



Leadership in-Action Report

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Executive Summary

Non-profit summer camps, especially those with a focus on youth education and mentorship, benefit from providing leadership opportunities to develop youth as leaders through programs that service the community. This gives older youth an opportunity to foster their leadership skills while giving back to younger communities who benefit from their mentorship. Community Music Schools of Toronto is no different. During the summer, this music education non-profit provides a 4-week music summer camp program to the Jane Finch and Regent Park community. The camp counsellors and volunteers at each site spend the most time with the children, supervising them during lessons, free time, field trips, mealtimes and accompanying them to the washroom. Many of these counsellors and volunteers are quite young, with most volunteers being in high school and all camp counsellors this year being in their early twenties. Even with the support of camp administration, their limited leadership experience and training make it difficult to manage large groups of children, support behaviour management and smoothly resolve conflict. Program managers, teachers and administrative staff have expressed a desire for the camp counsellors and volunteers to take on greater initiative and leadership during the summer camp period. However, it is difficult to support their leadership due to limited training resources and a lack of time for other staff to cultivate personalized training resources for camp counsellors. This Leadership-in-Action project aimed to fill this gap by conducting a formative evaluation of current training resources and transitioning into a summative evaluation to assess camp counsellors in action. Using interviews, group discussions, and in-person observations, I've created a handbook with preliminary training modules that targets observed training gaps and can be adapted to meet the needs of new counsellors in the following years.

Challenges and Constraints: Effective Leadership Training

Successful camp counsellors can meet the unique needs of children, adapt to changing circumstances and work towards camp goals. Young adults who serve as camp counsellors may not always be adequately trained to meet the needs of children and youth. The challenge to support counsellor leadership at CMST is two-fold. Firstly, administrators only have two days of designated training for the counsellors, struggling to balance housekeeping content and camp preparation while also providing leadership training. Secondly, administrators and staff are busy with other obligations throughout the camp period, lacking the time and resource to give personalized feedback to support counsellor leadership. Even during reflection periods at the end of the camp day which are reserved for personal feedback, these sessions can be cut short if there is additional clean-up or if staff are waiting for students to be picked up when parents are late.

Beyond time constraints, there is often a lack of clarity about what needs to be done. While issues with counsellor leadership can be observed, the process of carrying out a training needs analysis can be complicated. Analysing the causes of performance problems is overwhelming and difficult. Because of this, this report focuses on the training needs analysis of counsellors at a personal level, focusing on how leadership training is learned and then transferred into the workplace.

About Laidlaw's Leadership-in-Action

Around December 2025, I had reached out to Richard Marsella and Steven Foster, the Executive Director and the Director of Operations of Community Music Schools of Toronto, to collaborate with me to fulfill the requirements of my Leadership-in-Action project. The Leadership-in-Action project is a mandatory requirement of the Laidlaw Leadership and Research Program offered by University of Toronto and 21 other universities. It is a 6-week immersive project that entails working with a non-profit organization on a self-led project that has an impact on a community in need while demonstrating leadership skills. Around March, I reconnected with Steven and was introduced to Makda Musa and Vanessa Chase, the program managers at the Regent Park and Jane Finch sites. Over a series of meetings, we discussed that the summer camp would be a great opportunity for the LiA. They expressed that the leadership development of camp counsellors has been an area of concern for a while, and it would be great to see a project that could strengthen leadership skills and translate to counsellors taking more initiative during their work period. Over the 6-weeks, the LiA had three distinct purposes: (1) conducting a formative evaluation and leading a leadership workshop, (2) conducting a summative evaluation by observing camp counsellors during the camp period, (3) collaboratively producing a written report with reusable training resources for future training.

Author Note: As a student, I do not carry any special qualifications to carry out a comprehensive training needs analysis beyond my commitment to helping CMST and support from the Laidlaw scholarship team. As such, please understand that these findings reflect the work of an undergraduate student. I have done my best to consult research sources, scholarship staff and CMST to generate well-informed and helpful findings.

