring to were the stereotypical *environmental zealots* and *nature worshipers* that the group had been discussing.

The discussion about hindrances to environmental education also brought up the role of the camp director. One director admitted:

Like anything else at camp... [if] the camp director doesn't appreciate it, it probably don't happen at your camp. So the camps that tend to have more environmental education probably have a camp director who was an Eagle Scout... or who understands how to present God's creation, and get the kids to interact (Male, Focus Group One).

A program director expressed that in order to become a part of the camp culture, environmental education must be understood *from the top leadership all the way down* (Male, Focus Group Two).

Many of the participants acknowledged that summer staff training seems to be one of the major challenges preventing environmental education from becoming a significant part of the summer camp program. The participants agreed that their staff are typically not sufficiently prepared or interested to teach environmental topics. A camp director explained:

For me as a summer camp director, I can't find staff that are passionate about it. That's the biggest thing. Because I find that... for nature, they need a passion for it..... There's nothing I can do to make that successful unless the staff person is passionate about it.... Last year, one thing that made a positive difference in ours was [an environmental educator] came to pre-camp and with his passion for it, a few

caught the vision as he just did a hike with us. And it took somebody to have the passion for it in a very relaxed and fun way that it spurred in them things that they remembered in childhood. They had no intention of doing nature before that, but it was just being inspired by somebody (Female, Focus Group Three).

As the camp leaders in the focus groups discussed the dilemma of disinterested staff, they brought to the table creative suggestions for igniting the passion for expertise in environmental education. These suggestions included traveling to other camps to get ideas or an intensive training seminar for summer staff or camp leaders. A camp director shared the idea:

If I had a booklet that we could take and run people through things, that therefore the teaching emphasis was already created, fine. But for me to say, ‘Okay, in the midst of preparing for all these other things, we’re going to prepare this too—I just haven’t got where that’s a high enough priority yet. So until a staff member just says ‘Oh I wanna do that’ and creates the way to get the kids while interacting with nature to learn from it, to make that basically easy... it ain’t gonna happen (Male, Focus Group One).

The camp director who mentioned that her staff didn’t originally have a passion for nature brought up an encouraging suggestion:

These [summer staff] are the people with the heart for Christ as most of your camps have. It wouldn’t take much to excite them... if you had somebody who is showing them God in nature and this is how you can teach about God more by using nature: that would be exciting to me.... In other words, I don’t think it would necessarily take

someone with a passion for nature, even though I would love that, but just someone relating that this is how you can teach more about God to your kids by using nature would be very exciting to me (Female, Focus Group Three).

Other challenges that were highlighted during the discussion included location of the camp, cost of starting up a new program, disinterest of campers in outdoor programming, camp schedules that are already packed full with no room for new programs, and governmental regulations that restrict the exhibition of certain animals. A program director summarized, *It just adds some more logistical issues—that aren't insurmountable by any means—but do add some more challenges that we have to face, since we haven't done this for a while* (Male, Focus Group Two).

Summary. Christian spiritual development of campers was a prominent theme that most camp staff saw as the main purpose of Christian camps. Some camps were negative towards the term *environmentalism*, but all acknowledged that God desires for humans to be responsible stewards of the environment. Several participants emphasized the power of environmental education in drawing campers closer to God, and thus fulfilling a common goal of Christian camps. Some camp representatives shared ways that their camps implement environmental education in their summer camp programs, and all acknowledged that Christian camps could be doing more to effectively use the outdoor setting to teach campers about creation and the Creator. Several challenges to environmental education were mentioned, with the top challenges involving the camp board, camp director, and summer staff. When these key people see environmental education as important, it can thrive in a summer camp, but if they are indifferent toward

environmental education it will not succeed. Participants suggested more training and resources for camps to help them recognize the value of environmental education and integrate it into their existing programs.

Camp Website Data Results

Twenty-one camps from twelve states (Arizona [1], California [2], Colorado [1], Illinois [1], North Carolina [6] New York [1], Ohio [1], Pennsylvania [2], South Carolina [1], Tennessee [2], Virginia [2], and Wisconsin [1]) participated in the study by attending focus groups and releasing their websites for analysis. Websites are widely used by Christian camps to promote their purpose, philosophy, and program. For the website analysis segment of this study, the researcher scrutinized the websites of the 21 participating camps: reading every word of text, looking at photos, and watching videos. The researcher took the code list generated from Focus Group One, coded all of the relevant data from each website and sorted it into the larger themes that were synthesized through the focus group data analysis process. Some of the themes appeared more prominent than others on the camps' promotional websites, according to the researcher's findings.

