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Case Study of Skills Developed During Employment at Kentucky FFA Summer Camp as a Young Adult

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to provide a qualitative case study analysis of the soft skill development of summer camp staff members at the Kentucky FFA Leadership Training Center and to look at whether or not the leadership development focus of the camp program had an increased impact on the development of the staff members’ leadership skills. For years, FFA summer camp programs have been developing the leadership qualities of FFA members and preparing them to take on leadership roles for the upcoming year. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with former Kentucky FFA summer camp staff members from 2008 to better understand the experiences they had as camp staff members and how those experiences may have impacted their soft skill development. Themes of five types of experiences and seven soft skills developed as a result of the interview responses. The participants’ summer camp employment led to personal growth of soft skills. While the participants did report an increase in multiple soft skills because of their camp staff experiences, they did not consistently indicate a greater development in their leadership skills as compared to their other soft skills developed.
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Chapter I: Introduction

Context

Soft skills development and leadership skills development are taking places of importance for employment in a variety of careers (Brungardt, 2011; DuPre & Williams, 2011; Hurrell, 2016; Marques, 2012). Research has identified a gap between employers’ desire for soft skills in new employees and the level of skill development of young adults entering the workforce (Ooi & Ting, 2015). Hodge and Lear (2011) noted that employers believe part of the gap between employers’ expectations and employees’ preparedness could be due to higher education failing to properly prepare students for the modern workplace. If higher education is failing to fully prepare young adults for the workforce, it would be pertinent for young adults to identify and pursue other opportunities that will help them develop their soft skills expertise, thus narrowing the gap between their preparedness and employer expectations.

Seasonal summer camp employment for young adults has been identified as an experience that provides opportunities for development of young adults and is connected by multiple sources (Connors, Falk, & Epps, 2010; Duerden et al., 2014; Heiser, 2013) to the development of several soft skills, including: leadership, communication, organization, teamwork/collaboration, problem solving, interpersonal skills, and empathic skills. National FFA Organization (FFA) summer camps have recreational opportunities and programming, with activities focused around the personal leadership and skills development of camp participants (Agnew, 2014; Connors et al., 2010; Hoover, Scholl, Dunigan, & Mamontova 2007). The development-focused FFA camp has been shown to have a positive impact on campers (Brown, Terry Jr., & Kelsey, 2014; Halsall, Kendellen, Bean, & Forneris, 2016) and counselors (Bender, 2014; Halsall et al., 2016). As summer camp is shown to have impacts on staff members, there
is an opportunity to examine the unique impacts the leadership-focused programming has on summer camp staff implementing the youth development programs.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to describe how the experience of the leadership-development-focused FFA summer camps helped develop leadership and soft skills in the young adults who have served as summer camp staff members.

**Theoretical/Conceptual Framework**

The theoretical framework consisted of the soft skills development of young adults, the characteristics of the summer camp staff experience, and the FFA organization’s youth development philosophy and its impact on summer camp experience. The study focused on the development summer camp staff members reported based on their experiences at FFA summer camp. The FFA summer camp experience is based on the summer camp staff members’ interaction with youth participants and their ability to help develop the leadership skills of the youth participants that come to camp. The first component of the theoretical framework was that soft skills are a component of an individual’s skill set that helps them be successful in career roles and in the interpersonal interactions that take place in a job setting. The second component of the theoretical framework was the summer camp staff members engaged in activities at summer camp that are essential to summer camp employment and those experiences had an impact on their soft skills development as young adults. The third component of the theoretical framework was that because of the FFA summer camp’s focus on leadership development of youth participants, staff members were more likely to report a positive impact on their leadership development over other soft skills reported.
The first component of the theoretical framework was soft skills development. Soft skills have been categorized as “important job-related skills that involve little or no interaction with machines and can be applied in a variety of job contexts” (Charoensap-Kelly, Broussard, Lindsly, & Troy, 2016, p. 155). The types of work requiring individuals to be in an office setting and working through communication has increased, which has caused human resources officers to place a greater importance on finding employees with soft skills competencies and developing soft skills in employees that are lacking desired skills (Hurrell, 2016; Robles, 2012).

The second component of the theoretical framework was the nature of summer camp staff experience, which positively affects the development of their soft skills. Summer camp is a team setting and fosters development in the skills of communication and collaboration, and the issues that arise help staff members develop problem-solving skills, perseverance, and adaptability to change (Bender, 2014). Working in a summer camp setting has also taught staff members an appreciation of diversity, leadership skills, and role modeling and mentoring skills (Bialeschki, Dahowski, & Henderson, 1998).

The third component of the theoretical framework was the leadership-development focus of the FFA summer camp. Youth at FFA summer camp learn leadership, communication, organization, and teamwork skills, with their learning experiences integrated into the social and recreational aspects of their camp experience (Connors et al., 2010). According to Hoover et al. (2007), soon after FFA began in 1928, leaders began to plan towards leadership schools, camps, and conferences, and soon after the first camp took place, states began incorporating leadership training into their camp programs.

**Research Questions**

What is the common lived experience of FFA Summer Camp staff members?
Does summer camp employment at an FFA camp as a young adult have a positive impact on the development of staff members’ soft skills?

Does the focus on the development of youth’s leadership skills at FFA summer camp cause a greater positive impact on the development of staff members’ leadership skills over other soft skills?

**Limitations**

The first limitation of the study is the study participants’ openness when reflecting upon their experiences and my ability to accurately discern results based on the accounts of the study participants in the limited amount of time available in the dissertation process. The study also has limited generalizability as the study focuses on the leadership-focused FFA summer camp setting in Kentucky, is focused around one group of summer camp counselors from a specific year, and to the ability to get in contact with former members and invite them to respond. The study is also limited based on FFA summer camp staff members’ prior involvement in FFA activities prior to employment at summer camp and their opportunities since their summer camp staff employment to use and reflect upon their camp staff experiences.

**Significance of the Study**

This study is significant to summer camp professionals for further understanding about how summer camp experience facilitate development of staff members and findings from this study can inform professionals looking to increase positive impacts on their summer camp staff members. This study can also inform FFA camp leaders about whether the staff’s focus on leadership development of the youth has a leadership-heavy change among the soft skills developed.
Definitions, Abbreviations, and Nomenclature

**CTE.** Career and Technical education- area of education focused on building specific skills needed to be successful or ready to enter a career field.

**CTSO.** Career and Technical Student Organization- also referred to as Vocational Student Organization (VSO)- one of the three components of SBAE; student organization where students can apply their learning and participate in leadership skill development; the FFA is an example of a CTSO.

**FFA.** FFA is the National FFA Organization, “an intracurricular student organization for those interested in agriculture and leadership” and serves as an organization “committed to the individual student, providing a path to achievement in premier leadership, personal growth and career success through agricultural education (National FFA Organization website, 2017).

**Leadership Skills.** Some authors have regarded leadership as a trait, a behavior, or as a relationship component, but leadership “involves a more complex mix of skills including behavioral, social, and cognitive” (Guthrie & Thompson, 2010, pp. 51-52).

**SBAE.** School Based Agriculture Education- path of education based on the three-component model of agriculture education, which combines classroom and laboratory instruction, SAEs, and involvement in a CTSO.

**SAE.** Supervised Agricultural Experience- one of the three components of SBAE; experiential, service, and/or work-based learning through the implementation of a supervised agricultural experience program (National FFA Organization, 2015); project-based learning.

**Soft Skills.** Charoensap-Kelly et al. (2016) describe soft skills as “abstract personal or interpersonal qualities necessary for acquiring and excelling in a job” (p. 155).
**Staff Member.** For the purposes of this study, staff members are the temporary or seasonal employees of the camp that serve at the camp during camp sessions as leaders in a variety of ways based on their camp’s needs (Bender, 2014; Bialeschki et al., 1999; Duerden et al., 2014; Powell et al., 2003).

**Summer Camp.** Summer camp is an opportunity for boys and girls to get away from their homes for a few days, a week, or multiple weeks at summer camp where they can build their leadership, self-esteem, and interpersonal skills (Connors et al., 2010). For the purposes of this study, summer camp is defined as a multiple day and night, on-site stay at a camping facility with other youth with activities led or directed by camp staff members.

**Summary**

This dissertation is organized into five chapters. Chapter I is an introduction to the study. Chapter II is a review of literature related to the topics of the study. Chapter III discusses the research methods used in the study. Chapter IV is a description and analysis of the responses received in the study. Chapter V discusses the findings of the study as they relate to the development of former summer camp staff members as a result of their summer camp staff experience. Findings will then be connected back to prior academic literature.
Chapter II: Literature Review

There is limited research available regarding the personal and professional development of summer camp staff members as a result of their experiences on a summer camp staff. The majority of research related to summer camp is focused on the impacts summer camp experiences have on youth participants. This makes sense, as summer camps are focused on providing unique experiences that will have a positive impact on youth participants. Another group integral to the success of summer camp who are also impacted by their experiences at summer camp are the summer camp staff members. Many summer camp staff members serve while in the life stage of emerging adult, as a great number of staff members are young adults who are experiencing independence for the first time in their lives.

This review of literature lays a foundation that serving as a summer camp staff member provides an opportunity for personal growth and development of skills. The literature is organized into five topic areas: (a) school-based agricultural education, (b) summer camp experience and staff development; and (c) soft skills.

The first topic area is focused on school based agricultural education (SBAE) and its three components: classroom instruction, supervised agricultural experiences, and career and technical student organizations (CTSOs). This topic area shares information about the FFA’s role as a CTSO in the current SBAE model and its focus on the development of leadership skills for the youth members of the organization through clubs, conferences, and camps.

The second topic is summer camp and the FFA summer camp experience. This topic area conveys the factors of summer camps that cause it to be a successful and impactful event for youth and for adults involved. The topic area also discusses the aspects of the FFA summer camp experience that make it unique and well suited for positive development of summer camp
staff members. Also in this topic area are staff member experiences and staff development. This highlights the characteristics of being a summer camp staff member and positive and negative influences on staff development.

The third topic covered in the literature review is the other intangible skills, referred to as soft skills, which literature supports are also developed by summer camp staff members as a result of their experience on camp staff. This topic area covers the skills gap between preparation of young adults for the workforce and needs of employers as well as the soft skills of teamwork, communication, innovation and problem solving, and leadership. Also covered is the FFA organization and their summer camp, which are focused on the leadership development of youth participants and literature that supports the camp setting as an exceptional conduit for leadership development. The topic area also covers the aspects of camp that aid in the leadership development of the summer camp staff members.

**School Based Agricultural Education**

School based agricultural education (SBAE) is an experience-driven, hands-on educational environment where students are engaged in both in-classroom and out-of-classroom learning experiences (Dailey, Conroy, & Shelley-Tolbert, 2001; National FFA Organization, 2005; Swafford, 2018). SBAE is built upon the foundation of a three-component model (Figure 1), which is one of the most recognized aspects of SBAE and it includes, connects, and intertwines the following three components: classroom and laboratory instruction, supervised agricultural experiences, and membership in a career and technical student organization, foremost among those being the FFA (Dailey et al., 2001; National FFA Organization, 2005; Shoulders & Toland, 2017; Swafford, 2018). Dailey et al. (2001) state that the hands-on experiences are only the start of the learning experiences, with SBAE also
grounded in extending science and mathematics education and connecting them with other curriculum areas through nontraditional learning settings. Swafford (2018) notes that “the current model of school-based agricultural education (SBAE) provides a context where students may be exposed to and engaged in activities which support the development of competencies and skills required to fill future jobs” (Swafford, 2018, p. 297). Dailey et al. (2001) state that SBAE programs go beyond preparing students for future jobs or careers in that well-designed SBAE programs not only help students learn academic content but also help them learn life skills needed for adulthood. Dailey et al. go on to report that the diverse teaching methodologies used in SBAE programs, including hands-on experiences and training in vocational skills, partnered with “intracurricular experiential learning and leadership development” (p. 18), provides an
understanding of concepts which helps students achieve in their other courses and be prepared for the demands of higher education.

**Classroom and laboratory experience.** The classroom and laboratory experience within SBAE brings many components to play that a traditional classroom lacks. Baker, Robinson, and Kolb (2012) believe that once a student’s interest is piqued, an agriculture education instruction can begin to deliver content in a formal setting (a classroom) so that students can begin to transfer learning to their experiences. Baker et al. (2012) state that the average classroom today is a “sterile environment” and the advantage of agriculture education classrooms is that programs are experiential and provide opportunities “to move outside of the classroom into relevant agricultural contexts” (p. 6). Baker et al. (2012) suggests agriculture education programs’ incorporation of “guest speakers, research projects, science experiments, greenhouse or school farm work, and group projects provide the impetus for the experiential learning process” by which students can reflect on new knowledge, connect that to concepts, and then experiment with the knowledge and concepts in new contexts (p. 9). Learning in the agricultural context of an agriscience classroom assists students reach in-depth learning of content across multiple curriculum domains and allows them to utilize their learning to solve problems in the context where they will encounter them in the future as well (Dailey et al., 2001). Yoest and Kane (2015) report that the connection between classroom and laboratory instruction and industries, especially agriculture and natural resource industries, keeps students’ learning up-to-date with industry standards and the constantly changing advances in science and technology implemented in industry, further developing students’ abilities to apply learning and problem solving to real-world situations. Even from the early days of agricultural education, reinforcement of concepts in the fields of science and mathematics has been integrated into the
classroom instruction and has also been a component of supervised agricultural experiences and FFA involvement (Dailey et al., 2001).

**Supervised agricultural experience.** Supervised agricultural experiences (SAEs) are designed to provide an introduction to and exploration of possible careers and provide an opportunity for students to begin applying their classroom learning to real world situations where students have the opportunity to learn irreplaceable life lessons, from money and time management skills to personal confidence (Giffing & Warnick, 2012). According to Baker et al. (2012), the purpose of SAEs is to build students’ interest in agriculture education and help them develop meta-cognitive skills, which in turn support the other two components of the three circle model, classroom instruction and FFA. Yoest and Kane (2015) describe SAE, the “final component of the three circle model”, with the following description:

Students have projects that they keep records on throughout the year. These projects are based on the problem-solving approach used in the classroom. Twenty-first century skills are gained through students participating in the real-life situations that SAEs present. Students become marketable for employment because of these projects. They gain skills in record keeping, finances, and critical thinking. They develop a sense of responsibility that is important for young members of society to have. SAE programs are integrated into the classroom and FFA experience through application of information learned in the classroom and proficiency awards. (p. 23)

**National FFA Organization.** Since the inception of SBAE and the three-component model, one of the three components has been involvement in what is known as a vocational student organization (VSO) or career and technical student organization (CTSO) (Ewing, Clark, & Threeton, 2014). According to Ewing et al. (2014), the purpose of VSOs is to take the
technical career skills that are being taught through the other components of SBAE and integrate them with opportunities to develop skills in “leadership, teamwork, citizenship, problem-solving, communication and self-management skills for future workplace success” (p. 38). Ewing et al. (2014) go on to conclude that partnering the experiential learning of the educational components of SBAE with the involvement in a career and technical student organization (CTSO) helps promote learning and skill development by giving students tangible subject matter and then encourages them, through CTSO engagement and events, to showcase their “usable knowledge” of important SBAE concepts (p. 40). In today’s SBAE model, the primary VSO/CTSO is the FFA.