Acknowledgements

Thank you to Laidlaw Scholars and University of Toronto for this project opportunity. Thank you to Dr. Bina Johnson for connecting me with Community Music Schools of Toronto. Thank you to Richard Marsella, Steven Foster, Makda Musa and Vanessa Chase for welcoming me into their organization and summer camp so warmly. Thank you to all the administrators and counsellors at both sites who were willing to co-operate, share their stories and make this summer experience more enjoyable.

Theories Underlying Effective Learning

Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle

The diagram illustrates a cyclical process of learning and understanding. It features four central ovals arranged in a circle, connected by curved arrows indicating a clockwise flow. Each arrow is marked with a plus sign (+), signifying a positive relationship. The central ovals are: 'Level of correct understanding' (top), 'Amount of practice' (right), 'Amount of reflection' (bottom), and 'Amount of conceptualisation' (left). Surrounding these central ovals are four rectangular boxes representing external factors: 'Opportunity' (top-left), 'Opportunity' (top-right), 'Opportunity, encouragement, etc.' (bottom-right), and 'Opportunity, encouragement, etc.' (bottom-left). Arrows point from these external boxes to the central ovals they influence: 'Opportunity' to 'Amount of experimentation' (top-left oval), 'Opportunity' to 'Amount of practice' (top-right oval), 'Opportunity, encouragement, etc.' to 'Amount of reflection' (bottom-right oval), and 'Opportunity, encouragement, etc.' to 'Amount of conceptualisation' (bottom-left oval). A central spiral arrow points outwards from the center of the cycle.

This is particularly significant for any professional roles with leadership. Ask any teacher, instructor or leader: the most impactful training is working on the job. Any position that works with children generates countless amounts of opportunities to practice and experiment different skills in a wide variety of settings. This provides more chances for leaders to reflect and conceptualise which strategies work best.

Implication: Effective leadership training understands leadership is an *embodied skill* by providing counsellors, who otherwise wouldn't have as much experience leading children, with structured and safe opportunities to practice, experiment, reflect and conceptualise.

Working Memory and Mental Models

When we take in new information, our brains place these items into our short-term memory that has a limited capacity to hold information. Through the process of repetition and reinforcement, our brains will increase the significance of the subject matter and move it into our long-term memory. When items are transferred into our long-term memory, we create a mental model used to explain how something works or happens. These mental models can only be assessed when we present the model to others and review places where understanding is flawed or missing.

Implication: Effective leadership training assesses accuracy of learning by providing counsellors repeated opportunities to present their learning mental models, reinforcing existing knowledge and exposing gaps in understanding.

Knowles's Criteria for Effective Adult-Learning

Adult learning requires a certain amount of distinction from child learning, since most adults have greater capacity and autonomy to collaborate while they are learning. To capitalize off these strengths, Knowles presents specific takeaways for effective adult-oriented learning. In summary, adults benefit when they collaborate at all learning stages, including the planning, diagnosis of learning needs, goal setting and assessment.

Implication: Effective leadership training values the contributions of adult-learners, providing counsellors the opportunity to collaborate during the planning, delivery and assessment stages of learning.



Campers playing with legos at the end of the day

Understanding Community Music Schools of Toronto Camp Programming and Training Objectives

CMST defines that summer camp programming is made up of four elements: mindfulness, social skills development, musicking and musical growth, and reflection. These are connected to their curriculum values of anti-black racism and anti-oppression principles for learning and their commitment to their truth and reconciliation action plan. Their teaching philosophy is extensively elaborated in their published report “Nurturing the Musicking Spirit,” found on their website.

Each site includes two counsellors, responsible for managing twenty children. The children are split into two groups, with each counsellor managing ten children at once during different parts of the day. Counsellors are responsible for actively participating in all activities during camp, acting as a role model for students, support the team’s coordinated class/behaviour management efforts (e.g. reinforcing camp rules consistently, implementing coordinate strategies for engaging students with behavioural challenges, etc.), program and lead camper games.