Reactions to the Term “Environmentalism” and the Concept of Environmental Care. Environmentalism was not mentioned by name on any of the websites. Out of the 21 camps, only three mentioned any programming or practices related to environmental care or responsible stewardship of the earth. One North Carolina camp advertised a specialized week of camp called *EcoCamp*. The website's description reads:

This camp is a week-long nature camp that gives junior campers special opportunities to explore and experience the beautiful corner of God's creation.... During EcoCamp we'll focus on what scripture teaches us about our place in creation and how we care for it ("EcoCamp", 2012, para. 2).

Another North Carolina camp listed the educational classes that they offer school groups during the school year, including a class on *Endangered Species*. This same camp is identified as a *Stewardship Forest* by the NC Forest Service, indicating their responsible forestry practices. The Arizona camp that participated in the focus group discussion was still building facilities at the time of the website analysis, but on their website they described a desire to use solar power and wood burning stoves as cost-efficient energy sources.

Using Nature to Encourage Christian Spiritual Development. Thirteen of the twenty-one camps used the term *God's creation* on their website and emphasized the natural beauty of their location as an avenue for encountering God. A common theme that showed up on several websites was that of reconnecting with God by spending restful time in His creation.

A California camp's website said:

We have found that folks who are thrilled with being in God's creation... will also see the mighty hand of God's creative work in the desert.... Every bush, every insect, every rock, every animal, and every plant bears the unmistakable imprint of God's creative and sustaining power ("Our Mission", 2012, para. 4).

A camp in Virginia included this statement in their overall vision for camping: *We believe that the outdoors represents a rich potential for communicating God's essential life truths* (“Our Vision”, 2012, para. 1). A Pennsylvania camp included the phrase *utilizing the outdoors* in their mission statement, claiming, *The great outdoors is used not only for our enjoyment, but to point campers to the Creator of the great outdoors and to share the glorious truths found in His Word* (“The What and Why of Calvary”, 2012, p. 1, para. 2). Several of the camps offer school programs during their off-season, and some of the names of these programs testify to their foundation on biblical principles. Examples include: CEO Camp (Christian Education Outdoors) and CORE (Christian Outdoor Ranch Education). Other specialty programs that emphasize spirituality using the outdoors are a Creation vs. Evolution conference for teens at a camp in South Carolina and a *Rugged Spirituality* weekend retreat at a North Carolina camp.

Needs and Interests of Campers. Websites used adjectives such as *fun*, *exciting*, and *unique* to describe the outdoor aspects of their programming. Educational classes were advertised as *hands-on*, *memorable*, *engaging*, and *adventurous*. One program stated:

CEO Camp allows students to use their academic skills in art, language, math, and science as they discover and investigate new and exciting things about themselves, our world, and our Creator. Also, they will have fun with the many games and activities, giving groups an enjoyable time together (“Christian Education Outdoors”, 2012, para. 1).

Another camp appealed to teachers and students by offering:

[Outdoor Education] *offers a living laboratory that students can see, touch and feel. Opening the minds of students to the wonders of nature and the environment is certainly a difficult task from the confines of a classroom. Reading and discussion, no matter how well presented, simply cannot compare with seeing, touching, and feeling subjects within their natural environment.... Experience thousands of acres in the beautiful Blue Ridge Mountains, teeming with wildlife, plants and other natural habitats just waiting for curious hands and minds* (“Economical Packages”, 2012, para. 1).

All websites included colorful photos and videos of campers having fun outside. Images of campers hiking, playing games, mountain biking, rock climbing, holding animals, and reading their Bibles outdoors were used to appeal to the visual nature of today’s youth.

Types of Environmental Education in Camp Programming. All of the camps involved in the study offer at least one week of resident summer camp. Of the camps that provided information about their summer camp programming on their website, nine included hiking trails or nature hikes in their list of available activities. Overnight sleep-outs and guided night hikes for star viewing were night opportunities listed at some camps. A camp in Virginia listed horse science, pond/nature study, outdoor living skills, and canoeing as some of the outdoor/environmental skills available to their campers. Two camps indicated that they have a Nature Center on site available for campers. One North Carolina camp offered survival skills and tent camping options for their teen

campers, and another from the same state described that summer campers can connect with their environment by swimming, hiking, caving, or canoeing.

