Background

Beginning in the early 1860s, many U.S. children have spent their summers making friendship bracelets, swimming in lakes, and singing songs around a campfire at summer camp. It would be nearly impossible to picture the typical American summer camp without arts and crafts, as such activities have been and continue to be a fundamental component in these spaces. Utilizing a framework of historical reasoning applied to archival data, this research identified many substantial connections between the development and implementation of arts and crafts programs in summer camps and art education. To ensure that anyone within and beyond art education and organized youth camping could access this research, I created a website (www.artincamps.com) that includes an interactive timeline of the history of arts and crafts in U.S. summer camps from 1870-1999, a detailed graphic illustrating the progression of materials and activities, and relevant ephemera. Giving visibility to this programming and its rich history can legitimize its continued existence in society.

Research Questions

What is the historical evolution of arts and crafts programs in summer camps in the United States from 1870 to 1999 and what contemporary historical developments were influential in their conception, implementation, and progression?

Methods and Materials

1. Collected resources, images, and ephemera centered around arts and crafts programming in summer camp spaces, including but not limited to, prominent youth organizations and their histories, the field art education, summer camps, the organized camping movement, arts and crafts projects/activities, and societal movements in the United States from the 1870 to 1999.
2. Compiled and analyzed data through archival data analysis strategies and the theoretical framework of historical reasoning.
3. Created a website with a digital historical timeline summarizing my findings. This consisted of related text, images, and ephemera. The website also contains a visual diagram charting the progression of arts and crafts activities and materials from the 1870s to 1999.
4. Sharing research through the website with peers both within and beyond the field's art education and organized youth camping.

Results

Finding 1: Beginning in 1902, summer camp arts and crafts activities and materials expanded from six core crafts (ceramics, chair-caning, weaving, jewelry making, woodworking and book binding) to over 350 activities by 1989. Finding 2: The progression of summer camp arts and crafts were directly influenced and shaped by trends in art education, societal movements in the U.S., and leading youth organizations over time. Finding 3: This historical timeline of summer camp arts and crafts comes from archival material and ephemera, including Camping Magazine, Boy/Girl Scout handbooks and guides, summer camp promotional materials and commercials, educational resources for art education, and archival-focused social media pages.

Conclusion

This research found that summer camp arts and crafts activities and materials have been closely linked with art education in the U.S. between 1870 and 1999. Arts and crafts educators in summer camps followed emerging trends in art education and organized youth camping to create and facilitate engaging activities that provided valuable art education to generations of youth. Summer camp arts and crafts evolved alongside changes in art education mirroring the integration of new materials and processes into art classrooms across the country.

Future Directions for Research

A true hope for this project is that lives and grows beyond itself. I feel deeply that this history deserves to be shared and celebrated. I see the website as a living and breathing entity that encourages continued dialogue about the history of summer camp arts and crafts. This research pulled data from select youth organizations. Going forward, more research on marginalized groups and voices should be added to this history.

Acknowledgments

I could not have completed this research without the countless educators who’ve come before and paved the way for summer camp arts and crafts, the hundreds of thousands of art teachers who’ve shaped this field for the last 150 years, and the millions of young people who’ve spent their summers in camps across the country for centuries.

Progression of U.S. Summer Camp Arts and Crafts Graphic (above)

To view a digital version of the graph with zoom capabilities, follow the Miro link: https://tinyurl.com/artsandcraftsmiro or Google Drive download link https://tinyurl.com/artsandcraftschartpdf

To view the complete list of summer camp arts and crafts activities, follow the Google Drive link and download: https://tinyurl.com/artsandcraftslistpdf

Website Homepage: www.artincamps.com (far right)

QR Code link to www.artincamps.com (right)