CMST Standards of Programming & Curriculum Values (ABRAO Lens)

ANTI-BLACK RACISM AND ANTI-OPPRESSION PRINCIPLES FOR LEARNING

Welcoming & Safe Environments
Cognitive Developmental Growth
Mental Health & Emotional Wellbeing

VALUES

WE CARE by empowering and supporting our students and each other, and celebrating learning
WE CREATE by fostering developmental environments, being innovative and impactful
WE COLLABORATE by respecting, including and partnering with others, and leading with integrity

ELEMENTS OF PROGRAMMING

Mindfulness
Social Skills Development
Musicking and Musical Growth (referencing Nurturing Curriculum doc)
Reflection

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Figure 2.1 Elements of Programming from Jane Finch 2026 Training Slides

Goals for training

- Getting to know one another
- Planning camp workshops and activities
- Setup of space before camp starts (Friday)

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Figure 2.2 Goals for Training from Jane Finch 2026 Training Slides

At CMST, camp counsellors have two designated days of training from 9AM to 5PM. The other two days are more-so reserved for faculty, but counsellors are still expected to attend and participate. Camp training is designated to housekeeping tasks, such as scheduling, breaks, locations, field trip protocol and preparing camp activities. Throughout training, there are resources to support behaviour management and addressing incidents. Their expressed goals for training include:

1. Getting to know one another
2. Planning camp workshops, activities and physical space
3. Preparing for behaviour management and getting comfortable leading

When discussing with camp administrators what measures of success looked like, they illustrated that they wanted to see counsellors “being a lead, being proactive during workshop activities, listening attentively, remaining calm, watching how you communicate, being comfortable leading activities, explain rules or clarify when things aren’t clear and helping out with anything you see.” Counsellors are expected to support healthy group dynamics, support individual students social and emotional skills while also facilitating camp activities. The responsibilities of a camp counsellor can be complex and intricate, explaining why most training resources and professional development struggle adequately support them.

Training resources connected to behaviour management includes slides for brainstorming rules and routines, creating a camp contract, meeting individual needs, class management and behavioural management scenarios. There was also mention of the CMST protocol for behaviour management and addressing incidents of hate. A note within Regent Park’s training agenda stated, “[Counsellors] should develop own rules for conduct, in addition to the [camp contract] exercise with the students” (pg. 2).

Figure 2.3 Training directly tied to behaviour management and leadership

	Behaviour Management	Getting Comfortable Leading
Jane Finch <u>CMST JF Counsellor & Faculty Training Slideshow 2026</u>	1. Brainstorm Rules and Routines (Slide 43) 2. Camp Contract (Slide 44) 3. Meeting the Individual Camper’s Needs (Slide 58) 4. Class Management (Slide 62) 5. Behavioural Management Scenarios (Slide 63-69)	1. Testing and review mindfulness / outdoor activities (Slide 40-41, 79) 2. Goal setting (Slide 38)
Regent Park <u>CMST RP Counsellor Training Agenda</u>	1. Protocol for behaviour management and addressing incidents of hate (Page 2) 2. Camp Contract (Page 2)	1. Testing and review mindfulness / outdoor activities (Page 3, 4, 5)

	3. Discuss specific/general strategies for class management - setting up a “calm corner” (Page 4)	2. Goal setting (Page 4)
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Understanding the Counsellors

Before evaluating the effectiveness of training materials, it is important to assess the learners in question. To do this, I hosted a 60-minute personal reflection workshop with counsellors at both sites asking the following questions:

1. Think of a time you experienced good teamwork vs bad teamwork. Reflect on what distinguishes the two?
2. How do you currently define self-efficacy? What part of self-efficacy is most meaningful to you?
3. Define limiting beliefs and how they personally show up for you?
4. Goal-setting activity for leadership

This workshop was designed to assess how counsellors currently approach leadership and their initial level of comprehension for established leadership models, thus presenting them opportunities to share their current ‘mental models’ and b) invite them to share their personal thoughts during goal setting, reflection prompts and group discussions to guide training suggestions and personalized training content for the future.

Counsellors were open and willing to reflect on their experiences, including sharing personal stories and being vulnerable about their challenges. At the Jane Finch site, counsellors did the workshop with me at a nearby library while the administrators did faculty training. The session lasted 90 minutes, generating a lot of fruitful conversation. At the Regent Park site, one of the counsellors was out sick, so the workshop was done with the other counsellor with the participation of the two administrators. This session lasted 60 minutes.