Aside from the traditional week-long resident summer camp, some camps made environmental education available to diverse groups throughout the summer and school year. Three camps offered outdoor education-specific camps ranging from a four-day to a week-long program. One camp had a folder of pictures from an *Outdoor Lab* this summer, but included no description of the programming of this opportunity. Two North Carolina camps offered one-day educational programs for schools, but one of these also provided the option of expanding their school program into a residential package. A Pennsylvania camp promoted its School Programs with this description: *Naturalist, natural history, and field sciences programs also create an opportunity for students to learn through a unique hands-on approach* (“Schools”, 2012, para. 3). However, this camp did not provide any easily accessible information about the length or availability of this program.

Challenges to Environmental Education in Christian Camps. This theme was not addressed at all on the camp promotional websites. The researcher reasoned that camps are unlikely to promote or discuss what they are not doing on their website, because the purpose of the site is to advertise what they are doing well.

Summary. Websites are effective tools for visually advertising a camp’s purpose, philosophy, and program. While all of the 21 camps included in the study highlighted the natural setting of their camp in one way or another, the researcher observed that most of the camps were lacking in adequate descriptions of their methodology of utilizing the

natural setting. Some of the camps seem to highlight outdoor learning as a vital part of the camp experience, but others emphasized the fun and excitement of camp more than the value of the outdoor experience.

CHAPTER 5.

DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Connections to the Literature

The researcher examined the focus group data to see if there was a relationship to the information on environmental education in resident camps that was uncovered in the literature review. Before conducting the focus groups, the researcher assumed that the elements of summer camp which have been shown to contribute to environmental literacy—namely, unstructured play and recreation in the outdoors, the role of animals, development of self-concept, temporary community, and duration of experience—would all be prominent items of discussion among the Christian camp staff in the interviews.

Unstructured Play and Recreation in the Outdoors. When asked about the selling points of their camp, participants mentioned fun as a key factor that draws in campers. Horseback riding, canoeing, and crayfish hunting were highlighted as examples of outdoor recreation that children can experience at a summer camp. These unstructured, exploratory outdoor experiences during childhood include the types of interactions with nature that Wells & Lekies (2006) found to be significant in the development of environmental attitudes and behavior later in life. It is apparent that in practice, many of the camps interviewed use non-formal, unstructured teaching opportunities to build environmental awareness rather than structured environmental instruction. According to Sobel (2008) and Wells and Lekies (2006), these non-formal experiences can be more powerful in the development of environmental literacy than a more academic program might be.

The Role of Animals. In every focus group, participants mentioned animals as a tool for teaching campers about God's creation. The impact of animal husbandry as shown in the horse care emphasized at some of the camps is supported by the research of Kruse and Card (2004). Other camps mentioned animals brought in from the wild, such as snakes, frogs, lizards, and turtles, as creatures that pique the curiosity of campers and can be used to teach spiritual truth about God as their Creator. Sobel (2008) and Watson (2006) agreed that wild animals can serve as inroads into the child's interest and curiosity, preparing them to learn about nature, self, and others.

Development of Self-Concept. The development of self-concept was never directly mentioned during the three focus group sessions. However, a redeemed relationship with God and a stewardship responsibility to the environment were key topics of conversation in every focus group. Some camp staff expressed a desire to start a program that would use science and nature to teach character development, while others described camp as a place where campers learn who they are. These perceptions dovetail with Fine's (2005) research that shows camp to be a place where youth build their identities.

According to Marcinkowski (1998) and the NAAEE (2010), an individual locus of control and personal responsibility for actions are important contributors to responsible environmental behavior. Participants at the focus group interviews for this study would counter that personal responsibility for the environment is not only intrinsically motivated, but also mandated by the Bible's teachings. Stewardship of God's creation in obedience to the biblical mandate was recognized by several participants as a value that should be emphasized more strongly at Christian camps than it currently is.

