

Indoor vs. Outdoor: Activities to Get Kids Outside

Tim Tanner, Jenny Strickler, Janice Hanna, and Kelly Sedlak ♦ Extension Educators

INTRODUCTION

The importance of getting youth outdoors has been well established in the decade since Richard Louv published his seminal book *Last Child in the Woods*¹. We now understand that youth gain a variety of social, behavioral, academic, and physical fitness benefits^{2,3} with increased time in outdoor pursuits. Despite this knowledge and the subsequent push to reverse this trend by educators, youth continue to spend the bulk of their leisure time indoors. Why?

Previous researchers have investigated this issue from the aspects of leisure expense, access and transportation barriers, and from the perspective of parental fear⁴. A research team with the Ohio State University 4-H Youth Development Program expanded upon this field of inquiry by studying the preference and non-preference among youth for a variety of outdoor activities. Said another way, what outdoor activities do youth enjoy so much that they would forego participating in their favored indoor activity?

AIM

Conference participants will learn the results of this research which derived from surveying (n=402) youth campers immediately after they participated in ten commonly available outdoor leisure activities and three less common/cutting-edge options. Implications are evident for educators, outdoor program personnel, and policy makers.

Favored Outdoor Activities by Sub-group



Research findings also allow us to tailor outdoor activities based on favored indoor activities. For example, youth who enjoy reading and the arts while indoors are most impacted by kayaking when outdoors. Similarly, youth who enjoy watching TV are highly impacted by ropes courses. More targeted findings available in Table 2.

METHODS

Four hundred and two campers—aged 9-13 years—from four diversely-populated Ohio counties participated in this research study during their county's 4-H Junior Camp experience. Participants enjoyed a variety of outdoor activity skill stations (see Table 1) which lasted 45 minutes in length. Upon individual activity completion participants were surveyed utilizing a 3-minute retrospective pre/post-test. These surveys garnered the following data:

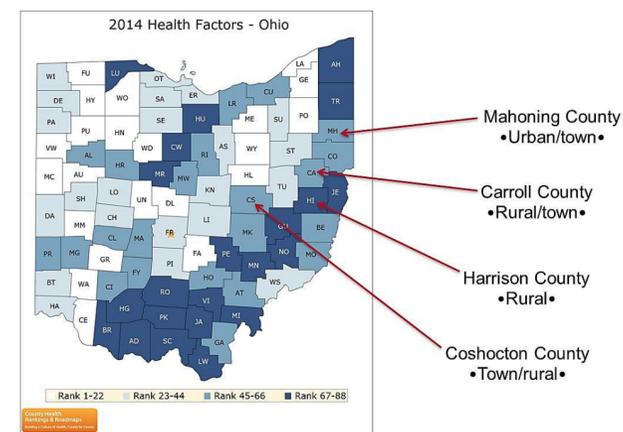
- ♦ demographic information
- ♦ indoor activity preferences
- ♦ outdoor activity scores
- ♦ likelihood of activity transference

Two key questions generated the most useful findings for the study:

1. My favorite indoor hobby or activity is...
2. I like this activity more than my favorite outdoor activity...

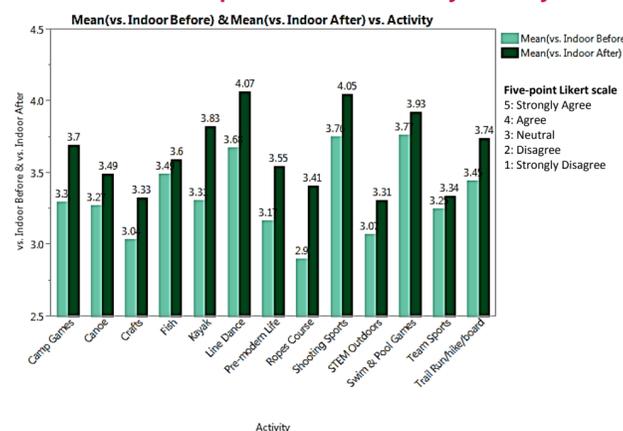
Additionally, instructors completed demographic information surveys to provide basic classroom context for each activity. Camper and instructor participants granted consent as per the Ohio State University's IRB protocols.

Participating County's Health Rankings



As noted by the darker shading in the illustration, the four participating counties all rank in the bottom half for the state of Ohio with regard to health and wellness factors⁵. Of particular note, Harrison County ranks in the bottom 10 among all Ohio counties. General county-based population densities (e.g.—urban, town, rural) are also listed.

Table 1: Youth Improvement Scores by Activity



KEY RESULTS

All of the following programs produced statistically significant improvement scores ($p < .0001$ level) except those listed as "poor." T-values were utilized to categorize the activities by performance strength.

Best Activities

(T-values from 6.8 to 4.8)

Outdoor crafts, kayak, shooting sports, camp games, ropes course

Okay Activities

(T-values from 4.5 to 3.1)

Line dance, trail run/hike, swim, pre-modern living, canoe

Poor Activities

(T-values from 2.5 to 1.5)

STEM outdoors, fish, team sports

OTHER VALUABLE FINDINGS

In addition to the activity rankings listed above, several other findings are of interest to outdoor professionals:

- ♦ Individual activities are more successful than group
- ♦ The activity's level of physicality and pace has no bearing on the results
- ♦ "New to them" activities generate stronger scores
- ♦ Female participants prefer morning activities
- ♦ Male instructors are better than female instructors in the afternoon and for reaching female students

Table 2: Outdoor Activities by Indoor Preference

ARTISTIC		PASSIVE TECHNOLOGY*	
Top 3	Bottom 3	Top 3	Bottom 3
Kayak	Team Sports	Ropes Course	Fish
Line Dance	Swim/pool Games	Shooting Sports	Canoe
STEM Outdoors	Fish	Kayak	Trail Run/hike
DAILY ROUTINES		PREFER OUTDOORS*	
Top 3	Bottom 3	Top 3	Bottom 3
Pre-modern Life	STEM Outdoors	Line Dance	Team Sports
Shooting Sports	Outdoor Crafts	Swim/pool Games	Camp Games
Ropes Course	Team Sports	Shooting Sports	Fish
INTERACTIVE TECHNOLOGY		READING*	
Top 3	Bottom 3	Top 3	Bottom 3
Ropes Course	STEM Outdoors	Kayak	Fish
Kayak	Canoe	Canoe	Trail Run/hike
Trail Run/hike	Swim/pool Games	Line Dance	Team Sports
NO PREFERENCE LISTED		SPORTS (INDOOR)	
Top 3	Bottom 3	Top 3	Bottom 3
Trail Run/hike	Ropes Course	Shooting Sports	Canoe
Camp Games	STEM Outdoors	Line Dance	Trail Run/hike
Kayak	Swim/pool Games	Team Sports	STEM Outdoors

*Denotes indoor preferences with low sample size

CONCLUSIONS

Research demonstrates the correlation between time spent outside and overall child wellness. With the declining health of today's American youth, it is important for outdoor educators to provide valuable experiences. This research project notes that careful attention should be given to the choice, timing, and leadership of outdoor activities.

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