

# The More Campers Attend the Same Camp, the More They Increase Their Competence, Friendship Skills and Independence



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## Introduction

The camp industry has the potential to evidence itself as a major contributor to the outcomes of youth development. There are over 12,000 camps providing services in the United States. Many of these camps have campers that return each summer. The use of the recently adopted Basic Camper Outcomes (BCO) questionnaires by the American Camp Association could assist in providing such evidence. Three of the questionnaires are based on the Self-Determination Theory (SDT), which suggests that optimal development is enhanced when the campers' needs of competence, autonomy, and relatedness are met. These three questionnaires measure increases in campers' competence, friendship skills and independence. Thus, the purpose of this study was to examine the acquisition of three developmental outcomes among youth campers and their relationship to the number of summers campers attended camp.



## Abstract

This study was designed to assist camps in documenting camper gains in developmental outcomes. The revised ACA Accreditation Standards for 2007 strongly recommend that camps identify and document outcomes. Yet, a 2006 ACA National Needs Assessment indicated that over 90% of camp personnel are concerned with identifying camper outcomes. Perhaps as a result of this need, the ACA recently endorsed seven Basic Camper Outcomes (BCO) questionnaires. This study used three of BCO's and examined the camper developmental outcomes of independence, friendship skills, and competence.

## Results

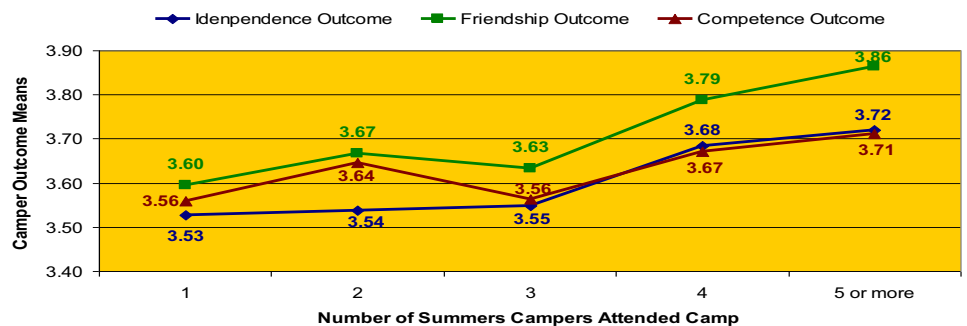
Good News! Camper developmental gains in independence, friendship skills, and competence were found. The mean (or average) results for all the campers in the study scored between 3 and 4 (out of 5) on the BCO camper scale. In other words, the means for independence (3.57), friendship skills (3.66), and competence (3.60) all indicated that camper gains due to their experience at the same camp were between "Increased a little bit, maybe" and "increased a lot, I am sure."

More Good News! This study also compared camper outcomes to camper summer attendance. Results indicated that the number of summers campers attended camp significantly affects camper developmental outcomes ( $p < .05$ ). In other words, as campers increase the number of summers they attend the same camp, they also incrementally increase in the developmental outcomes of independence, friendship and competence. This trend of increasing camper outcome scores for attending camp 1, 2, 3, 4, or more than 5 summers is displayed in Figure 3.

Table 1. Demographics of the Study

Camp Features	Percentage
Affiliation	57% Agency 43% Independent
Business Entity	21% For Profit 79% Non Profit
Camp Sex	76% Coeducational 19% All Female 5% All Male
Camp Type	19% Day 81% Resident
Camper Sex	63% Female 37% Male

Figure 3. As Summers Increase Camper Outcomes Increase



## Methods

During the summer of 2007, 21 camps contributed 3030 camper BCO's for this study. The BCO was designed to measure camper gains in developmental outcomes. The BCO required campers to complete the questionnaire only once, as opposed to "pre- and post-test" collections. Accordingly, campers completed the BCO on the second to last or last day of their session. The BCO asked campers, "How much, if any, has your experience as a camper in this camp changed you in each of the following ways?" Example statements can be seen in Table 2.

Table 2. Examples of BCO Statements

Outcome	Statement Example
Independence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Taking care of myself</li> <li>• Making decisions by myself</li> </ul>
Friendship Skills	Becoming better at ... <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• understanding my friends' feelings</li> <li>• trusting my friends</li> </ul>
Competence	Becoming better at ... <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• learning new things</li> <li>• understanding new information</li> </ul>

## How This Research Can Help

- The more summers that campers return to the same camp the more they will incrementally increase in developmental outcomes.
- Provides evidence to stakeholders such as parents, staff, campers, politicians, and contributors that the camp industry is a contributor to positively developing youth.
- Documents camper outcomes and meets the 2007 ACA accreditation standards...now easier than ever with the new ACA BCO questionnaires.