Temporary Community. In the review of the literature, the researcher found much support for the role of the camp as a temporary community where environmental outcomes can be cultivated in a group setting (Burkhardt, et al., 2005; Cairn Series, 2003; Gillis & Speelman, 2008; NAAEE & NEETF, 2001; Ribbe, 2010; Smith, Steel & Gidlow, 2010). Surprisingly, the focus group discussions did not address the relationships that campers build with each other or their roles in the camp community. Several camps did acknowledge that their camps provide a Christian environment that is distinctly different than the environments that many of the campers may come from; however, they did not refer to this environment as a temporary community. It seemed that the discussion centered more on the actual communities that the campers came from and would return to than the temporary community of the camp.

Duration of Experience. None of the focus groups mentioned the length of time needed for effective environmental education sessions in summer camp programs. All of the camps involved in each focus group offered weeklong sessions of resident summer camps, but none of them indicated the amount of time within that program spent outdoors or in environmental programming. A study that examines the efficacy of various lengths of resident environmental experiences in Christian camps would be a valuable contribution to the length-of-experience studies conducted by Mittelstaedt, Sanker, and VanderVeer (1999); and Stern, Powell, and Ardoin (2008).

Summary. The researcher found that the five inherent components of summer camp that surfaced from the literature review were not extensively highlighted by those who work at Christian camps. Instead, the Christian camp staff focused on spiritual impact as

their primary purpose of camp, and spoke of the value of environmental education when it draws campers into relationship with God the Creator.

Conclusions

This paper has demonstrated that an exploration into the insights and experiences of a small sample of the Christian camp community in North America yields a variety of perspectives. Another sample, from different geographic areas or from more diverse theological backgrounds, would likely yield its own unique set of perspectives.

However, even among the diverse perspectives from this study we can see common themes that emerge from the many voices. The Christian camp staff interviewed for this study demonstrated concerns about secular environmentalism, love of God and creation, concerns that the Church is not fulfilling its biblical role of environmental stewardship, desire to see children more connected to creation, desire to see children in deeper relationship with God, and confusion about how to better integrate environmental education in to their summer camp programs. Some of the camps expressed hesitation towards the word *environment* and their perceived conception of *environmentalism*, but when they used other terms to describe education in, about, and for nature, they were more positive towards the idea.

None of the camps seemed to feel that Christian camping is effectively using the outdoor setting to its full potential for educational growth and spiritual impact. However, all of the camps expressed interest in environmental education, especially when it is used to draw campers into relationship with God. Some of the participants interviewed also wanted to see camps improve in their stewardship education, training campers to take

care of creation according to the biblical mandate given in Genesis. Camp directors and program directors related that they would be more likely to incorporate environmental education if they had better trained staff that were passionate about teaching the environment.

This qualitative data seems to indicate that many Christian camps desire to integrate environmental education into their summer camp programs or to start environmental education experiences during the off-season for school groups, but lack the resources and training necessary to move forward in this direction.

Recommendations for Practice

The researcher would suggest that Christians who understand the biblical basis for environmental education could develop and teach a training curriculum for Christian camp summer staff. This training program could include a biblical basis for environmental education, basic ecological concepts, education skills, and outdoor skills necessary for quality environmental education. In addition, the training program could seek to cultivate within the summer staff a sense of appreciation for God's creation and passion for teaching. Alternatively, environmental educators could develop a booklet of easy-to-learn activities and resources that camp directors and program directors could use to train their own staff. Professors in camp administration degrees, especially at Christian colleges, could include environmental education in the curriculum, so that those who become camp directors and program directors already have gained a vision for environmental education as well as the skills to implement it in their programming.

Recommendations for Future Research

There is much that remains to be studied about environmental education and its role in the Christian camps of North America. This study was designed to spark an interest and start a conversation about the current state of environmental education in Christian resident summer camp programs, with hopes that other researchers will contribute more information to the research question and help discover the environmental outcomes of Christian camp programs. Other researchers could implement the research design at Christian camp conferences in other parts of the country to gain a broader understanding of the definitions, implementation, and integration of environmental education across the country. Researchers could evaluate the efficacy of structured environmental education programs in summer camps at achieving environmental literacy, and compare these results to the environmental literacy that may result from camp programs that offer unstructured nature experiences. Alternatively, research comparing the outcomes of a challenge course program in a camp setting to the outcomes of an environment-based education program in a camp setting would provide valuable data about the similarities and differences of these methods of education. If future research proves an effective correlation between challenge course education and environment-based education, Christian camps that already implement challenge course education may desire to augment their programming with a new focus on environmental education for community building. The length of time that is most effective for a resident environmental education experience is another question that remains to be answered. As researchers continue to discover the state of environmental education in North American

Christian camps, their research will provide excellent resources for practitioners who wish to improve the environmental education in their camp programs. It is hoped that the results of this study will help to lay a foundation for future programs that can cultivate environmental literacy, especially among the youth of this nation who seek to glorify God with their lives. Environmental responsibility is just one of the many ways that daily life choices can bring honor to God (1 Corinthians 10:31), and the researcher's desire is to help Christian camps glorify the Creator by developing campers into environmentally literate citizens.