The National FFA Organization (FFA) uses agricultural education, leadership experiences, and career development events to have a positive impact on members by developing leadership skills, developing individuals personally, and preparing members for future careers (FFA, 2015; Rose et al., 2016). Shoulders and Toland (2017) describe the FFA as “an intracurricular organization that, as the three-component model suggests, motivates students to display their knowledge and skills developed in the classroom and through their SAEs” (p. 86). Rose et al. (2016) go on to say that the FFA builds self-confidence and self-esteem in its members for the purpose of providing students with a “physical and emotional sense of belonging” (p. 41). Research shows that high school students desire to improve their leadership potential and their professional skills, and the FFA, as an organization focused on leadership development, helps feed students’ longing for involvement in leadership-developing activities (Connors, Velez, & Swan, 2006).

One of the FFA’s primary methods for developing members’ leadership competencies is by allowing members to take on leadership roles. Giffing and Warnick (2012) state “FFA
leadership opportunities are fundamental to the success of all students in agricultural education” (p. 13). By utilizing youth in leadership roles of activities, the FFA encourages youth to grow, gain knowledge and skills, and build self-esteem. Serving in these roles has a strong impact on leadership development of youth as they learn to work as partners alongside adult leaders (Horstmeier & Nall, 2007). According to Halsall, Kendellen, Bean, and Forneris (2016), autonomy-supported experiences, where youth are allowed to lead with measured input from adult counterparts, “are integral to helping youth successfully transition to adulthood” (p. 31).

While developing youth leadership capacities, local FFA chapters also provide leadership opportunities as officers at the local, state, and national FFA chapter levels. Ewing et al. (2014) report that “the National FFA Organization provides leadership and technical agricultural opportunities for students to practice and excel in areas of agriculture that promote growth, student development, and the acquisition of advanced technical skills and knowledge” (p. 38). In a study of the Pennsylvania State FFA officer program by Hoover and Bruce (2006), officers reported positive personal and professional development in all critical areas of adolescent development. Hoover and Bruce (2006) also note FFA leaders directly attribute their personal development in multiple areas to their FFA leadership experiences. Their study concluded that youth that took on state FFA officer positions developed life skills that would help carry them throughout adulthood, such as goal setting, time management, teambuilding, and communication skills (Hoover & Bruce, 2006).

**Summer Camp Experience and Staff Development**

The overnight summer camp experience is an opportunity for campers to participate in fun activities with fellow campers and learn through those activities. Research by Connors, Falk, and Epps (2010) indicates that summer camp is an opportunity for learning without a direct focus
on learning objectives because the development of participants’ soft skills are disguised by the social and recreational aspects of the camp experience. According to Gillard, Roark, Nyaga, and Bialeschki (2011), camp is a learning experience where participants can learn to develop positive relationships, where there are opportunities for experiences that help them develop competencies, and where campers begin to practice behaviors that will help them as they transition into adulthood. Camp can be a powerful experience for both the campers and the emerging adults employed because it is a time for developing leadership skills and learning to employ those developing skills (Lokteff, 2010). According to Marshall (2016), “the full potential and power of the camp environment has yet to be recognized” (abstract).

One camp that is having a positive impact on the development of youth participants is FFA Summer Camp. Over the past 80 years of FFA summer camps, each state-run camp has welcomed thousands of FFA members to an experience for improving their leadership skills while they make memories, make friends, and take part in recreational activities (Connors et al., 2010). Connors et al. (2010) go on to tell us that FFA summer camps today still strive to provide a natural setting for recreation and leadership-developing activities.

FFA strives to use its summer camp program to develop personal competencies of youth participants. According to Connors et al. (2010), since the origination of vocational agriculture education programs and supporting organizations such as FFA, camping programs have been incorporated as a method for developing the self-esteem, leadership and teamwork skills, and the resourcefulness of camp participants. Some former FFA summer camp participants report that developing leadership and teamwork skills is a focus of FFA and that they were better off today because they learned to work together through difficult situations (“What I did this summer” report, n.d.). Participants go on to say that learning at FFA summer camp is accomplished
through various activities, including activities where FFA chapters learn to work together as a team, which helps their chapter grow together as a group and encourages participants to learn something that they can apply to their life in and beyond FFA (‘What I did this summer’ report, n.d.).

Research shows that the summer camp experience can be rewarding and also provide both personal and professional benefits for summer camp staff members (Bialeschki, Dahowski, and Henderson, 1998). Summer camp staff members recount that three components of their summer camp staff experience - camp philosophy, staff training, and staff support - are what provide a positive or negative foundation for shaping their experiences at camp (Bialeschki et al., 1998). Marshall (2016) proposes that one summer of employment in a camp setting “may lead to perceived personal growth in categories such as peer relationships, appreciation of diversity, teamwork, leadership, mindfulness, responsibility, role modeling, technical skills, and interpersonal skills” (p. 52).

Duerden et al. (2014) state that employment at a residential summer camp, when correctly structured, is a unique experience for adolescents that can have a positive impact on the development and readiness of their essential workforce skills. Former summer camp staff members note that the camp work setting was a place to begin thinking about their careers, and former summer camp staff members were more inclined to service-oriented careers such as ministry, missions, or other non-profit work (Harrison, 2013). In a similar study by DeGraaf and Glover (2003), summer camp staff members went into a wider range of professions after their time spent working at summer camps, but respondents still comment on how their professional lives were positively impacted by their summer camp staff experience. While some former summer camp staff members may have been guided toward a specific type of work or learned
what job environment they were suited for based on their staff experiences, some respondents in a study by Ferrari and Digby (2007) report that their summer camp staff experience taught them what types of career field they wanted to be in, such as going into the field of education because of the enjoyment they experienced working with children at camp. Heiser (2013) suggests that camp leaders play a pivotal role in developing summer camp staff leaders’ competencies, as they are the ones that create opportunities for camp staff to practice their problem solving, communication, and collaboration skills, experiences when reinforce retention of those skills and show staff members how to apply those skills in a workplace.

Bell and Carrillo (2007) note that summer camp staff members are more likely to deem their development as significant when their development is of use to them. In some instances, summer camp staff experience provides opportunities to learn career-specific skills and allowed staff members to develop a competency in the use of those skills (Bialeschki et al. 1998). According to Duerden et al. (2014), “camp appears to be an effective workforce development context because it provides participants a setting rich with responsibilities. Camp staff members are often pushed out of their comfort zones… which may lead to the development of new skills” (p. 40). Duerden et al. (2014) go on to say that some of the skills staff members acquire are interpersonal in nature, including communication, leadership, and empathy toward others, but members also develop in the task-oriented skill of problem solving. Summer camp staff members also report other personal benefits as a result of their staff experience, including an increase in their self-confidence, a growing appreciation for the natural world, and a growth in their spirituality (DeGraff and Glover, 2003). DeGraaf and Glover (2003) go on to report that the summer camp experience builds self-confidence and helps staff members develop skills that are sought-after in a workplace.
Some research points toward interpersonal interactions serving as a great contributor to the development of summer camp staff members. For Duerden et al. (2014), interpersonal interactions stand out as the most relevant and important component of the growth of summer camp staff members. A study by Bialeschki et al. (1998) reports that many staff benefited from their interactions with diverse groups of campers and by working alongside fellow staff members from diverse backgrounds. Summer camp employment has other benefits for summer camp staff as well, such as the opportunity to develop their own personal identity in the camp workplace setting before having to do so in future employment contexts in their career setting (Duerden et al., 2014).

The importance of interpersonal interaction in camp staff development connects with research on the impact of emotional intelligence on camp staff personal growth. For summer camp staff members, there seems to be a strong and close connection between general personal growth while on summer camp staff and the development of emotional intelligence (Jacobs, McAvoy, & Bobilya, 2004). Jacobs et al. (2004) include some measures for emotional intelligence as soft skills, among those being “stress tolerance, self-actualization, social responsibility, optimism, empathy, happiness, interpersonal relationships, and flexibility” (p. 85), and share that these emotional intelligence components are focal points for workplace skill development programs and workshops from human resources departments.

Important to the development of camp staff members is the opportunity to be guided and mentored by more experienced staff members. Bell and Carrillo (2007) state that leadership techniques that support and empower the summer camp staff members in their tasks have a more significant impact on staff members. Lokteff (2010) suggests that developing a mentor-mentee relationship between experienced adult staff members and younger staff can be beneficial for the
younger staff members both at and away from camp. Young camp staff members build their confidence in their leadership abilities by learning to lead campers while being kind and understanding with them, and staff members are taught this skill through the guidance they receive from more experienced peers and from mentors at camp (Harrison, 2013). According to Cronin (2001), “effective supervision is one of the most important aspects of quality camp staff experiences” (p. 32). Being open to good advice, becoming part of the camp’s community, allowing yourself to work outside of your comfort zone, and internalizing your reasons for working at summer camp are all interpersonal aspects of working at camp that have an impact on the development of summer camp staff members (Duerden et al., 2014).

With all of the positive impacts of summer camp staff experiences, there are also risks that camp staff and camp leaders should consider. Summer camp staff members also report that having fun and acting childlike were among the meaningful components of their camp staff experience (Jacobs et al., 2004). Due to the opportunity and desire to act childlike and have fun, summer camp staff leaders and supervisors need to make a conscious effort to educate their staff and have regular conversations with their staff about the potential costs of risk-taking behaviors (Lokteff, 2010). Lokteff (2010) goes on to report that summer camp staff members are usually eighteen- to twenty-five-year-olds and they engage in risky behaviors without adequately considering possible consequences because they are still experiencing the same brain development as teenagers.

**Soft Skills**

The intangible personal and interpersonal qualities a person possesses which allow them to successfully navigate a work setting are commonly referred to as life skills or soft skills (Charoensap-Kelly, Broussard, Lindsly, & Troy, 2016). While some soft skills are seen as
personal skills, Ooi and Ting (2015) propose that the soft skills of communication and teamwork are more tangible with regards to someone’s ability to function in a workplace. Assessing the development of soft skills is not easily accomplished because of the time it takes for these skills to be developed in individuals and because many individuals tend to continue to develop these skills over time regardless of an active pursuit for development (Wurdinger & Qureshi, 2015).

The summer camp staff experience results in personal identity development and growth of self-esteem, self-confidence, and spirituality of staff members, all of which help staff members as they begin to strive toward other life goals (Bialeschki et al., 1998). The summer camp staff experience, while being challenging for the staff members, is a fun and gratifying opportunity for developing soft skills, as noted by respondents in a study by Ferrari and Digby (2007), where former staff members “believed they developed skills in leadership, decision-making, planning and organizing, communication, interpersonal interactions, and teamwork” (para. 4). DeGraaf and Glover (2003) report many areas of personal development identified by former summer camp members:

An additional area of personal benefits identified… was the development of life skills… defined as tangible skills and/or attitudes for living and working with others (e.g., relational skills, self-confidence, development of social skills, etc.) as well as specific skills that respondents learned at camp that were continually used after camp outside of the workplace (e.g., outdoor-related skills, parenting skills, etc.). (p. 9)

Marques (2012) lists “self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills” (p.163) as soft leadership skills and state they are constantly increasing in importance in the workplace and future leaders should focus on developing these skills to be successful.

According to Bender (2014), “organizations are looking for professionals who demonstrate
dedication, strong communication skills, effective collaboration skills, adaptability, problem solving, and willingness to take on challenges, among other things” (p. 29). Brungardt (2011) reports an emerging focus on soft skills by human resources professionals and goes on to state that the importance of developing soft skills and helping people reach their maximum potential is now emphasized for nearly of employee at every level within organizations.

Employers and organizations are often prioritizing what skills are most valued among soft skills and technical skills, with some skills usually coming up more often than others. According to DuPre and Williams (2011), communication skills were the most valued, followed by problem solving, teamwork, and job-specific technical skills, with employee work ethic finishing out the list. Some potential employers regard work ethic and workplace professionalism as their most valued soft skill, followed by communication skills, teamwork skills, and problem solving skills (Casner-Lotto & Barrington, 2006). Soft skills have been regarded for a while as a necessity for performing passionate and appealing work in customer service, but soft skills are now seen as valuable assets for individuals across the range of occupational roles (Hurrell, 2016).

**Skills gap.** There may now be a skills gap in the development of soft skills identified by comparing college faculty instructors’ perceptions about what types of skills should be focused on and what types of skills are needed and sought by employers (Hodge & Lear, 2001). There are a large number of young adults entering the workforce unprepared or incompetent in the communication skills required to address the needs of what we face in today’s diverse society (Tompkins, 2016). Hodge and Lear (2001) place the responsibility squarely on the emerging adults, as their research shows students’ may have not listened to the guidance provided by professors or advisors, nor participated in valuable exercises in their classes, or may have not had
the ability to derive learning from their experiences and convert what was learned into a
meaningful impact on their lives moving forward. According to Casner-Lotto and Barrington
(2006), the years of early adulthood spent in college are a good opportunity for developing an
individual’s skills:

As the educational level of new entrants increases from high school to two-year college
to four-year college, “deficiencies” decrease, though some “deficiencies” persist at the
college level, particularly in skills employers say are very important for successful job
performance: basic writing in English, written communications, leadership, and
professionalism/work ethic. (p. 32)

Casner-Lotto and Barrington (2006) go on to report potential employers’ views that many
students finish college while still deficient in their leadership skills. Potential employers report
42.6% of graduates from two-year college degree program and 23.8% of graduates from a four-
year degree program are still deficient in their leadership skills when entering the workforce
(Casner-Lotto & Barrington, 2006). Casner-Lotto and Barrington also state that a high
percentage of high school graduates that are entering the workforce also deficient in their
leadership skills, but are given somewhat of a pass, as employers did not feel that leadership
skills were an important skill to look for out of high school graduates.

There is a great need for students to understand employers’ expectations while they are
still in college and still have some time to develop those skills through targeted strategies and
relevant experiences (DuPre & Williams, 2011). This need aligns with the findings of Hodge
and Lear (2001) who report that students are not taking part in enough valuable experiences that
help them develop the skills which potential employers now desire for potential employees to
possess. In a study by Duerden et al. (2014), respondents reported that summer camp
employment provides a myriad of positive effects, including growth of skills that literature closely correlates with workforce preparedness.

Teamwork. One of the soft skills with a plethora of research analyzing its relevance in human development is teamwork. Ooi and Ting (2015) classify teamwork as an essential soft skill and state that, contrary to the thinking of university students, the development of teamwork skills is emphasized much more than leadership skills. Casner-Lotto and Barrington (2006) defines teamwork, which is closely related to collaboration, as the ability to develop cooperative workplace relationships with coworkers and customers, work on teams of diverse individuals, and work and succeed through difficult circumstances. While many soft skills are needed to successfully interact in a collaborative work environment, Brungardt (2011) suggests that teamwork skills have been explored as an indicator for overall soft skills proficiency. Bialeschki et al. (1998) report that a focus on developing teamwork skills has both personal and professional benefits, as individuals found success in developing a bond with coworkers by connecting about mutual interests and backgrounds.