Key Takeaways

- a. Build confidence from *doing*

Counsellors were introduced to the concept of self-efficacy and why confidence is an essential skill for leaders. When asked how counsellors defined self-efficacy, counsellors associated self-efficacy with acting despite uncertainty. They shared that self-efficacy is built through knowing their worth, taking a chance on yourself despite internal or external doubts, and acknowledging that we are all learning. Most counsellors shared a fear of being defined by their past mistakes. One described a fear of being “too available” or “not smart enough.” To overcome their limiting beliefs, they suggest that confidence can develop through repeated opportunities to act, practice,

and learn from experience. This confirms the theoretical foundations of Kolb's learning cycle, which is that *doing* informs knowing, rather than the inverse.

b. Initiative

Taking initiative emerged as a significant theme for all counsellors. Counsellors defined initiative as the willingness to take the first step in engaging students. This is most apparent during the goal-setting activity, where every counsellor noted initiative in some form being an essential part to completing their goal. This includes starting conversations with children that inquire about their life while maintaining professional boundaries, making the effort to connect in new ways with each camper, being a confident and sociable individual that takes initiative to play with others, and sitting with students and playing with them. This aligns with previous illustrations that administrators gave when describing what "counsellor success" looked like, demonstrating that counsellors and administrators both align in their mental models of successful leadership.

c. Capacity to learn exists

Counsellors demonstrated a strong conceptual understanding of leadership, self-efficacy, and effective teamwork. They did so by reflecting in real-time, using personal experiences and previous knowledge to share their mental models of leadership to others. They could clearly articulate the characteristics of supportive teams, effective leadership, and personal growth demonstrating a sophisticated understanding of leadership models. In addition, counsellors were open and willing to reflect, communicate, participate and experiment in a group setting, demonstrating that they have the foundational skills to allow effective learning to happen. The environment between counsellors and staff were extremely supportive, with others actively listening when someone is speaking and building onto the conversation. Thus, a conducive learning environment exists at both the individual and social level.

The leadership workshop established that effective leadership training has the *capacity* to happen. The formative evaluation intends to assess if effective learning *is* happening by answering the following questions:

1. *How well are counsellors learning?* Does the current training provide ample opportunities for counsellors to experiment, practice, reflect and conceptualize new topics?
2. *Does learning prioritize the right things?* Is the course covering the right topics and meeting the needs of those attending?

The formative evaluation will focus its efforts on answering the first question, while the second question will be better understood with findings supplemented by the summative evaluation.

Formative Evaluation of Training Materials

Likelihood of Application and Ease of Generalisation

To assess if behaviour management and leadership-based training resources aligned with effective learning models, I evaluated training resources by how experiential learning resources are and their ease of generalisation. As mentioned before, experiential learning means having an experience with learning resources, which leads to a cycle of reflection, conceptualizing and experimentation. Ease of generalisation refers to whether training resources can easily be incorporated into everyday practice. Indicators of high generalisation includes varying instruction methods, ease of application to work scenarios, building and connecting to previous knowledge, and varying opportunities to apply knowledge.

Figure 4.0 Assessment of how experiential training resources are

	Does training incorporate having an experience?	Does training incorporate reflecting on an experience?	Does training include connecting concepts to an experience?	Does training include experimentation?	n / 4
Protocol for <u>behaviour management</u> and <u>addressing incidents of hate</u>	X	X	✓	X	1/4
Camp Contract	X	✓	✓	X	2/4
Meeting the Individual Camper's Needs	X	X	✓	X	1/4
Class Management	X	✓	✓	X	2/4
Behavioural Management Scenarios	✓	✓	✓	✓	4/4
Brainstorm Rules and Routines	X	✓	✓	X	2/4
Discuss class management + setting up a "calm corner"	X	✓	✓	X	2/4
Goal setting	X	✓	✓	X	2/4

Leading mindfulness / outdoor activities	✓	✓	✓	✓	4/4
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Figure 4.1 Assessment of how well learning supports generalization