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APPENDIX A
SAMPLE FORMS FOR FOCUS GROUPS

CONSENT FORM
“Exploring Environmental Education in North American Christian Resident Camps”

INSTITUTION: Montreat College

PRIMARY INVESTIGATOR: Emily J. Dunkerton

NAME: (please print) _____

Purpose:

This study is designed to explore the definitions that Christian camp leaders attribute to the term *environmental education*, as well as the variety of ways that these leaders implement and integrate environmental education throughout their respective camp programs. The long-term goal of the study is to lay a foundation for future practices that will cultivate environmental knowledge and stewardship within the context of Christian camping.

Procedures:

As a Christian camping professional, you are invited to participate in a study that will explore the perceptions and experiences of Christian camp leaders regarding environmental education. If you agree to participate, we would ask that you complete the following tasks:

1. Complete a half-page demographic form that asks for your age, gender, location of your camp, and years of experience in camping.
2. Participate in an hour-long focus group interview at the 2012 Tweakage Rendezvous or 2012 CCCA Carolinas/Virginias Sectional.
3. Submit any camp program schedules, curricula, promotional brochures, or other documents that describe your outdoor programs to the principal investigator. These documents may be submitted via e-mail, fax, or hard copy. Signing this consent form will grant the primary investigator permission to use data gleaned from these documents in her research.

Risks and Benefits of the Study:

The risk in participating in the focus group interview is that you may not be able to attend optional activities scheduled at the same time. We recognize that your time is valuable. There is also a potential risk of breach of confidentiality of focus group data, but precautions to ensure confidentiality minimize this risk (see below). The benefits include, but are not limited to: networking with other camping professionals, learning from others about environmental education, making your opinions and experiences known to your colleagues, gaining a resource list of environmental education curricula, and contributing foundational data to the field of research.

Confidentiality:

Names will not be used throughout the study to preserve anonymity to all but the primary investigator. Audio recordings will be transcribed and the recordings will be erased one

year after completion of the study. All data collected will be kept in a locked file and only be accessible to the research committee. Any documents that are collected will only be available to the research committee and will be shredded at the conclusion of the study. No publication will include any information that will make it possible for anyone outside the study to identify a participant. No information will be available to your employers.

Voluntary Nature of the Study:

You are invited to participate in this study of your own free will. You may leave the study at any time if you so choose. Your participation or non-participation will not affect your relationship with Montreat College, Tweakage, CCCA, or Alpine Ministries.

Contacts:

The primary investigator conducting this study is Emily J. Dunkerton of Alpine Ministries, a graduate student at Montreat College. You may contact her for questions at any time at Alpine Ministries; Phone: (304) 877-6427 extension 4134 or e-mail: emily.dunkerton@abc.edu.

If you have questions regarding your rights as a participant in this study you may contact the Institutional Review Board of Montreat College, P.O. Box 1267, Montreat, NC 28757. You may also contact Dr. Brad Daniel, chair of the Outdoor Education department at Montreat College and advisor to this study at (828) 669-8012 extension 3307 or e-mail: bdaniel@montreat.edu.

Consent:

I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions regarding the study and have received answers. I hereby authorize Emily J. Dunkerton to collect, examine, analyze, and report on program schedules, brochures, curricula, or any other documents from my camp that I deem pertinent to the study “Exploring Environmental Education in North American Christian Camps.” I understand that the documents will only be available to members of the research committee and will be shredded at the conclusion of the study. I understand that my camp’s data may contribute to a master’s thesis resulting from this study. I understand that no publication will include any information that will make it possible to identify a participating camp. I willingly consent to donate any pertinent documents that I choose to provide to the study. I willingly consent to participate in the focus group interview and allow my comments to be used in any research publication that results from this study.