Summer camp staff members must pledge themselves to teamwork, as it is an essential component of the camp experience (Heiser, 2013). Former summer camp staff members recognize how important it was to learn to collaborate with coworkers and they recognize that their summer camp staff experience helped them learn to trust and respect others on their team, even going so far as to say that “anyone in any profession would really benefit from being in [a summer camp] environment” (Bialeschki et al., 1998, p. 28). Bialeschki et al. (1998) go on to report that summer camp staff experiences provide growth of multiple interpersonal skills, with many former staff members emphasizing the development of their communication skills and their ability to think through problems in new and original ways, and the skills they develop stay
with the staff members as they move into other career opportunities. In a study by Jacobs et al. (2004), summer camp staff members say that the second most common way in which they changed as a result of summer camp employment was an improvement in their interpersonal skills.

**Communication.** According to Heiser (2013), effective communication includes the proper use of the words, saying words in the correct way, and knowing when to say them. Summer camp staff members develop in both the listening and speaking components of communication skills as a result of nearly constant interpersonal exchanges in both private settings, which allows staff members to learn how to share their personal beliefs and opinions, and in group settings, which allow them to develop their public speaking skills (Duerden et al., 2014). A study by Harrison (2013) identifies multiple contributions to the development of communication skills at summer camp:

People could learn to communicate and share ideas with each other at camp. As the staff began to articulate their views and ideas, they gained confidence and respect. Problems were solved through building trust among the group, building rapport with the group, and ultimately learning how to communicate on a deeper level. (p. 81)

**Innovation and problem solving.** Creativity, innovative thinking, and problem solving are defined as the ability to show ingenuity and creativity in one’s work, to take new ideas and effectively share them with others, and to gather information from a variety of sources and combine them into new ideas (Casner-Lotto & Barrington, 2006). In the study by Casner-Lotto and Barrington (2006), responses from potential employers indicate an expectation for the importance of creativity and innovation to increase to one of the top five most important soft skills for future graduates. They go on to say that for the United States to remain competitive on
the world stage, it is crucial for the nation to develop creative and innovative thinking skills (Casner-Lotto & Barrington, 2006).

Summer camp staff members credit their summer camp experience for the development of their problem solving skills (Heiser, 2013). Summer camp staff members are provided an opportunity to develop their problem solving skills because they have to deal with unexpected or stressful situations and circumstances (Duerden et al., 2014). Many staff members are forced to learn some independence and how to navigate difficult situations on their own because there is not always someone there for them to defer to, or ask how to handle the situation, or hand the problem off to when the situation is more difficult than they expected (Duerden et al., 2014).

**Leadership skills.** Research has shown evidence toward a need for individuals with a strong grasp of fundamental leadership skills throughout society (Agnew, 2014). Casner-Lotto and Barrington (2006) define leadership as the ability to motivate and develop those around you and the ability to draw upon the collective strengths of a group so that all enjoy collective successes. Brungardt (2011) defines leadership as “a relational process that requires working with others to accomplish a goal or to promote positive change” (p. 1). For new entrants to the workforce, 81.8% of employers view leadership skills as very important for individuals with a four-year college degree, while 45.5% of employers view leadership skills as very important for individuals with a two-year college degree (Casner-Lotto & Barrington, 2006).

**Developing leadership.** Developing leadership skills may require a lot of outward acts and interpersonal practices. Casner-Lotto and Barrington (2006) propose that soft skills should be the focal point of leadership development education and, to help reach positive results from their leadership methods, developing leaders should practice building relationships with others. Young adults entering the workforce can promote the development of their leadership skills by
seeking out opportunities and taking on roles that require them to be responsible for decisions and make them be thoughtful about the possible results of their decisions (Casner-Lotto & Barrington, 2006). According to Gutherie and Thompson (2010), for developing leaders to have the best chance of reaching their leadership potential, a leadership education learning environment should be comprised of three components: proper instruction in theories and fundamental beliefs about leadership, hands-on and real-world experiences, and contemplation on their experiences through the lens of their leadership training. Plemmons (2012) writes that students begin to build self-confidence in their leadership ability when they begin to recognize the influence their style of leadership has on their environment. Fertman and van Linden (1999) discussed how students play a role in their own leadership development:

The goal in forging leadership development and character education is to help students experience and reflect on both their transformational and transactional leadership abilities. Such linkage also offers opportunities for adolescents to consider qualities they expect from their own leaders in formal (e.g., workplace or government) and informal (e.g., recreational and family activities) settings. (p. 16)

Intrinsic motivations and introspection may also play a role in leadership development. Fertman and van Linden (1999) urge for personal introspection in leadership development, as a focus on developing and growing oneself is a significant leadership development tool. Many students feel that leaders tend to seek out opportunities to lead when they either feel an obligation to serve as a leader or feel a sense of personal fulfillment from the leadership experience (Kagay, Marx, & Simonsen, 2015). The National FFA Organization has adopted the leadership principle “that students move along a developmental continuum as they mature and
develop leadership skills” (Hoover, Scholl, Dunigan, & Mamontova, 2007, p. 107) and they have set goals to help students move along that continuum in a positive direction.

McElravy and Hastings (2014) report that emotional intelligence can reliably predict leadership skills for adolescent leaders who view themselves as having good leadership skills and adolescents who can naturally control their emotions and influence the emotions of others are more likely to view themselves as competent leaders. Also, support from parents and support from school leaders is directly associated with adolescents’ views toward their own leadership abilities as athletes, students, and community members (Hancock, Dyk, and Jones, 2012).

**Leadership development from camp and FFA.** Multiple studies involving summer camp staff members found that the summer camp staff experience can have a positive impact on leadership development. In a study of former summer camp staff members by Jacobs et al. (2004), respondents credit their camp staff experience for growth in their leadership skills and for preparedness for taking on new responsibilities. Bialeschki et al. (1998) state that the development of leadership skills and the ability to take on responsibilities because of summer camp staff experiences has other significant impacts on the development of individuals, both personally and professionally. Bialeschki et al. (1998) go on to report development in the soft skills of leadership and taking responsibility for the care of youth as a result of summer camp staff experience. Harrison (2013) discussed that the majority of staff felt that the constructive judgment and ongoing support they received at camp helped to validate their leadership qualities, regardless of the level of their leadership skills at the beginning of the experience.

“Agricultural education has made a positive difference in the past and we can still have a great impact on the future” (Agnew, 2014, p. 22). To make additional progress in leadership development at FFA summer camps, most states now emphasize leadership development more
than the experience of camp and recreation activities (Connors et al., 2010). Hoover et al. (2007) point out that there has been an increase in the development of curriculum and other resources related to leadership development as a result of an increase in the importance of leadership education. Hoover et al. (2007) identifies two agricultural education groups as resources for leadership development, 4-H and FFA, who share similarities in their goals for the positive personal development and skills development of youth, and they both also provide content and opportunities focused on developing life skills and leadership skills. Kagay et al. (2015) summarizes the multiple benefits reported by former FFA members as a result of their involvement in FFA:

- Enhancement of personal development included the perceived intrinsic benefits, some skill development, and the friendships that were gained through leadership positions.
- Many officers recognized personal growth and an appreciation for personal development that had come from leadership. Officers felt that they had improved their public speaking skills, become more outgoing, learned to work with others, and developed other life skills that would benefit them, no matter their pursuits in the future. (p. 85)

**Summary**

In summary, the importance of soft skills is growing and new entrants to the workforce need to find opportunities to develop their skills to meet the demands of the workplace. School based agricultural education provides opportunities for youth to develop soft skills through various experiences and leadership opportunities, which includes the FFA summer camp program. Summer camp employment has been shown to develop the soft skills of camp staff members, and with a focus on education and leadership development, the FFA summer camp program may provide a unique learning experience for the summer camp staff members.
Chapter III: Methodology

Research Design

Understanding an individual’s feelings about their development called for a study using qualitative methods of research rather than quantitative, as someone’s personal opinion about their own experience is imprecise and results would be difficult to quantify for quantitative comparison. Baškarada (2014) states that rather that trying to solve a problem, “qualitative research is focused on understanding the nature of a research problem” (p. 1). As this study is focused on understanding the nature of development that takes place as an FFA summer camp staff member, it is well suited for qualitative research methods. To understand the impact that the FFA summer camp experience had on staff members, the study was limited to a single summer camp staff group at a single FFA summer camp and a case study approach was utilized.

Qualitative research. According to McCusker and Gunaydin (2015), qualitative research is related to understanding some experience or aspect of life, which generates words rather than data, and helps us understand “the ‘what’, ‘how’, and ‘why’ of a phenomenon” (p. 537). “Qualitative research uses a naturalistic approach that seeks to understand phenomena in context-specific settings” (Golafshani, 2003, p. 600). The aspect of life under evaluation in this study is the FFA summer camp staff experience and the goal was to understand how summer camp staff experience results in the development of staff members. According to Maxwell (2013), in qualitative research “the researcher is the instrument of the research” and the research itself is “an intrusion into the lives of participants,” which requires an awareness of the research’s potential impact upon participants (pp. 92-93).

Case study method. The primary concern in a case study is with developing a description, interpretation, and explanation of what has taken place in a selected case (Maxwell,
2013). Miles (2015) states that the “nature of writing case study involves the transforming of the actual, in the moment actions and practices in a setting into a representation that is immutable and mobile” (p. 311). An important aspect of case study is that it is drawn from the views of those involved in the case, with their voices, actions, interactions, creations, and the context-dependent knowledge about their diverse experiences and activities coming together to create an account of practice for the case and site (Miles, 2015; Tellis, 1997). Through the act of a case study, the case is crafted at a specific place and time by the researcher and participants as they choose what parts of the case are highlighted or included and what parts are excluded (Miles, 2015).

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to better understand the soft skill and leadership skill development of young adults as a result of their time spent as a summer camp staff member at a FFA summer camp.

**Research Questions**

- What is the common lived experience of FFA Summer Camp staff members?
- Does summer camp employment at an FFA camp as a young adult have a positive impact on the development of staff members’ soft skills?
- Does the focus on the development of youth’s leadership skills at FFA summer camp cause a greater positive impact on the development of staff members’ leadership skills over other soft skills?

**Description of population, participants, sampling procedures used, description of risk, voluntary participation, confidentiality, and anonymity**
Population. The population for the study was all former FFA summer camp staff members at the Kentucky FFA Leadership Training Center during the summer of 2008, which were provided by Kentucky FFA leaders.

Participants. All former camp staff members that were employed at some point during the summer of 2008 at the Kentucky FFA Leadership Training Center were eligible to give input to the study.

Sampling procedures. After submitting the project proposal to the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Murray State University, all summer camp staff members from 2008 were contacted by the primary researcher based on contact information gathered and provided by the Kentucky FFA Leadership Training Center and members of the KY FFA leadership team. Based on the protocol and procedures outlined in the application, the study was approved as a Level 1 study and in compliance with MSU’s guidelines. Each participant’s desire to participate in the study was ascertained and all information about the study and the IRB approved consent form was provided to those willing to participate in a recorded phone interview. Upon receipt of a signed consent form, participants were contacted to schedule an allotted time for the phone interview.

Description of risk. Participants were not expected to be at risk for physical or emotional stress or trauma as a result of their participation in this study.

Voluntary participation. Participation was completely voluntary. Participants could discontinue participation in the study at any time. If a participant chose to discontinue participation in the study, information they had provided up to that point could be considered in the evaluation of results for the study.
Confidentiality. Contact and personal information provided by participants were kept confidential. Also, individual’s choice whether or not to participate were kept confidential and the choice to participate or not did not affect their standing with Kentucky FFA or the Kentucky FFA Leadership Training Center. Personally identifying information was removed from the transcript, including personal references to coworkers, which could have provided an opportunity to determine the interviewee’s identity through process of elimination. Each interview and interviewee was assigned a number 1-5 for the purposes of aligning interview recording with transcript and with results from the data.

Anonymity. Individual participant’s answers to interview questions were not directly tied to individual’s names or contact information.

Description of Research Instrumentation

The process for gathering data for this study was a phone interview, which took an average of a half of an hour per participant. Possible participants were contacted through phone and email to ascertain their desire to participate and consent for participation in the study. Participants were provided with important information regarding the study, including the purpose of the study, expectations for participation, identified risks, benefits, voluntary participation, anonymity, confidentiality, and interview process. Before participating in a phone interview, participants acknowledged informed consent through a consent form and electronic signature on the form.

Survey method. This study used a one-on-one recorded phone interview, which provided an opportunity for participants to elaborate on their summer camp staff experiences in their own words at the level of disclosure they desired. All phone interviews were recorded for transcribing and evaluating responses after the conclusion of the interviews.
**Interview questions.**

1. How many years did you work as a summer camp staff member at an FFA summer camp?
   a. What years did you work at an FFA summer camp?
   b. In what states have you worked at an FFA summer camp?
2. What training(s) did you go through to specifically prepare you for your FFA summer camp staff employment?
   a. Were the trainings before and/or during the summer camp session?
   b. What were the topics covered in the trainings you received?
3. What aspect(s) of camp would you say are *essential* for making FFA summer camp the experience that it is for youth? for staff members?
4. How did you develop as a result of your summer camp staff experience:
   a. As an individual?
   b. As a potential employee for future jobs?
5. In what way were your soft skills or interpersonal skills developed by your summer camp staff experiences?
6. Did you feel that you developed in some soft skills more than others?
   a. If “yes”, please provide which soft skills were developed because of your camp experience and what aspects of camp most affected that skill development.

**Interview process.** The population was contacted by way of contact information provided by KY FFA leaders and the Kentucky FFA Leadership Training Center. Phone interviews were scheduled for a one-hour block of time based on each participant’s availability in the near future with interviews not taking place back-to-back to avoid having to cut an
interview short at any point and providing adequate time for responses. Phone interviews were recorded electronically and then played back for transcription at a later time.

**Recording process.** All participants’ phone interviews were recorded and transcribed after the interview was completed before coding of responses. Participants’ responses were organized based on the source question to which the participant was responding.

**Procedure for Data Analysis**

Responses from the interviews were gathered and copied into a single document so that responses could be grouped according to their source questions. A coding chart was created for organizing responses into common themes. Coding responses within each question group allowed for a better understanding of the rate of occurrences of similar responses to a question.
Chapter IV: Analysis and Findings

Data Analysis

This chapter provides descriptive analysis of the case study by connecting strategies through coding of interview results and connecting relationships from the data through code mapping.

The case selected for this study was chosen based on its representation of a typical group of staff members that serves at the Kentucky FFA Summer Camp. The 2008 summer camp staff group was selected because their time at camp was (a) long enough ago that none of the former staff members would likely still be employed during the summers as a seasonal summer camp staff member, (b) long enough ago that the former summer camp staff members would likely have a few years in their career field to have applied some of what they learned from their summer camp staff experience, and (c) recent enough that the staff members would still be able to recall information and reflect upon specific experiences from their summer camp staff experience.

The population of the study consisted of the seasonal summer camp staff members that served at the Kentucky FFA Leadership Training Center during the summer of 2008. The study guidelines were set to include input from any individuals that served on the summer camp staff at any point of the chosen summer, thus the population \((N=6)\) represents the full staff at the Kentucky FFA Leadership Training Center during the summer of 2008, with all six staff members starting and finishing the summer as a unit. Five members \((n=5)\) of the 2008 summer camp staff were able to be contacted and participated in the study, and are a fair representation of the population. The ethnicities of the participants in the sample group were all white, with one female and 4 male participants.
Data Collection

Data collection for this qualitative study was through one-on-one phone interviews with the participants of the study. The subject’s responses to interview questions were recorded on a recording device and then transcribed by the interviewer (Appendix A). The transcripts were then coded for analysis, with codes falling into two different categories developed by the researcher and aligned to the research question. Statements were coded according to the following codes and code groups:

- Activities
  - Discussion
  - Learning
  - Planning
  - Reflection
  - Teaching

- Soft Skills
  - Communication
  - Cooperation
  - Leadership
  - Organization
  - Relationship-building
  - Responsibility
  - Teamwork

Statements could be assigned more than one code if a statement could be connected to more than one activity and/or soft skill, such as the statement “I had to learn how to...”
communicate that idea with the kids” (Interview 1, personal communication, June 24, 2018). That statement was coded as both *learning*, as it pertained to the staff member sharing that they were learning, and *communication*, because the learning that was taking place was in their communication skills.

**Trends in Responses**

After the coding of responses, the coding points were placed on a mapping surface and linked to other coding points based on their overlap. Each line represents an overlap the interviewee made between two codes at some point during their responses. The coding software also adjusted the sizes of the boxes around the codes based on the frequency that coding point in the interview responses, with the frequency also noted alongside the code in parentheses. Each code map has one code highlighted yellow, indicating which soft skill that interviewee reported as their area of greatest development because of their summer camp staff experience. In some instances, one or more codes were not used in the coding of an interviewee’s responses, which is indicated by a strikethrough of the code name on that code map. If a code was still present in an interviewee’s responses but did not overlap with another code, it is still present on the code map but not linked to another code and not struck through.
Figure 2. Code Map - Interview 1

Figure 3. Code Map - Interview 2
Figure 4. Code Map - Interview 3

Figure 5. Code Map - Interview 4
Four out of the five interviewees provided some reference to discussions that they had at camp and connected discussion as having an impact on their development. The coding for discussion
was applied ten (10) times to statements across the four interviews. The code for discussion was linked to the following other codes (with frequency of links noted): communication (2), learning (1), planning (2), reflection (3), and relationship building (3).

**Learning.** Interview responses that fell under the code for learning were responses about any learning of soft skills or technical skills that took place in the months leading up to or during the summer camping session. Examples of statements coded as related to learning are as follows:

- “I learned that, especially in the career I’m in now, I’ve got to work with men in a career which is heavily male-based (being an Ag teacher) and that really helped me” (Interview 1, personal communication, June 24, 2018).
- “I wasn’t a full certified teacher, but I was still teaching and learning from the experience” (Interview 4, personal communication, July 5, 2018).
- “It taught me a lot about being a diligent, hard worker” (Interview 5, personal communication, July 13, 2018).

All five interviewees provided some reference to learning that took place because of the camp experience and how the learning related to their personal development. The coding for learning was applied eighteen (18) times to statements across the five interviews. The code for learning was linked to the following other codes (with frequency of links noted): communication (2), discussion (1), leadership (3), organization (2), reflection (3), relationship building (3), responsibility (1), teaching (2), and teamwork (4).

**Planning.** Interview responses that fell under the code for planning were responses about planning sessions or about how experiences or feedback were going to be used in future weeks of camp. Examples of statements coded as related to planning are as follows:
• “On Fridays, we would talk about improvements and talk about what we need to do for the next week, and that taught us that, although this is just a summer camp, that in life, we need to debrief” (Interview 1, personal communication, June 24, 2018).

• “Every single week on Friday after the campers left, we would meet with the director and debrief about the week and worked on things we wanted to improve” (Interview 4, personal communication, July 5, 2018).

Three out of the five interviewees provided some reference to planning that took place before or during camp that helped them practice or develop in their skills. The coding for planning was applied ten (10) times to statements across the three interviews. The code for learning was linked to the following other codes (with frequency of links noted): cooperation (1), discussion (2), organization (1), reflection (1), responsibility (1), and teamwork (1).

Reflection. Interview responses that fell under the code for reflection were responses about instances where the interviewee had reflected upon previous experiences or received feedback about their performance and they used reflection to help them learn from the experience. One example of a statement coded as related to reflection is the following:

• “I would get input on those canoeing classes and swimming classes” and get “specific feedback from all functions of the camps that [I] would put into practice to train and improve” (Interview 4, personal communication, July 5, 2018).

Four out of the five interviewees provided some reference to planning that took place before or during camp that helped them practice or develop in their skills. The coding for planning was applied eight (8) times to statements across the four interviews. The code for reflection was linked to the following other codes (with frequency of links noted): communication (1), discussion (3), learning (3), planning (1), and teaching (1).
Teaching. Interview responses that fell under the code for teaching were responses about the interviewee’s experiences in teaching at the FFA summer camp or related to the development of their teaching skills, or lesson- and curriculum-writing skills while at camp. Some examples of statements coded as related to teaching are the following:

- “While working at FFA camp, kind of experiencing that, and also going back to college and realizing what I did and didn’t want to do, and I think that it molded me to be a teacher because I was able to create curriculum and, you know, experience that small window of teaching that now I do all the time” (Interview 1, personal communication, June 24, 2018).

- “[Making camp fun] was the thing I was focusing on there the most; it was positive interactions with students, positive interaction with kids that were younger than I was and it prepped me for that whenever I was or got to be a teacher” (Interview 2, personal communication, July 3, 2018).

- “Working with students, I taught communications class the first year and I did fill in for some of the other classes when we didn’t have instructors, so I think [I developed] communications skills, you know, for being able to teach” (Interview 3, personal communication, July 3, 2018).

- “[FFA camp] was a perfect springboard where I could make some mistakes in a nonthreatening way where it wasn’t a high stakes job where I wasn’t a full certified teacher but I was still teaching and learning from the experiences” (Interview 4, personal communication, July 5, 2018).
• “I [worked] mainly in the cafeteria, but I did get to teach, so I got to hone some of those skills that are necessary for effective teaching and learning” (Interview 5, personal communication, July 13, 2018)

All five of the interviewees provided some reference to teaching during their camp staff experience that helped them practice teaching or develop in their teaching skills. The coding for planning was applied eighteen (18) times to statements across the five interviews. The code for reflection was linked to the following other codes (with frequency of links noted):

communication (4), leadership (4), learning (2), organization (1), reflection (1), relationship building (2), responsibility (2), and teamwork (1).

**Communication.** Interview responses that fell under the code for communication were responses about the staff members using communication skills with other staff members, communicating with campers, or developing communication skills because of some camp experience. Some examples of statements coded as related to communication are the following:

• “For me, I think for me to enjoy camp and also for the kids that went to camp, you had to know how to effectively communicate with them; to make them understand that this is a place that they could make it how they wanted… our main focus was for kids to be able to grow in their self leadership and also as a team. For me, I had to learn how to communicate that idea with the kids” (Interview 1, personal communication, June 24, 2018).

• “Working with the students, I taught communications class the first year and I did fill in for some of the other classes when we didn’t have instructors, so I think [I developed] the communications skills, you know, for being able to teach” (Interview 3, personal communication, July 3, 2018).
Four out of the five interviewees provided some reference to communication and how communication played a role in the programming of camp or in their experiences at camp or development of their communication skills because of camp. The coding for communication was applied fifteen (15) times to statements across the four interviews. The code for reflection was linked to the following other codes (with frequency of links noted): discussion (2), leadership (2), learning (2), reflection (1), relationship building (3), responsibility (1), and teaching (4).

Cooperation. Interview responses that fell under the code for cooperation were responses about the staff members being able to resolve conflict, get along with fellow staff members or other individuals, or teaching students about how to get along with or cooperate with their fellow chapter members. Some examples of statements coded as related to communication are the following:

- “I had to learn how to work on a team, so I knew what someone else’s strengths were and they could pick up in areas that, you know, I was flawed in. We also lived together all of the time (during the summer) and we learned to deal with arguments and disagreements” (Interview 1, personal communication, June 24, 2018).
- “There was a lot of cooperation that helped me; a lot of problem solving as well as conflict; there was, at time, conflict with the staff and it helped to have those and you had something negative and you make a positive out of it” (Interview 2, personal communication, July 3, 2018).
- “[I developed] interpersonal skills, with dealing with other camp staff members and living in very close quarters for that amount of time” (Interview 3, personal communication, July 3, 2018).
Four out of the five interviewees provided some reference to cooperation between the staff members or teaching students how to cooperate. The coding for cooperation was applied six (6) times to statements across the four interviews. The code for cooperation was linked to the following other codes (with frequency of links noted): leadership (1), planning (1), relationship building (2), and teamwork (3).

**Leadership.** Interview responses that fell under the code for leadership were responses about the use of leadership skills by the summer camp staff members or experiences in trying to develop their own leadership abilities or the leadership abilities of the youth at camp. Some examples of statements coded as related to leadership are the following:

- “All of the curriculum is designed to develop students’ leadership abilities and how they can lead a chapter… they were trained to take on the abilities to take on a leadership role when they went home, or in the future some time” (Interview 1, personal communication, June 24, 2018).

- “I wanted to give the students that were coming through [camp] the same level of leadership development that I got from those three years” (Interview 3, personal communication, July 3, 2018).

- “I wasn’t provided training through the FFA facility, but everybody hired there was basically a former FFA member and as FFA members, you get tones of leadership training at the local, state, and regional level” (Interview 4, personal communication, July 5, 2018).

Four out of the five interviewees provided some reference to their own leadership development as a result of their FFA summer camp staff experience or to their task of developing the leadership capabilities of the campers. The coding for leadership was applied seventeen (17)
times to statements across the four interviews. The code for leadership was linked to the following other codes (with frequency of links noted): communication (2), cooperation (1), learning (3), responsibility (2), teaching (4), and teamwork (1).

**Organization.** Interview responses that fell under the code for organization were responses about the staff member’s or team’s ability to be organized or get organized for camp, as well as the development of organizational abilities of the staff members because of their camp staff experiences. Some examples of statements coded as related to organization are the following:

- “I think [I developed] my ability to be more organized. It was my job every Monday morning to take all of the campers’ names, all of their class interests, their class officers, and I would do all of the scheduling for every single kid and I had to get that done before lunchtime so that we could start them in their classes after lunch… I had to become extremely organized in how I did that and not get distracted by other things that were going on” (Interview 1, personal communication, June 24, 2018).

- “One thing that I felt like [camp] definitely helped me with was organization because there was a lot that needed to be organized [for my role]… organization, planning ahead, planning with your time, figuring out time management, figuring out how best to utilize your time during the day because your time is relatively rigid” (Interview 2, personal communication, July 3, 2018).

- “There’s a schedule that camp runs on. It’s a very stringent schedule because we want to be organized and there’s nobody over your shoulder… you’ve got to go take care of things. If not, I’m accountable to that” (Interview 4, personal communication, July 5, 2018).
Four out of the five interviewees provided some reference to their focus on being organized while at camp or to the development of their ability to be organized because of their camp experiences. The coding for organization was applied ten (10) times to statements across the four interviews. The code for organization was linked to the following other codes (with frequency of links noted): learning (2), planning (1), responsibility (3), and teaching (1).

**Relationship building.** Interview responses that fell under the code for relationship building were responses about building relationships at camp with their fellow staff members, administrative staff, visiting teachers, and campers, we well as how they can now build relationships better because of their camp experience. Some examples of statements coded as related to relationship building are the following:

- “I think the ability to develop relationships and connections with people [helped me grow]. I’m somewhat of an introvert and I was forced at camp to be an extrovert, even when I didn’t want to, and that really helped me in my career because, if you’re a teacher, you have to be kind and talk to everybody, whereas as an introvert, I’m more comfortable being along and doing things that I need to do on my own” (Interview 1, personal communication, June 24, 2018).
- “One of the things that is great about the Kentucky camp is you are not with your chapter, so you are split up and you spend a lot of time with people from different areas of the state. So being able to see other students make those relationships was pretty important and pretty special” (Interview 3, personal communication, July 3, 2018).
- “[Camp] just made us work our best and made us make sure the kids had a great time that week, but also learn some things and learn to treat each other with compassion and care. And we kind of led by that example [by what] we were doing. So I think, as an
individual, it helped me form better relationships throughout my whole life and made me a better version of myself” (Interview 4, personal communication, July 5, 2018).

All five of the interviewees provided some reference to building relationships at camp or development of their ability to build relationships because of the camp experience. The coding for relationship building was applied nineteen (19) times to statements across the five interviews, making it the most frequently applied code across the interview responses. The code for relationship building was linked to the following other codes (with frequency of links noted): communication (3), cooperation (2), discussion (3), learning (3), responsibility (1), teaching (2), and teamwork (4).

Responsibility. Interview responses that fell under the code for responsibility were responses about responsibilities that the summer camp staff members had at camp and about how having responsibilities helped them develop personally or professionally. Some examples of statements coded as related to responsibility are the following:

• “Responsibility, ownership, there were a lot of things that I changed with my position relative to years gone by” (Interview 2, personal communication, July 3, 2018).

• “I think it was good for me to come out of my shell and spend that much time with the other camp staff. I was 24-hour camp staff living there and so it was really being responsible for that many students, being on call 24/7” (Interview 3, personal communication, July 3, 2018).

• “You wanted accountability on the officer teams where students were learning how to be accountable and be responsible, so for teaching that you had to model that” (interview 4, personal communication, July 5, 2018).
• “I think that Dr. Pete and Brenda really leaning on us as a camp staff to kind of be in charge of some areas or some aspects of the camp experience; I think that probably helped quite a bit… While we were employed at camp, it was, you know, this was kind of the experience that we want these students to have and your going to be responsible for helping create that experience through your interaction with them… I think that the leadership at camp, just Dr. Pete and Brenda and them saying “Hey, we’re going to let you guys have some responsibility to make sure that these students have a positive experience this week”; I think that really helped” (Interview 5, personal communication, July 13, 2018).

All five of the interviewees provided some reference to their responsibilities while they were serving as summer camp staff members and how the responsibilities they had helped with their personal or professional development. The coding for responsibility was applied sixteen (16) times to statements across the five interviews. The code for responsibility was linked to the following other codes (with frequency of links noted): communication (1), leadership (2), learning (1), organization (3), planning (1), relationship building (1), teaching (2), and teamwork (2).

**Teamwork.** Interview responses that fell under the code for teamwork were responses about the summer camp staff members’ experiences working as a team at camp and how different types of experiences at camp helped them develop teamwork skills and about developing the teamwork skills of the FFA youth campers. Some examples of statements coded as related to responsibility are the following:

• “Our main focus was for kids to be able to grow in their self leadership and also as a team. For me, I had to learn how to communicate that idea with the kids and for them to
be open to their ideas and learn to work as a chapter” (Interview 1, personal communication, June 24, 2018).