Signature of Participant

Date

Signature of Investigator

Date

QUESTIONNAIRES FOR DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

AGE (circle one): 18-25 26-35 36-50 51-60 61+

YEARS IN FULL-TIME CAMP MINISTRY:
 YOUR POSITION AT CAMP:
 LOCATION OF CAMP:
 DOES YOUR CAMP OFFER RESIDENT CAMPS FOR YOUTH AT LEAST ONE
 WEEK LONG?

DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

AGE (circle one): 18-25 26-35 36-50 51-60 61+

YEARS IN FULL-TIME CAMP MINISTRY:
 YOUR POSITION AT CAMP:
 LOCATION OF CAMP:
 DOES YOUR CAMP OFFER RESIDENT CAMPS FOR YOUTH AT LEAST ONE
 WEEK LONG?

DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

AGE (circle one): 18-25 26-35 36-50 51-60 61+

YEARS IN FULL-TIME CAMP MINISTRY:
 YOUR POSITION AT CAMP:
 LOCATION OF CAMP:
 DOES YOUR CAMP OFFER RESIDENT CAMPS FOR YOUTH AT LEAST ONE
 WEEK LONG?

DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

AGE (circle one): 18-25 26-35 36-50 51-60 61+

YEARS IN FULL-TIME CAMP MINISTRY:
 YOUR POSITION AT CAMP:
 LOCATION OF CAMP:
 DOES YOUR CAMP OFFER RESIDENT CAMPS FOR YOUTH AT LEAST ONE
 WEEK LONG?

APPENDIX B
SAMPLE FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW SCRIPT

Focus Group Interview Script

Introduction: Welcome to *Environmental Education Focus Group One*, and thank you for taking the time to participate. My name is Emily Dunkerton and I am conducting this focus group as part of my graduate coursework at Montreat College. I am interested in learning about your understanding of environmental education as it relates to Christian camping. For the next hour, we will be exploring environmental education together through a series of open-ended questions. I am looking for your honest, diverse perspectives on this topic, so there is no right or wrong answers. While I would love to hear each one of you respond to every question, it is not required and you may choose to answer as many or as few questions as you feel comfortable. The entire session will be recorded by digital audio recorder and written notes.

Everything you share in this session will remain confidential. No personal names or camp names will be used in this study, so please try to refrain from using names when referring to each other. The purpose of this study, procedures, risks and benefits, confidentiality, and voluntary nature of this study are all outlined on the Consent Form in front of you. Please take five minutes to read through this form carefully and don't hesitate to ask any questions. If you still agree to participate after reading this form, please sign it and hand it to me. If you choose not to participate, please excuse yourself from the room before we begin.

In addition to signing the Consent Form, I am asking you to fill out a short Demographic Form with basic information about yourself and your camp.

When everyone has completed and turned in these three forms, we will begin. Help yourself to refreshments!

1. How do *you* describe the summer camp experience to a parent who is interested in sending his/her child to your camp?
 - What do you think are the most important elements of that experience for the child?
2. What comes to your mind when you hear the word "environment?"
 - Why do you think this is?
3. Take a minute and write down the way you would define *environmental education*.
4. *Environmental education* has been defined by some as: "teaching children and adults how to learn about and investigate their environment, and to make intelligent, informed decisions about how they can take care of it." What would you change about this definition, if anything?
5. For the rest of our time together, when we use the term *environmental education*, let's think about activities, lessons, or programs that fit into the definition I just gave you. This will ensure that we are all talking about the same thing. If you would rather define environmental education in a different way, please clarify

what you mean when you use this term so that we will all be on the same page. To what extent do you think environmental education belongs at a Christian camp, if at all?

6. What purpose does environmental education serve at your camp?
7. How is environmental education implemented at your camp, if at all?
8. Who is responsible for the environmental education at your camp? How are they trained?
9. What do you see as some of the challenges or hindrances to environmental education in Christian camps?
10. How does environmental education fit with the rest of your camp program? Is it integrated?
11. If your camp does not include any type of environmental education, why is that?
12. Are there any more questions or comments related to environmental education and Christian camping you wish to share, or is there anything else that someone would like to share?

Thank you for your participation and your insights into this topic. Please take this packet of environmental education resources as a thank-you for your involvement in this research. Contact me if you would like to receive an electronic copy of my thesis including the findings from this focus group.