- “We worked as a team. Our 24-hour staff was a team that spent weekends together, we went on vacations together every December when we were out of school, so I had to learn how to work on a team, so I knew what someone else’s strengths were and they could pick up in areas that, you know, I was flawed in” (Interview 1, personal communication, June 24, 2018).

- “You got chapter hour where you have [each] chapter plan with their teams and they work on setting goals for the upcoming year” (Interview 4, personal communication, July 5, 2018).

All five of the interviewees provided some reference to their teamwork experiences, the development of their own teamwork skills, or the development of teamwork skills of campers. The coding for teamwork was applied twelve (12) times to statements across the five interviews. The code for teamwork was linked to the following other codes (with frequency of links noted): cooperation (3), leadership (1), learning (4), planning (1), relationship building (4), responsibility (3), and teaching (1).

**Summary**

There were a few aspects of camp that made for a common experience as a summer camp staff member at the KY FFA Leadership Training Center. The activities of camp fell into five coding categories and were, from most mentioned to least mentioned, teaching, learning, discussion, planning, and reflection. The primary responsibility of the summer camp staff members is teaching, so it is appropriate that teaching and learning were the aspects of camp most often mentioned, with each code being used eighteen times. The exchange of information
with the summer camp staff members was not only directed toward the campers, as the staff members also referenced their own learning of skills at camp and discussed the positive impact of being taught by the mentors around them at camp. The next two activity code categories of discussion and planning were each used ten times and the last activity code, reflection, was used eight times. These three categories were most commonly used in reference to administrative responsibilities of the summer camp staff members, most often referring to when the staff group discussed the positive and negative experiences that week in a debriefing session at the end of each week of camp and they worked together to address issues and work to improve the camp experience and to meet those areas of need.

The former summer camp staff members from 2008 at the Kentucky FFA Leadership Training Center reported that the summer camp staff experience had a positive impact on the development of multiple soft skills. When asked if they felt like they had developed in one skill more than others, one summer camp staff member reported a greater development in their organizational skills, two reported a greater development in their communication skills, and two reported a greater development in their leadership skills. Relationship building was the soft skill most often mentioned by the former camp staff members as they shared about the relationships they built at camp and their increased ability to develop relationships now because of their camp experience. Leadership was the second most often mentioned soft skill, relating to both the focus on developing the leadership skills of the youth and the use of and development of the leadership skills of the summer camp staff members.
Chapter V: Conclusion and Discussion

There is research on the impact that summer camp experiences have on the youth that attend residential summer camp programs, but much less research about the impact that the camping programs have on the staff that work with and teach the youth visitors. There are a wide variety of camps, including but not limited to faith-based camps, shooting sports camps, environmental and natural resource education camps, skill development camps, sports camps, etc. so there is even less research about the impact of camp programs on the staff members for each specific type of summer camp program. Also, because of the variety of camp experiences based on regional factors (geography/topography, climate and weather) and local factors (accessibility to and from camp, camp facilities, etc.), there is not a consistent experience for staff members across the board. Because of the diversity of camp experiences, there is not an effective way to know what factors of camp are consistent across camping experiences and how those experiences impact individual staff members.

Summary

This research provides a snapshot of the relevant experiences and impacts that the 2008 Kentucky FFA summer camp season had on the seasonal staff members. Five out of the six Kentucky FFA summer camp staff members from the summer of 2008 participated in the study. Participants shared about specific experiences that they viewed as essential elements of the summer camp experience and their responses were grouped into the following types of activities: discussion, learning, planning, reflection, and teaching. Based on those experiences, the participants of the study reported practice in or development of the following soft skills: communication, cooperation, leadership, organization, relationship building, responsibility, and teamwork.
Discussion

Based on the feedback from the participants of the study, certain themes emerge about their FFA summer camp staff experience and how their experience had an impact on their personal development.

Research Question #1: What is the common lived experience of FFA Summer Camp staff members? Some of the activities of the Kentucky FFA Summer Camp reported by the participants of this study are the discussion time with fellow staff and leaders, planning with fellow staff members and full-time staff, and teaching the youth attending the camp. Participants in this study reported that the shared living environment was important to the development of their cooperation, relationship-building, and teamwork skills as they learned to live in close proximity with their fellow staff members and spend the day working alongside them as well. Another experience mentioned as an important aspect of the camp experience was teaching the youth at camp so that their leadership abilities were developed and teaching to help them return home with the ability to effectively run their local FFA chapter. The teaching component of camp was identified as an essential element of camp for both the youth and for the staff members.

The time spent with fellow adults developing meaningful relationships was more influential to the impact that the summer camp staff experience had on them than other components of the experience. As their primary role at camp is teaching, and more than half of the former camp staff members now work in the education field, it makes sense that the teaching experience was of great value to them as well. For the KY FFA camp, it could be beneficial for them to market these valuable components to potential summer camp staff members. For one, as building relationships with others in the agriculture education community was mentioned by
more than one of the participants, the camp could draw more interest from those that have a
desire to build those relationships with staff and visiting adults from the agriculture education
field. The KY FFA camp should also promote the teaching experiences, which provide
opportunities for personal development and professional development and could draw in more
applicants looking for opportunities to develop their teaching skills.

**Research Question #2: Does summer camp employment at an FFA camp as a young
adult have a positive impact on the development of staff members’ soft skills?** When asked
if they felt that they developed because of the camp staff experience, all of the participating staff
members reported positive personal development (as an individual) and professional
development (as a future employee). All of these summer camp staff members from 2008
reported positive development of their soft skills in some way. For the marketability of the
summer camp staff experience, the consistent responses of personal and professional
development by the former summer camp staff members should be highlighted as additional
benefits of the summer camp staff experience.

**Research Question #3: Does the focus on the development of youth’s leadership
skills at FFA summer camp cause a greater positive impact on the development of staff
members’ leadership skills over other soft skills?** While developing the leadership potential
of the FFA youth at camp is the focus of the FFA summer camp experience, the experience does
not translate to a greater impact on the development of staff members’ leadership abilities over
the development of other soft skills. Four out of the five participants in the study mentioned
leadership in their interview responses. All four of the respondents who mentioned leadership
referenced leadership along with the camp activity of teaching and three of the respondents
referenced leadership along with the camp activity of learning, which was in reference to their
own learning and development. When asked if they felt that they had developed in one soft skill more than others, only two of the five participants (I4 and I5) reported a significant enough difference in the development of their leadership skills over the development of their other soft skills.

For the FFA summer camp staff of 2008, one of the staff members (I4) felt that there was no significantly greater change in any one of their soft skills compared to the development of their other soft skills and did not attribute their soft skill development to any specific activities or experiences at camp. They credited their general personal development and soft skill development to the overall nature and general experience of being in the camp environment. For another staff member (I1), they reported greater development in a couple of soft skills over other soft skills, namely their organizational skills and their relationship-building skills. They attributed the development in those skills, respectively, to their responsibilities for organizing the camp sessions and the intimacy of the team environment throughout the days and weeks at camp with their fellow staff members.

While the focus of the camp is leadership development of the youth attendees, that does not translate to greater leadership development for the summer camp staff members. Some of the participants of the study did mention leadership along with teaching, so there could be added benefit for those going into field where they will be teaching leadership skills, as there are opportunities to practice the teaching of leadership skills during the KY FFA summer camp staff experience. As for the development of soft skills, the former summer camp staff members’ responses indicate that the general nature of the camp experience and experiences in that FFA summer camp environment are beneficial to a well-rounded development of soft skills, as the experience helped them develop in many ways.
**Relationship of Results to Prior Research**

A recurring theme from the interview responses of the former FFA summer camp staff members was the lack of a formal training. When asked about what training(s) they had before being on the summer camp staff, interviewee #5 responded, “Absolutely none” (Interview 5, personal communication, July 13, 2018). Interviewees #3 and #4 responded to inquiry about their training for the summer camp and only referenced their time as an FFA state officer as part of their preparation for being ready to serve on the FFA summer camp staff. When participants were asked about training before the camp session, topics covered included the following: first aid, CPR, fire extinguisher use, and ropes course training. One participant mentioned training on a computer program that was used for creating the camp schedule as it pertained to her responsibility for creating that schedule for each week of the camp session. Suggested areas of training include how to interact with youth, how to lead classes, and other themes that could have helped prepare them for the camp staff experience.

What the participants referenced, with regards to being prepared for the demands of summer camp, was their time as a Kentucky FFA State Officer, including Interviewee 3 who said, “As far as training, I’d say, I served as a Kentucky FFA state officer, so that was probably the best training” and Interviewee 4 who said, “Well for me. I wasn’t provided training through the FFA facility, but everybody hired there was basically former FFA members and as FFA members you get tons of leadership training at the local, state, and regional level.” Interviewee 2 also credited his FFA state officer experience for his communication skills by saying “As far as communicating, I feel like that’s something that I did fairly well because I was the state FFA officer and had to get used to speaking to crowds of 400 people.” These comments align with the study by Hoover and Bruce (2006) where former FFA state officers in Pennsylvania reported
“the State Officer experience enhanced skills in the areas of time and stress management, teamwork, goal setting, and problem solving, contributing to their personal development” (p. 120).

With regards to their personal development because of the summer camp staff experience, the participants reported growth in their communication skills, cooperation skills, leadership skills, organizational skills, ability to build meaningful relationships, ability to handle responsibilities, and teamwork skills. Their self-reported personal development is consistent with earlier studies, such as one by Marshall (2016) in which they propose that a single summer of summer camp staff employment “may lead to perceived personal growth in categories such as peer relationships, appreciation of diversity, teamwork, leadership, mindfulness, responsibility, role modeling, technical skills, and interpersonal skills” (p. 52). A study by Heiser (2013) found that camp directors/leaders “can enhance their learning of these skills, and their applicability to their future careers, by intentionally creating opportunities for them to practice and by thoughtfully challenging them to grow in these areas” (para. 13). These studies were supported by the feedback from participants of this study who credited the Kentucky FFA camp director, Dr. Pete Driesbach, for improving the learning and development of the summer camp staff members. Interviewee 4 spoke of the leadership that Dr. Pete displayed and the quality of time spent with the staff as having a positive influence and that he was “not really pushing (them) but leading by his example.” The staff members also credit the fact that the camp director “put a lot of trust in” them and the experience of holding a significant job as a college kid helped them “feel important and valued” and helped them “rise to the occasion” (Interview 4). Interviewee 5 reported the responsibility placed on the staff members by the camp directors helped them develop their soft skills:
I think that Dr. Pete and Brenda really leaning on us as camp staff to kind of be in charge of some areas or some aspects of the camp experience… I think that that probably helped quite a bit. … I think that the leadership at camp, just Dr. Pete and Brenda and them saying “hey, we’re going to let you guys have some responsibility to make sure that these students have a positive experience this week”… I think that that really helped.

According to Duerden et al. (2014), when camp staff members are “pushed out of their comfort zones and given the opportunity explore new identities”, it leads to skill development and changes in their view of self (p. 40). The results of that study are supported by the statement of Interviewee 1 who said that the summer camp staff experience gave them “the ability to develop some independence” and decide who they were as a person. Also, in reference to their career path, camp helped them find clarity about what they wanted to do, like Interviewee 1 who stated, “I wasn’t really sure (about their future career)…. While working at FFA Camp, kind of experiencing that, and also going back to college and realizing what I did and didn’t want to do, and I think that it molded me.” Duerden et al. (2014) also report that interpersonal interactions stood out in their study as a significant influence on the development of summer camp staff members during their summer of work. Their research is supported by this study, as participants of the study shared that discussion with other individuals played a crucial role in their summer camp staff experience and by the fact that relationship-building and communication were two of the top four most often mentioned soft skills in the interview responses.

Conclusions

Based on the responses of the participants of the study from the 2008 Kentucky FFA summer camp staff, the preferred staff member at the Kentucky FFA summer camp is a former Kentucky FFA state officer. Four of the five participants of the study were former Kentucky
FFA state officers and the one who was not a former FFA state officer was a last minute addition to the staff with experience on their local FFA chapter executive team. According to Interviewee 4, “everybody hired there was basically former FFA members and as FFA members you get tons of leadership training at the local, state, and regional level … everyone that comes in usually has a lot of leadership trainings just by being an FFA member” (Interview 4, personal communication, July 5, 2018).

Even with years of leadership development from as FFA members and serving in local or state FFA leadership roles, going on to serve as an FFA summer camp staff member still had a positive impact on the development of the staff members’ soft skills. The opportunity to teach the youth at camp developed the staff members’ teaching, communication, and organizational skills. Having discussions with fellow staff members and other adults at camp helped with the development of communication and relationship-building skills. For each of the activities recalled by the former staff members of the FFA camp, the experiences provided growth opportunities for the staff members to learn and grow in such a way that the experience stayed with them years later.

**Implications**

In conclusion, the researcher found that in spite of its label as a type of informal education, FFA experiences and agricultural education as a whole are of great value to the personal development of the students that participate. From the input of the participants and the study of literature, taking part in more of the opportunities that are available in agricultural education will in turn lead to more opportunities to learn and develop valuable skills through the application and practice of skills. The goal of P-20 education is to develop the whole person for career readiness and school based agricultural education provides the types of experiences that
can help accomplish that goal. This can also include being a local chapter leader, serving as a state FFA officer, or employment as an FFA summer camp staff member.

Summer camp employment is a great opportunity for young adults to further develop their soft skills, which can help their soft skill development be closer to what is desired by potential employers. Because of the opportunities to learn from and network with agricultural educators from across the state, take on responsibilities for campers’ safety, and teach youth how to be better leaders, FFA summer camp employment provides a unique experience for staff members to develop both personally and professionally.

Limitations of the Study

There are multiple limitations to this study:

1. The conclusions made from this study are based on a specific case and not necessarily a standard for the feelings and beliefs of FFA camp staff from different years of camp or from FFA camp facilities in other states.

2. The FFA camp staff of 2008 represents limited diversity. The staff members were all white, five of six staff members were male, most studied agriculture education at Murray State University, and had experience as FFA officers in local chapters or the state FFA program. Based on those similarities, does the FFA summer camp program do an adequate job in recruiting possible staff members from a diverse audience of qualified applicants?

3. According to some statements by the interviewees, it seems that all of the staff members knew each other before the summer camp season of 2008. Some had also worked together the previous summer at the KY FFA summer camp program. Their familiarity with each other likely had an impact on their
development individually and as a group and results from this study would not be
generalizable to staff with little prior experience or familiarity with each other
before their summer camp program.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

Based on the results of this study, there are multiple areas for future research. While
some participants mentioned their motivation for applying for and joining the FFA summer camp
staff team, this study did not investigate their motivations. A study of the nature of their
motivations, whether those motivators were intrinsic and/or extrinsic, for personal development,
financial gain, better than other opportunities, or an only opportunity could have implications on
the marketability or quality of camp life for summer camp staff members.

A second area of research is the application and approval process and how these
individuals were recruited and selected for their position with the Kentucky FFA Leadership
Training Center. The majority of the summer camp staff in 2008 were agriculture education
majors, and/or at Murray State University at the time, and/or were former state FFA officers. At
least one participant said that they were directly approached about servings as a summer camp
staff member, which could point to an applicant pool which was too small, too narrowly focused
(i.e. only those with FFA or FFA officer experience), or unqualified for the role. Understanding
the recruiting, application, and approval process for the FFA summer camp staff member
position could help the camp program recruit a larger pool of quality applicants.

More research is needed on the current Kentucky FFA Leadership Training Center
summer camp staff’s training process and how well prepared summer camp staff members are
for their role as a summer camp staff member. Additional research is needed to understand how
additional training for their summer camp role impacts the staff’s confidence or feelings of
preparedness for their roles. Additional training could also have a positive impact on the development of the summer camp staff members beyond the development they experienced from the day-to-day activities of the summer camp environment.

Another area of research identified is how the experiences and development of camp staff members vary based on the focus of the different types of camp. The FFA summer camp is focused on leadership development of FFA chapter leaders and teaching the local FFA chapter leaders and members how to lead their local chapter for the upcoming year. That is a much different experience than residential summer camps focused on recreation or sports and understanding how those different experiences have a different impact on the staff members has implications for all types of camping programs.
References


Appendix A - Institutional Review Board Approval Letter
TO: Brian Parr, Educational Studies Leadership and Counseling
FROM: Jonathan Baskin, IRB Coordinator
DATE: 4/24/2018
RE: Human Subjects Protocol I.D. - IRB #18-152

The IRB has completed its review of your student’s Level 1 protocol entitled “Case Study of Skills Developed During Employment at Kentucky FFA Summer Camp as a Young Adult.” After review and consideration, the IRB has determined that the research, as described in the protocol form, will be conducted in compliance with Murray State University guidelines for the protection of human participants.

The forms and materials that have been approved for use in this research study are attached to the email containing this letter. These are the forms and materials that must be presented to the subjects. Use of any process or forms other than those approved by the IRB will be considered misconduct in research as stated in the MSU IRB Procedures and Guidelines section 20.3.

Your stated data collection period is from 4/24/2018 to 12/10/2018.

If data collection extends beyond this period, please submit an Amendment to an Approved Protocol form detailing the new data collection period and the reason for the change.

This Level 1 approval is valid until 4/23/2019.

If data collection and analysis extends beyond this date, the research project must be reviewed as a continuation project by the IRB prior to the end of the approval period, 4/23/2019. You must reapply for IRB approval by submitting a Project Update and Closure form (available at murraystate.edu/irb). You must allow ample time for IRB processing and decision prior to your expiration date, or your research must stop until such time that IRB approval is received. If the research project is completed by the end of the approval period, then a Project Update and Closure form must be submitted for IRB review so that your protocol may be closed. It is your responsibility to submit the appropriate paperwork in a timely manner.

The protocol is approved. You may begin data collection now.
Appendix B - Invitation to Participate Message

Invitation to participate message

Kelly Rexroat

v1

Greetings!

I am contacting you today because in the summer of 2008, you served as a summer camp staff member at the Kentucky FFA Leadership Training Center. I, Kelly Rexroat, am a doctoral candidate in the Ed.D. in P-20 and Community Leadership program at Murray State University and am in the dissertation process to complete the requirements for the degree. My dissertation is entitled “Case Study of Skills Developed During Employment at Kentucky FFA Summer Camp as a Young Adult” and we have selected the summer of 2008 to be focus of the case study.

We are hoping to better understand the impact on soft skills development that summer camp staff experience has on those that serve at KY FFA summer camp and hope to accomplish that through a case study involving interviews of the summer camp staff members that served that summer. We specifically selected the summer of 2008 because that provides a length of time since that experience to have possibly served at more years of summer camps at the KY FFA Leadership Training Center or in other places, and provides time to have completed schooling or training for your selected career field, and this provides some time to have been in a career setting or in the workplace in some capacity. The hope is that the experience since your time on summer camp staff have provided context in which you have used your soft skills or those abilities have helped you in some way.

To get your perspective about the summer camp experience and the impact it has had on you, I would like to plan to interview you over the phone sometime in the near future. Before that, I will send you the necessary consent paperwork and have you send that to the faculty supervisor for my dissertation, Dr. Brian Parr, at Murray State University. I will send you the paperwork along with a prepared envelope for you to send the signed paperwork to him. If you could, please contact me at your earliest convenience to let me know if you would be willing to commit to talking to me for less than an hour to help with this project. If you have any question
or concerns, feel free to contact my faculty supervisor or me at your convenience. Our contact information is below.

Thank you for your time and I look forward to hearing from you,

Kelly Rexroat

Kelly Rexroat- email: krexroat@murraystate.edu - Cell: (859) 285-9693

Dr. Brian Parr- email: bparr@murraystate.edu - Phone: (270) 809-2966
Appendix C - Recruitment Letter

Recruitment Letter

Kelly Rexroat

v1

Invitation to participate in the research study titled:

“Case Study of Skills Developed During Employment at Kentucky FFA Summer Camp as a Young Adult”

Greetings Potential Study Participant,

I am writing to you today to request your input on the research I am doing for the purpose of completing my dissertation for the requirement for the degree of Doctorate of Education (Ed.D) in P-20 and Community Leadership at Murray State University. I will be conducting interviews as part of the study to increase understanding of how the FFA summer camp staff experience impacts the development of the summer camp staff members. As a former FFA summer camp staff member, your experience and makes you ideally qualified to provide input in this study.

I will be conducting interviews with former summer camp staff members in the hopes that we can capture your perspective about your time as a summer camp staff member and the impact it has had on you. The interview should take between 30 minutes to an hour to complete. Your responses will be kept confidential and each interview will be assigned a number code to help ensure that personal identifiers are not revealed during the analysis and write up of findings.

There is no compensation for participation in this study. However, your participation will be a valuable addition to our research and will help provide a better understanding of the impact that FFA Summer Camp has on its summer camp staff members.

If you are willing and able to participate, please provide some suggested times and dates that will work for you to set aside time for an interview and I will do my best to fit in around your schedule. If you have any questions, please don’t hesitate to ask.

Thank you!

Kelly W. Rexroat
Appendix D - Interview Consent Form

Research Participation Consent Form

Study Title: Case Study of Skills Developed During Employment at Kentucky FFA Summer Camp as a Young Adult

Primary Investigator: Kelly Rexroat, Doctoral Candidate in Department of Educational Studies, Leadership, and Counseling

Faculty Sponsor Contact: Dr. Brian Parr, Dissertation Committee Chair from Department of Agricultural Science, 270-809-2966, bparr@murraystate.edu

You are being invited to participate in a research study conducted through Murray State University. This form contains information you will need to help you decide whether to be in this research study or not. You must be at least 18 years old to participate. Please read the form carefully and ask the study team member(s) questions about anything that is not clear. You will be given a copy of this form to keep.

1. **Nature and Purpose of Project:** The purpose of this study is to better understand the impact of FFA Summer Camp staff experience on the development of soft skills. Research for this study is being conducted by a doctoral candidate student for their dissertation.

2. **Participant Selection:** You are being asked to participate because of your past involvement as a member of the summer camp staff at the Kentucky FFA Leadership Training Center.

3. **Explanation of Procedures:** The study activities include a phone interview, which should take approximately one hour to complete. One interview should suffice, but follow-up questions may require a second phone interview. The primary investigator will schedule an interview time with the participant so that it is at a convenient time for each study participant.

4. **Recordings:** Interview audio recordings will be recorded on a secondary device for the purposes of transcribing the interview responses after the conclusion of the interview. If you do not want to be recorded, that is an option, but may require additional time during interview for responses to be accurately recorded by direct transcription. Please initial below to indicate your consent with regards to audio recording:

   _____ I agree to be recorded by way of audio recording.
   *Initials*

   _____ I do not agree to be recorded by way of audio recording.
   *Initials*

5. **Discomforts and Risks:** There are no anticipated risks and/or discomforts for participants.

6. **Benefits:** This study is not designed to benefit you directly. However, your participation may help to increase our understanding of the impact that the FFA Summer Camp staff experience has on those that serve as summer camp staff members.
7. **Confidentiality:** Your identity will be known to the researchers, but the information you provide will be kept confidential.

8. **Refusal/Withdrawal:** Your participation is strictly voluntary and you are free to withdraw/stop participating at any time with absolutely no penalty. The participant is welcome to skip a question at any time if they prefer not to answer, at which point the interview can continue on from the next question. Not all questions must be answered for responses to be recorded in the study.

9. **Contact Information:** Any questions about the procedures or conduct of this research should be brought to the attention of Dr. Brian Parr at 270-809-2966 or bparr@murraystate.edu. If you would like to know about the results of the study, please contact Dr. Brian Parr.

Your signature indicates that this study has been explained to you, that your questions have been answered, and that you agree to take part in this study.

The dated approval stamp on this document indicates that this project has been reviewed and approved by the Murray State University Institutional Review Board (IRB) for the Protection of Human Subjects. If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, you should contact the MSU IRB Coordinator at (270) 809-2916 or msu.irb@murraystate.edu.

Participant's Name (printed): __________________________________________

_____________________________________________________________________

(Signature of Participant) (Date)

_____________________________________________________________________

(Signature of Person Obtaining Consent) (Date)
Appendix E - Interview Opening Script

Interview Opening Script

Kelly Rexroat

v1

Good morning/afternoon/evening (Participant Name), this is Kelly Rexroat, doctoral candidate at Murray State University. Just want to let you know that for the purposes of transcribing, our conversation is being recorded. Are you ok with that?

Thank you for your willingness to help provide input to this study. Before we get started, I want to go over a few things, some of which were previously covered in the consent form you signed and sent back to me.

Your input will be helping us better understand the impact that FFA Summer Camp staff experience has on former staff members. Your participation is completely voluntary and your are free to not answer a question, at which point we will skip that question and move on to the next one. You are also free to withdraw or stop participating in the interview at any time. Your responses to interview questions will be completely confidential and no one will know which answers were yours. While your responses are confidential, your answers will be combined with the answers from other participants for the use of the study, and may be submitted for presentations at conventions or publications in scholarly journals.

The interview may take up to an hour to complete.

There is no compensation for your participation in the study.

There are no known risks for participation in the study.
Appendix F - Interview Questions

Interview questions

Kelly Rexroat

v1

1. How many years did you work as a summer camp staff member at an FFA summer camp?
   a. What years did you work at an FFA summer camp?
   b. In what states have you worked at an FFA summer camp?

2. What training(s) did you go through to specifically prepare you for your FFA summer camp staff employment?
   a. Were the trainings before and/or during the summer camp session?
   b. What were the topics covered in the trainings you received?

3. What aspect(s) of camp would you say are essential for making FFA summer camp the experience that it is:
   a. For youth?
   b. For staff members?

4. How did you develop as a result of your summer camp staff experience:
   a. As an individual?
   b. As a potential employee for future jobs?

5. In what way were your soft skills or interpersonal skills developed by your summer camp staff experiences?

6. Did you feel that you developed in some soft skills more than others?
a. If “yes”, please provide which soft skills were developed because of your camp experience and what aspects of camp most affected that skill development.
Appendix G - Interview Responses Grouped by Question

Q1- How many years did you work as a summer camp staff member at an FFA summer camp?

I1: Three years… wait… four years.
I2: Three years.
I3: Three summers.
I4: Three.
I5: I spent two summers there.

Q1a- What years did you work at an FFA summer camp?

I1: My first year working there was the summer of 2007 and my last year was the summer of 2010.
I5: That would have been… I think it would have been 2007 and 2008.

Q1b- In what states have you worked at an FFA summer camp?

I1: Just in Kentucky.
I2: Kentucky
I3: Just Kentucky.
I4: Kentucky.
I5: Only in Kentucky.
Q2- What training(s) did you go through to specifically prepare you for your FFA summer camp staff employment?

    I1: We trained for the ropes course. We were all ropes course certified. I was ropes course certified. I did training on FileMaker Pro, which was a scheduling program that I used. I did trainings on payroll for the Kentucky Department of Education. We also did first aid safety training, CPR certification, and training for fire extinguishers.

    I2: First Aid. We did a First Aid class and I feel like that was just about it.

    I3: As far as training, I’d say, I served as a Kentucky FFA state officer, so that was probably the best training, so I was actually a state officer the summer of 2007 so I spent a week there as the state officer for that week and then began summer camp in 2008. I was working with students with leadership and communication skills and things like that from the state office and then was able to work there as camp staff.

    I4: Well for me. I wasn’t provided training through the FFA facility, but everybody hired there was basically former FFA members and as FFA members you get tons of leadership training at the local, state, and regional level. I was a state FFA officer that and in the summer of 2006, that’s why I didn’t work that year. That was my first summer starting college and I didn’t want to work that summer. So we were at camp doing training for state officer at camp that week at that time so everyone that comes in usually has a lot of leadership trainings just by being an FFA member and then when we are hired we have regular meetings with the director, Dr. Pete Driesbach… at the time that would get us prepared for our role and help us get started and I know that we did my second or third year there we put the ropes course in so we had ropes course training and with a lot of leadership and safety stuff included in that too.
I5: To be honest with you, absolutely none. Actually, the reason that I was employed there the first summer… (one of the staff members) who I went to high school with, who was my best friend from high school, he was working there and they had someone that quit at like the last minute and this was like a week before the camp season started. (He) called and said “Hey, would you like to work at FFA Camp” and I was like, “you know, that would probably be a lot more fun than pouring concrete basement walls,” so I packed by bags and headed to Hardinsburg. So that first summer there, my main position was in the cafeteria and then I had some canteen responsibilities, and then I also taught an electrical safety course. There was no official training leading up to my employment there. Well, did you have any FFA experience before that? Yes. So I was a 4-year FFA member at Nelson County High School. I was on the executive team for three of those four years, and then I went to Murray State to pursue a degree in agricultural education. OK. As part of that executive team, did you go to the summer camps as well? Yes, I went to the FFA camp, I think, three times: the summer after freshman year, sophomore year, and junior year.

Q2a- Were the trainings before and/or during the camp session?

I1: They were all before. No ongoing training during the summer.

I2: Oh yeah. They had someone come in and we all learned how to do it. Was this after everyone was already there? Like the week before everyone else got there? It was a couple weeks before all the campers got here.

I3: Were there trainings before summer camp? Others mentioned First Aid. Sure, so I also served as the EMT for summer camp those three years so I was the Camp EMT in 2008. So your EMT training, was that something you already had? It was. So it wasn’t something you specifically prepared for, it was something you already had trained in those things and prepared
for that? I was and they don’t typically fill the position of EMT but it was nice to have one on staff I think, so I just kind of brought that with me. So you made up your own job because you had the training? Basically, well I did office work and worked in the canteen, but EMT and anything medical that came up, they kind of relied on me for that. Good to have that training under your belt, because I’m sure summer camp isn’t without its hazards. Oh absolutely, especially when you do the fun run on Thursday afternoons. At 4-H Camp, I used my first aid kit a few too many times to make me happy.

I4: I would say more before but we would meet regularly. When you say trainings you think of this formal somebody coming in but every single week on Friday after the campers left we would meet with the director and debrief about the week and worked on things we wanted to improve. I think sometimes we say its training but sometimes on the job learning is better for training then some formalized process on paper. So I would say we did it before and definitely ongoing.

I5: (Not applicable)

Q2b- What were the topics covered in the trainings you received?

I1: What was mentioned before.

I2: Were the topics just first aid and CPR and stuff? Burns, sprains, if someone gets hurt how do you brace them, who responds to what and how do you respond, location of all of the kits and how the defibrillator works, that kind of stuff.

I3: (Not applicable)

I4: What was some of the focus of that training that you said you did during the briefing? Every camper would fill out a survey and have suggestions and we would read through all them at the end of the week and you know some of them were kind of funny but some of them had
some really good input. We would talk about the things that did go well and didn’t work so well, and things we wanted to address the next week to make sure that we improved. So it was qualitative based data that came from that current group and we would use that qualitative data to help inform decisions moving forward. So little things, from the bathrooms working, to experiences in different classes, to engage in that we wanted to change. I meant the first year I worked in the canteen and I taught an electricity class so I would get input on my class to help me and the next two years I was a lifeguard and I would get input on those canoeing classes and swimming classes I would teaching so specific feedback from all functions of the camp that you would put into practice to train and improve.

I5: (Not applicable)

Q3a- What aspect(s) of camp would you say are essential for making FFA summer camp the experience that it is for youth?

I1: I think for me, I think for me to enjoy camp, and also for the kids that went to camp, you had to know how to effectively communicate with them to make them understand that this is a place that they could make it how they wanted but also a place to train them for the upcoming school year because our main focus was for kids to be able to grow in their self leadership and also as a team. For me, I had to learn how to communicate that idea with the kids and for them to be open to their ideas and learn to work as a chapter and how the Ag teachers kind of motivated their kids, which helped me in the future because that’s my career now. So they came as a chapter? Or, participation-wise for the chapters, was there a high number from each chapter that came? Was everyone required to come before participation the next year or was it optional? Since it’s at the Kentucky FFA Leadership Training Center, all of the curriculum is designed to develop students’ leadership abilities and how they can lead a chapter, so we focused on
executive teams, like the chapter officers and activity chairmen. The first section of classes they always had was their officer classes and activity chairman classes. Some of them might not have had a leadership role, but they were trained to take on the abilities to take on a leadership role when they went home, or in the future some time. A lot of the chapters brought 20 to 30 kids depending on the size of the chapter and that kind of reflected the size of their membership. There wasn’t necessarily a limit on how big the chapter was as opposed to how many kids you had to bring. It was more of a… you could tell when you had a chapter that was 120 members because they would bring about 20 students, or 25 students to camp. *So that number was probably made up of their current school year’s leaders or leaders for next year and some that were more interested in leadership roles?* Yes.

I2: I think that there has to be a pairing of enthusiasm and organization. I mean because the whole reason you are going to a camp… if it’s too organized then, I almost made is really bad joke, like you are concentrating all the time and at camp I don’t want to do that, say that on the recording, you follow me? But it was, it has to be organized in such a manner as such so that you know people know a routine what they need to do and they know where they are supposed to be. But at the same time, you know, whenever they are at the place then you got to put some F-U-N out there. And you got to make it that way so that they want to be at those places rather than being where they’re not supposed to be.

I3: Being able to meet students from all across the states and kind of see them come out of their shell a little bit because one of the things that is great about the Kentucky camp is you are not with your chapter so you are split up and you spend a lot of time with people from different areas of the state. So being able to see other students make those relationships was pretty important and pretty special.
I4: Well I think the whole goal of FFA camp is local FFA chapters are bringing their officer teams and their executive teams to you as a spring board, they are training for the upcoming year. Its their leadership training for serving their roles so I think what makes it powerful is they are there with their local teachers and they are engaged in whatever they are planning throughout their year and their events they are set goals. They are also working with Really good peer role models the kids that come to camp, you know, they’ve got really good role models. If you’re a kid that’s coming at me, I was the first kid in my family to go to college…. Graduate high school, went to FFA camp as a camper I was surrounded by kids even with similar backgrounds but the context was all positive, positive experience. You felt like you were at a really significant job as a leadership team member. And the classes are designed, you got chapter hour where you have chapter plan with their teams and they work on setting goals for the upcoming year and then you got specific classes they can take that will help them in their role too like officer training classes. So it’s powerful because it’s significant to their training to their job but also giving them fellowship with other really high caliber leaders around the whole state. 

So they weren’t with their chapters the whole time? They split off for president or secretary or something like that? You had two hours with your chapter and then you also had an officer class where if you were like the chapter secretary you had an hour each day where you are training with the secretaries to learn your job so yeah, you had chapter time and time with other students. And you played sports and athletics with other kids from other places so that helped too.

I5: for the students? The youth that came to camp? I would say having staff that are relatable. I don’t necessarily think age has anything to do with it, but I think that it helped that we were… all of us that were working there, we were kind of close in age to the students. Staff that are passionate about student success and positive youth development… I think that is
absolutely critical, and it certainly makes the experience. I’ve been to some other camps and you have some staff that are there just to collect paychecks and I think at FFA camp, that wasn’t the case. We were there to try to make a difference. The paycheck was nice, but, you know, we had fun and we got paid for it. So, you would say it’s mostly that you weren’t motivated by the paycheck, but motivated really by the fact of your interaction with the youth and the opportunity to do that? Yes. Absolutely. It seems that most of you all were, or a number of the people in this group were Ag Ed eventually. You know, most of them went into that career. Four out of the six, including you with Ag Ed and then moving on with your degrees? Yeah.

Q3b- What aspect(s) of camp would you say are essential for making FFA summer camp the experience that it is for staff members?

I1: I think something that really drove our success was the debriefing that we did every Friday. Whenever the campers would leave… of course, we followed a very strict curriculum, a very planned out daily schedule from six o’clock in the morning to 1 or 2 in the morning the next morning. Obviously, we would kind of work in shifts, but we would debrief and on Fridays, we would talk about improvements and talk about what we need to do for the next week, and that taught us that, although this is just a summer camp, that in life we need to debrief. So whether it’s now as I’m a teacher, after I teach a lesson, I need to debrief my lesson or if I’m working with a group of kids, whether that’s at church or at school, once an event is over, I need to debrief that event so that the event is better next years or next time it comes around.

I2: The people you are working with. I mean that’s one hundred percent of it, at least for me. The other people you are working with, some of the guys at the time they were my best friends. They were the people I spend the most time with. They were just so much fun. What kind of impact did you have on each other? Well, they were in my wedding. Some of them, most
of them, I was friends with beforehand and because of that we kind of were telling each other, ‘I think I’m going to do this’ or ‘ok, yeah we will do it together’. Legitimately, its so funny, I was a state FFA officer and I went down to Warren County for a banquet and I called (one of the other staff members) and I said “Hey man, I’m going to be speaking at a banquet and I was actually wondering if I can crash on your couch for the night?’ He said “yeah” and I met (him) my freshman year of high school at FFA camp and we stayed in touch through that and so now I’m a freshman in college at this point in the story when I crash on his couch so I told him “ I’d really like to work at camp this summer” and he was like “ huh, yeah that does sound good.” So he called Dr. Pete and asked him what he needed to do and Dr. Pete said “well, uh we need a lifeguard.” And he was like ok and he went and got certified and he was in. He was the first one hired and then I did my thing and got to be athletic director and if (he) hadn’t of worked there he wouldn’t have gone into Ag Ed, which he did for a couple of years, and now he is getting his… he’s going to be a vet. *Who is Dr. Pete?* He was the coordinator at the time at the camp. Pete Driesbach.

I3: I think it is again that relationship with the students. And with me I served three years and several of the camp staff members served multiple years seeing those students come back and remember you. You know, in my current job I’ll run across people who were campers back then …… *Hey, I lost you for that last sentence. You said something about building relationships with the students, and saying how you interact with them and how you’d run into them since then and that was it.*  Yeah, sure, I’ve run into them since working at summer camp you know and they remember me from even years later and they say “hey did you work at the FFA camp?” and they thank you for having done that and they say that they had such a great time and they learned so much at camp. They still associate with that.
I4: Man, I tell you it was … I love what I’m doing now… but talking about being a kid being in college, it was the greatest job I could ever imagine having. I mean it took someone like me and gave me a place to live, for one it provided those basic needs. I had a place to live for the summer. I felt like back home I was going to be around some negative influences, people I grew up with so it gave me a place to go in the summer when I wasn’t in college, three meals a day, really that security was there. But what really spring boarded it was, a lot of people that were in FFA and working camp were also most of the time eyeing careers with in agriculture so it gave you a chance to network with people that were coming in there, since I was going to be an Ag teacher, so I literally… when I graduated from college, because of FFA camp, I knew every single Ag teacher in the state and I was hired really early that first year I was out. I was hired April or May, pretty early. I was able to secure a job and I think that was because I was able to network with every single teacher in the state of Kentucky through camp so it is a great networking opportunity but also it’s the camp director at the time, Dr. Pete Driesbach… he put a lot of trust in us. We were young college kids, we took our roles seriously and as lifeguards we were able to take safety very seriously, take facility management very seriously, and I think having a significant job at that age you feel important and valued makes you rise to the occasion. And it was a very fun atmosphere it was an incredibly fun job to have where you are working basically 24/7, around the clock at the camp with the kids. The best man at my wedding was the lifeguard that I met at camp so you build some meaningful relationships too. It was just a great job.

I5: I think just the ability to be involved with the high school FFA members, the Ag students, that’s what really made the experience for me, but you know my passion was Ag education. I wanted to pursue a degree in Ag Ed because my Ag teacher had a profound impact
on the trajectory of my life. To me, being able to interact and to try to have a little bit of a positive impact on some students throughout the summer from all over the state was really important. It was incredible because, like I said, my main job that first summer was in the cafeteria, but they did let me teach an electrical safety course, so I did get to interact with quite a few students.

**Q4a- How did you develop as a result of your summer camp staff experience as an individual?**

I1: When I started working at an FFA camp, I wasn’t really decided on what I wanted to do. I was a state officer my first summer out of high school, and I became familiar with FFA camp, but it wasn’t really something I wanted to do. I was a homebody and was born and raised on a family farm where we raised tobacco and corn and hay and soybeans. We raised beef cattle and we weren’t really encouraged to leave the family farm especially during the summer months, we were expected to work through them and I had a pretty good summer job during my summer breaks in high school. I was encouraged by Dr. P who was the Director of the FFA Camp, and some of my friends you’ve probably interviewed already, to work at camp because it gave me the ability to develop some independence and, you know, kind of decide who I was as a person, but also what my future career would be, because I wasn’t really sure. I changed my major three times at Murray State University. While working at FFA Camp, kind of experiencing that, and also going back to college and realizing what I did and didn’t want to do, and I think that it molded me to be a teacher because I was able to create curriculum and, you know, experience that small window of teaching that now I do all the time.

I2: I think that it helped me with positive interaction with students, because it, I always knew I was going to go Ag Ed, always knew that was the route I was going to go, so whenever
you are in that setting, a setting in a camp, like I said, you are trying to do F-U-N as much as you can and make it fun and that was the thing I was focusing on there the most, was positive interactions with students, positive interaction with kids that were younger than I was and it prepped me for that whenever I was or got to be a teacher.

I3: I think it was good for me to come out of my shell and spend that much time with the other camp staff. I was 24-hour camp staff living there and so it was really being responsible for that many students, being on call 24/7, and again having those interactions with young adults.

I4: The camp director at the time… the leadership he displayed… Dr. Pete… His family grew up in Africa. His family were missionaries, so his influence was one very much of faith and God-centered and that rubbed off on me. He spent a lot of time with us not really pushing that but leading by his example. So I think my own development made me a better person because the work that I did was always ‘hey were working for youth and we got to make sure they are taken care of and they are safe. They are getting a valuable experience.’ So all us knew our job was important that vision that we wanted the camp, that we wanted to accomplish it just made us work our best and made us make sure The kids had a great time that week but also learn some things but learn to treat each other with compassion and care. And we kind of lead by that example we were doing. So I think as an individual it helped me form better relationship throughout my whole life and made me a better version of myself.

I5: You know what, I think it taught me a lot. I had known the value of hard work, but I had never been pushed like I was pushed that first summer. I was kind of the main breakfast person for the camp. You know, we would have three to four hundred students there a week, so I had no real restaurant experience, but the folks at the FFA camp there, they said “here’s what you need to do. Here’s how this is going to work.” So it was a lot of early mornings and it was a
lot of learning on the fly making sure that there was enough food for campers throughout the however many weeks we had. So it taught me a lot about, more about being a diligent, hard worker, attention to detail, and then just maintaining a positive attitude and how infectious a positive attitude could be for an overall experience like camp.

Q4b- How did you develop as a result of your summer camp staff experience as a potential employee for future jobs?

I1: I was in the prime location to be recruited from school because I could call all of the Ag teachers in the state of Kentucky by name. I had the ability every single week to speak to different Ag teachers about, you know, their schools and, you know, what types of programs were out there and what type of teachers people were looking for whenever I was about to get out of college towards my senior year and graduated, I had the opportunity to come and work at camp while I was looking for a job and although I did not sign my contact for my job until July 15th, actually, it was an agreement between myself and my new principal that I would finish out all the weeks of summer camp before I started working there because I knew that it was important, you know, to my coworkers. I knew that commitment was important which also, through which, my principal knew that I was committed to something and I think that that kind of sealed the deal when they knew how committed I was and how I would be committed to that school system. In addition to that, when I was doing my interviews, I probably interviewed at 12 to 15 different places and I turned 6 interviews or opportunities to teach down before I ever got the opportunity to teach where I started teaching, but I would go and talk to the Ag teachers that were at camp that week and I would ask them what kind of questions would you ask and we would kind of talk through those questions, so it was almost like an interview training for me on
top of an employment job. So you were able to talk to some people who were in those positions and find out what they would look for in a candidate, right? Absolutely, yes.

I2: Were there things that prepared you for your career? You talked about you could focus on fun and have those interactions with kids, so were there other things? Oh definitely! I mean, responsibility, ownership, there were a lot of things that I changed with my position relative to years gone by. There were some things that we implemented as a staff together. There was a lot of cooperation that helped me…a lot of problem solving as well as conflict… there was at time conflict with the staff and it helped to have those and you had something negative and you make a positive out of it.

I3: So, working at FFA camp is obviously very demanding. You are there 24/7 for the 8 weeks or something and you got to give it your all because the students come in for one week and you got to make it just as special on week one as week four, week five, and I think just having that mentality of you know giving it your all at any point of the day.

I4: We were teaching classes every week so it was really the first formal teaching where I was the sole teacher. You know I taught electricity class and then I did that class with canoeing and lifeguarding and it was different than the content I ended up teaching as an Ag teacher and now as an assistant principal you learn a lot about teaching and what people respond to. And about forming relationships and allowing people to trust you. It was a perfect springboard where I could make some mistakes in a nonthreatening way where it wasn’t a high stakes job where I wasn’t a full certified teacher but I was still teaching and learning from the whole experiences. And then, like I said networking was huge as well. I would get feedback from other teachers that were in the field and you know that your feedback with teachers was 24/7 you know, other than when you are sleeping. You are eating lunch with them, you are leading class next to them,
helping them with their…. Time you are helping them coordinate the athletics, you were working with people that were in a role that I wanted to be in, so I mean I had access to mentors every single week.

I5: Can you clarify a bit? You know, you had talked about or hinted about some of those, like your hard work and your positive attitude. As you were developing, do you feel like there were things that developed in you that made you more capable for future career opportunities? Oh. Ok. Yeah. I’m with you. I think that one of the big things that first summer really taught me was that, you know, regardless if I’m an expert in a certain area, that I am capable of accomplishing whatever task is set before me. I don’t know if you’ve ever cooked scrambled eggs for 400 students, but that’s insane. No, I haven’t. Probably took a large spatula? Yeah. But no, I had never done that before but it taught me that I might not be an expert but through hard work and perseverance, I can accomplish whatever task is set before me. OK.

Q5- In what way were your soft skills or interpersonal skills developed by your summer camp staff experiences?

I1: In the 4 years that I worked at camp, I lived with only three other females that worked at camp during those 4 years, and one year, I was the only female that worked there. I learned that, especially in the career I’m in now, I’ve got to work with men in a career with is heavily male-based being an Ag teacher, and that really helped me. Could you repeat the question again? It’s just about how your soft skills or interpersonal skills were developed, like your leadership skills, your interpersonal communications, teamwork skills, leadership skills, how some of those things were developed because of that experience. Ok. We worked as a team. Our 24-hour staff was a team that spent weekends together, we went on vacations together every December when we were out of school, so I had to learn how to work on a team, so I knew what someone else’s
strengths were and they could pick up in areas that, you know, I was flawed in. We also lived together all of the time and we learned to deal with arguments and disagreements. I also, because I worked in the office of the camp, I did all of the orders for the cafeteria, so I had to work with adults who were 20 years, sometimes 30 years older than me, and I had to understand that feel that I was very green with. I had never ordered food for 400 people before. I didn’t know how many boxes of chicken that they needed and I had to learn to communicate with the director of the kitchen was doing in forms of how many numbers we were going to have. They didn’t necessarily understand well we’ve got this many kids coming in, if they needed more for that week or whatever else they would have on the menu, so I really had to learn how to effectively communicate with someone because I knew how to run a computer and they didn’t. I also did a lot of stuff with the department of education there in Frankfort when it comes to introducing programs and writing theme curriculum that I would send to them. It was always very frustrating to me that I would send curriculum to somebody sitting in an office at Frankfort that was never going to see the kids that I was writing the curriculum for, and they would have a really hard time understanding why we needed an icebreaker before we started our lesson. An icebreaker might have taken 12 minutes of a 36 minute class, but that icebreaker was “the catch” that made the kids, you know, really link into what I was about to teach them, so it was important for me to build that relationship with those people that I only knew over the phone or over email.

12: *The non-technical. Leadership, decision making, planning, organizing, communicating, interpersonal interaction, teamwork. Some of those that hit on ways you developed?* As far as communicating, I feel like that’s something that I did fairly well because I was the state FFA officer and had to get used to speaking to crowds of 400 people and stuff like that, that was a normal thing. I was good with that. One thing that I felt like it definitely helped
me with was organization because there was a lot that needed to be organized as far as athletic director working there with the tournaments and stuff like that. Organization, planning ahead, planning with your time, figuring out time management, figuring out how best to utilize your time during the day because your time is relatively rigid. You don’t have a whole lot of flexibility.

I3: So working with the students, I taught communications class the first year and I did fill in for some of the other classes when we didn’t have instructors, so I think just the communications skills, you know, for being able to teach. I actually teach a course for Murray State now at Ft. Campbell dealing with young adults, so I think that really prepared me for taking on that role as well. Any other soft skills you developed? Just interpersonal skills with dealing with other camp staff members and living in very close quarters for that amount of time so just interpersonal skills and office skills and all those skills, working together and getting along. Just learning to get along and live like that? Yeah.

I4: Yeah. Just the general nature of that. There’s a schedule that camp runs on; It’s a very stringent schedule because we want to be organized and there’s nobody over your shoulder. It’s like in high school when the bell rings, you’ve got to move. You have to watch your phone, your clock, you’ve got to go and take care of business, so time management. When you run on a schedule, and I was like “look, I got to open the pool in 15 minutes,” you’ve got to go take care of things. If not, I’m accountable for that. So, I think some of those soft skills developed because of the general workings of camp. Like I said, the relationship building, you know, I got to see kids all across the state of KY, hundreds and hundreds of kids, probably thousands by the end of three years and with the teachers… I mean, time management, interpersonal skills, goal-setting for yourself. You know, we were coming up with new ideas. I started something there called the
“spirit stick.” It was just a silly little thing to add to the athletic program where the group with the most points got the spirit stick at the end of the day. You know, little things like that we actually contributed that are still going on today. So I think of that creativity.. I think those things, sometimes, you can’t explicitly teach those soft skills, you almost just have to create an environment where they grow on their own, and camp definitely was that.

I5: You know, a lot of different ways. Like I said, I was mainly in the cafeteria, but I did get to teach, so I got to hone some of those skills that are necessary for effective teaching and learning. Also, involvement in the sessions and different kind of supervision. Yeah, you know, just constant contact with the youth I think really put me at an advantage to my classmates at Murray State because I had additional experience working with youth, especially as we got into our teaching methods courses and things like that. I had already been doing some of those things and I had that experience coming in. So, in lots of different ways

Q6- Did you feel that you developed in some soft skills more than others?

I1: Absolutely, yes.

I2: If you can think back to how you were at the beginning of those years of employment and at the end of it and did you develop any of those significantly more or were they all close to the same? So my first year in 2007 when I was athletic director I didn’t really get it all down, like the way that I would communicate with the groups as a whole and everything. I feel like I focused way too much on things getting done and not things being fun and my second year, I toned it down and all focused on having fun and as long as we were doing that, as long as we were having fun then there was nothing that you had to reprimand. And that changed a lot, changed my mindset, it changed everything about my second year in 2008. So before and after, it definitely was positive interaction with students, you could put that under communication, so
the positive communication, prioritization, my priorities shifted from my first year to my second year because I realized I was focusing on the wrong thing. *You were focusing on the done rather than the fun?* There you go. That’s the daggone buzz word. *I know. I feel like I need to put that on a plaque in my office or something.* Focus on the Fun not on the done. That and right beside that the acronym “OHIO: Only Handle it Once”. That way you can show the dichotomy of man.

I3: I don’t think so, I think it was just the atmosphere of being there and I had been to camp for three years before so I kind of knew what was going on and then I wanted to give the students that were coming through the same level of leadership development that I got from those three years. *So just the general experience or just the general structure of it was set up for that; not really that there was anything outstanding that happened, just that it was a natural thing that happened?* Yeah, I think so. It’s just a natural thing. FFA camp is a special place and you are kind of in the middle of nowhere and focused on… as a student just focused on developing those skills and it’s a great learning environment. And I think it’s structured that way. *As the staff as students or the students that are participating?* For both, as well. We lived there for two months as the staff and the students are there for a week and so there’s not really a whole lot of outside contact during that week so you can really focus in on the courses as a student the courses they are taking and then you as the instructor as well. And you don’t just see them in class, you see them around playing baseball or softball or other activities going on at camp so you can have that personal relationship with them as well, not just as that staff member.

I4: You know, I think I’m in a position now where I lead people every day. (Personally identifying information removed). I’m still one of the younger people in the building, but I’m in one of the leadership roles, and I think being in a role like camp, it puts you in a position where you can lead people regardless of age or something. The value comes with your competence,
your ability to get people to follow your leadership, your ability to influence, and I think camp is a place where, if you work at camp, those things really happen and that really was a place where those skills developed in me at a very young age that I use every single day now and I’m sure the people you interviewing… everybody who works at camp goes on to be successful. Man, I can think of people who worked there years ago that were state representatives, all the people you’re interviewing now, I think (one former staff member), he’s a doctorate and he just got hired at Texas A&M, (one former staff member) is a highly successful Ag teachers. (one former staff member) is an Ag teacher, there was some folks, (one former staff member) who was an EMT, but I’m not sure what he is doing now, but everybody usually goes on to be pretty highly successful, from what I understand, so I think it’s just because… it’s just because of FFA camp or maybe FFA camp attracts people of a caliber, but I know for me it did a lot of good in my life, it made those skills develop in me that I did not have, so I would attribute a lot of that to camp.

I5: I would say just general leadership, positive attitude, just general leadership type things.

Q6a- If “yes”, please provide which soft skills were developed because of your camp experience and what aspects of camp most affected that skill development.

I1: I think my ability to be more organized. It was my job every Monday morning to take all of the campers’ names, all of their class interests, their class officers, and I would do all of the scheduling for every single kid and I had to get that done before lunchtime so that we could start them in their classes after lunch. On that first day? Yeah. I had to become extremely organized in how I did that and not get distracted by other things that were going on. Between that and communicating with the teachers that arrived that week, what lesson plans they needed to teach, where the rosters were located, any type of volunteers who had to come in, and we had to make
sure they had the correct paperwork filled out to be there at camp that week. We also made sure that everything that had to do with the finances of camp were correct when it came to the number of campers we had, and then there was meal planning and the time cards and our weekly reports we would send to Frankfort. I had to be very organized and say, “hey, this has to be done at ‘this’ time and not necessarily ‘this day’, but at ‘this time’ during the day and over those four years, I did the same job, but my job kind of got a little bit more difficult every year, but I only say more difficult because I got better at organizing. Did you say it got more difficult? It did. I got more responsibility each year. Was that just based on your years of experience? I think that had a lot to do with my years of experience. By the end of the summer, I was not only helping with state convention that was before our camping season, but was state fair that was after our camping season and organizing the contests at those events, in addition to our camp work. So KY FFA and the Department of Education kind of worked together to get a little bit more done out of those of us that were working at camp, so my responsibilities got a little larger. So you talked about some of that, but are there any aspects of camp that may have developed some soft skills other than that you have talked about already? Any of those essential elements of camp that might have helped you grow? I think the ability to develop relationships and connections with people. I’m somewhat of an introvert, and I was forced at camp to be an extrovert, even when I didn’t want to, and that has really helped me in my career because, if you’re a teacher, you have to be kind and talk to everybody, whereas as an introvert, I’m more comfortable being alone and doing things that I need to do on my own. It definitely made me become more of an extrovert. Any other comments about your time at camp? I will say that job definitely drove me into the career that I’m in. Because of that job and the opportunities that KY FFA gave to me, I have a whole basket of friends that I can call on for anything, and I’m very appreciative of the
adults that worked with me whenever I worked there because they really guided my future career and they continued to walk with me throughout it. You mean the teachers that were there bringing chapters or some others? Both. The ones that brought the chapters because they’re as much a part of the camp as the staffers, and Brenda and Dr. Pete and any of the other staff that worked there during camp.

I2: What pushed that change on? Well its funny, they stopped doing this, but there used to be a one-page survey and we would have all the campers fill it all out and man those surveys had an impact on me because you read them and most of them were blank and all qualitative stuff, and kids would fill them out and we would all sit in a circle after camp was finished on Friday and we would look through and read them all and be like “oh ok cool. Ok cool! The makes sense.” We would all look at them and say “yeah, we do need to make that change.” So that for me was helpful and because, for a lack of better term, it cleared some things up and made some things more important. Was that the debriefing at the end of the week and looking at what you’ve done and how you can improve? Absolutely!

I3: (Did not feel that some soft skills were developed more than others)

I4: So, if you were saying that your leadership abilities were sort of a general one that developed because of camp, so were there any specific experiences or things about camp that mostly affected that leadership development? Yeah. I mean, every class you teach has a leadership theme. The whole thing is… the goal of camp is to develop leaders. When we send those kids back to their home chapters, they’re going to be leading their local FFA chapters, so that’s just the central heartbeat of camp, so in every aspect, you never wanted a kid sitting down and eating lunch by themselves. You wanted leaders to jump in there next to them to make sure everybody felt welcomed and included, but also you wanted accountability on the officer teams
where students were learning how to be accountable and be responsible, so for teaching that, you had to model that, but I think you rise to that. I think your expectations are important and those are the expectations for working at camp and I do know people who worked at camp that weren’t brought back, you know, in one instance. That in itself shows you that you’ve got to rise to the expectations and make sure you’re meeting that vision, so I think that leadership is going to have to be present because that’s what camp’s all about. *I guess if you can survive camp, you can survive in life, right?* Absolutely. You know, it’s not a full reflection of the challenges that life gives, but it’s a great place to work. And you really have to commit. It’s not a 9-5 job where you get off. You’re there Monday through Friday all day long. It’s a 24-7 job besides when you’re sleeping, and even then, if something happens, you have to wake up and take care of it. So really, I think commitment is a big part of what makes camp so helpful. *Were you, like, in a cabin with the kids 24-7 or were you just on the campgrounds?* No. The teachers stayed in the cabins with the kids. We had a dorm that we lived in during the summer, so we didn’t have housing with the students. *Ok. So like a guys’ dorm, a girls’ dorm, for the staff?* Yeah.

I5: I think that Dr. Pete and Brenda really leaning on us as camp staff to kind of be in charge of some areas or some aspects of the camp experience. I think that that probably helped quite a bit. Previous jobs, you know, it’s like, “here’s a task and this is the only thing that you’re going to do.” While we were employed at camp, it was, you know, this was kind of the experience that we want these students to have and you’re going to be responsible for helping create that experience through your interaction with them through different reports and things we gave at sessions. You know, goofing off at the talent show, you know, I think that the leadership at camp, just Dr. Pete and Brenda and them saying “hey, we’re going to let you guys have some responsibility to make sure that these students have a positive experience this week.” I think that
that really helped. *Well, I know Dr. Pete Driesbach, but who is Brenda?* Brenda is.. what is her last name? We just always called her Mrs. Brenda, but she’s the person that does the books and all that. *OK. I can probably find out on the website if I need to find her last name, but I just didn’t know if she was like the manager while Pete was the director.* Yeah, she is like the bookkeeper, and actually, now that I think about it, Denny too. Denny was the maintenance man, and MAN, talk about an incredible individual. You get a bunch of, you know, me, (other fellow staff member), and (another fellow staff member), we probably didn’t have any business being in his shop, but there were things that we wanted to know how to do or wanted to learn to do it, and he was like “yeah, come on over and I’ll teach you.” Denny really kind of picked us up and put us under his wing, too, especially on the off weeks when we were mainly focusing on maintenance stuff. He was an incredible individual. *He was teaching you some of those technical skills, right?* Yes. *How to use your hands, fix stuff?* Yeah. *I bet that was invaluable?* Yeah, some of it was really simple stuff like painting, but, you know, there were other times where they were working on some wiring and stuff, and Denny was like “hey, you want to come help with this? We are going to have an electrician come in. Do you want to come along and learn about what’s going on in these cabins?” *Absolutely! Yeah, and I’m sure that helps you with you teaching that electrical safety and gives you that hands-on experience with that?* Absolutely!