	Are instruction methods varied and present information in different ways?	Can learning be easily applied in most scenarios?	Does training build onto previous concepts and fits into the bigger picture?	Is learning applied in different scenarios, including the most challenging ones?	n / 4
Protocol for <u>behaviour management</u> and <u>addressing incidents of hate</u>	X	✓	✓	✓	3/4
Camp Contract	X	✓	✓	✓	3/4
Meeting the Individual Camper's Needs	X	✓	✓	X	2/4
Class Management	X	✓	✓	X	2/4
Behavioural Management Scenarios	✓	✓	✓	✓	4/4
Brainstorm Rules and Routines	✓	X	✓	X	2/4
Discuss class management + setting up a "calm corner"	<i>Depends</i>	<i>Depends</i>	<i>Depends</i>	<i>Depends</i>	N/A
Goal setting	<i>Depends</i>	<i>Depends</i>	<i>Depends</i>	<i>Depends</i>	N/A
Leading mindfulness / outdoor activities	✓	✓	✓	X	4/4

Figure 4.2 Evaluation of training resources based on how experiential learning is and how well it supports generalisation

Objective	Resource	Is Learning Experiential?	Does learning support generalisation?
Behavioural and Classroom Management	Protocol for <u>behaviour management</u> and <u>addressing incidents of hate</u>	Weak	Strong
	Camp Contract	Weak	Strong
	Meeting the Individual Camper's Needs (Slide 58)	Weak	Weak
	Class Management (Slide 62)	Weak	Weak
	Behavioural Management Scenarios (Slide 63-69)	Strong	Strong
	Brainstorm Rules and Routines (Slide 43)	Weak	Weak
	Discuss specific/general strategies for class management - setting up a "calm corner" (Page 4)	Weak	Dependent on quality of discussion
Leadership Training	Goal setting	Weak	Dependent on quality of discussion
	Leading mindfulness / outdoor activities (Slide 40-41, 79)	Strong	Strong

Out of the 9 resources tied to behavioural management and leadership training, only 2 of them were found to have strong evidence tied to likelihood of application. This is

because there are very few observable moments where training slides prompt counsellors to actively recall information from training slideshows and apply them. The exception for this includes two activities, the behaviour management scenarios and leading mindfulness/camp activities. There was a relatively even split for generalizability, with 4 resources having strong evidence, 3 resources having weak evidence and 2 being dependent on quality of group discussion. The resources scoring the weakest include meeting the individual camper's needs, class management and rules/routines. This is because they have both little experiences built into learning and is also hard to generalise into camp activities.

Is Learning Effective?

To understand if current training provides ample opportunities for counsellors to experiment, practice, reflect and conceptualize new topics, insights are organized into two takeaways: a) need for more experiential learning and b) generalizability is not enough.

a. Need for more experiential learning

Most resources except for behaviour management scenarios and leading camp activities do not provide opportunities for camp counsellors to embody and apply their skills through experimentation and practice. This suggests that while counsellors will have a strong theoretical foundation of what they *should* do, they will struggle to *implement* them in practice.

b. Generalizability is not enough

This means that resources that have clear calls to action and are easy to use, such as the camp contract and behaviour management protocol, are less likely to be implemented. This is because counsellors don't have experience using them and counsellors can easily forget that they exist. When knowledge is not reinforced, our brains are likely to disregard that information to make space for new content. Finally, some resources that are delivered through informal group discussions were not directly observed, such as the goal-setting activity and general strategies for class management. This requires more follow-up for how generalizable they are and whether they are utilized during the camp period.

Summative Evaluation of Training Materials

Transfer of Learning to the Workplace

Now that there is a better understanding of how learning is transferred to the counsellors, the second portion is evaluating how learning is transferred into the workplace. This will allow us to see if both the content of the training and its design concept are effective. To do this, I carried out an informal outcome evaluation at the end of each camp day, using in-person observations and group conversations from counsellors and camp administrators during the debrief sessions to assess how effective counsellors carried out work activities. The evaluation focus on metrics based on the CMST roles and responsibilities for counsellors:

1. Effective Planning
 - a. Do counsellors have a detailed plan for the day?
 - b. Do counsellors choose activities relevant to camp goals and appropriate for student's abilities?
 - c. Are plans based on student and camp needs?
 - d. Are there a mix of long-range agendas and daily agendas?
2. Effective instruction
 - a. Do counsellors focus students' attention?
 - b. Do they inform students of activity/behaviour objectives?
 - c. Do they teach, restate and reinforce expectations?
 - d. Do they model, demonstrate and provide examples?
 - e. Do they provide feedback and re-instruct when necessary?
 - f. Do they conduct smooth transitions from one activity to the next?
3. Social and emotional wellbeing
 - a. Do counsellors show concern for students?
 - b. Do counsellors make an effort to know each student as an individual?
 - c. Do counsellors promote positive self-image in students?
 - d. Do they establish a level of difficulty to encourage success?
 - e. Do they use student interest and background?
4. Classroom management
 - a. Do counsellors manage behavioural problems in accordance with CMST regulations?
 - b. Do counsellors establish and clearly communicate parameters for student classroom behaviour?
 - c. Do counsellors promote self-discipline?
 - d. Do counsellors manage disruptive behaviour constructively?
 - e. Do they arrange the classroom for effective instruction?

The summative evaluation aims to assess how effective counsellors supported camp activities at the end of the day. From there, I discuss how previous training resources either supported or failed to support work activities, the factors affecting the transfer of learning to the workplace and unexpected consequences that arise as a result of applying new skills.

Effective Planning

Before camp starts, counsellors clock in from 8:30AM to 9AM to prepare for students. During this time, they have a morning meeting where they go over the plan for the day. Unfortunately, I was unable to attend any of their morning meetings. However, I was able to use my observations from the day and the debrief sessions to make sense of their planning systems.

Structure

Both sites have a “camp agenda” for the day that is posted in a visible space for all the campers and staff to see. The average camp day looks like this:

Time	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
8:30-9:00am					
9-9:30am Welcome time/ free play					
9:30-11:30am	Workshop 1	Workshop 1	Workshop 1	Workshop 1	Workshop 1
11:30am-12:30pm LUNCH					
12:30-1pm OUTDOOR ACTIVITIES					
1-3pm	Workshop 2	Workshop 2	Workshop 2	Workshop 2	Workshop 2
3-4pm	Group Activity/ End of Day Wrap-Up	Group Activity/ End of Day Wrap-Up	Group Activity/ End of Day Wrap-Up	Group Activity/ End of Day Wrap-Up	PERFORMANCE
4:00-4:30pm	Staff Debrief	Staff Debrief	Staff Debrief	Staff Debrief	Staff Debrief
4:30pm END OF DAY					

Figure 5.0 Camp Schedule from CMST JF Training Slides

There are two important times that counsellors have direct responsibility for. This includes the 9-9:30AM slot where counsellors greet students and the 3-4PM slot for a group activity and end of day wrap-up. This year, there was a series of bad weather days due to air pollution and rain which meant kids had to do their outdoor activities inside. Thus, 12:30-1PM became for counsellors to lead and manage indoor games for children.

There was little to no observable evidence that counsellors had deliberate planning for running activities during the camp day besides the planning they did during the training sessions. Most of the time, children are given “free-play” at the end of the day. This can be effective for groups of children who are good at independent play but can be counter-productive for children whose independent playstyle escalates into conflict or danger. For example, the first two weeks of camp with younger children means they often need more direction for independent play since they struggle to regulate themselves. Often, counsellors would spontaneously think of games which led to

logistical issues and children would spend time waiting as they set up games. During reflections, counsellors shared that they feel the camp needs more structure. They expressed a level of confusion and unclarity about who is meant to lead games and what they are supposed to do at times. In addition, not knowing exactly what they are going to lead makes them less confident and unsure of themselves. One counsellor expressed that while leading group activities, they want more support from other staff, whether that comes in the form of legitimizing their authority or directly intervening by supervising the kids.

Environment

At Jane Finch, counsellors explicitly identified that the instructor had difficulty commanding attention because of the open-room layout and the multi-purpose use of the space functioning as both a “classroom” and the “play-space.” Children were able to run around and leave the “classroom”, disengaging from group activities.

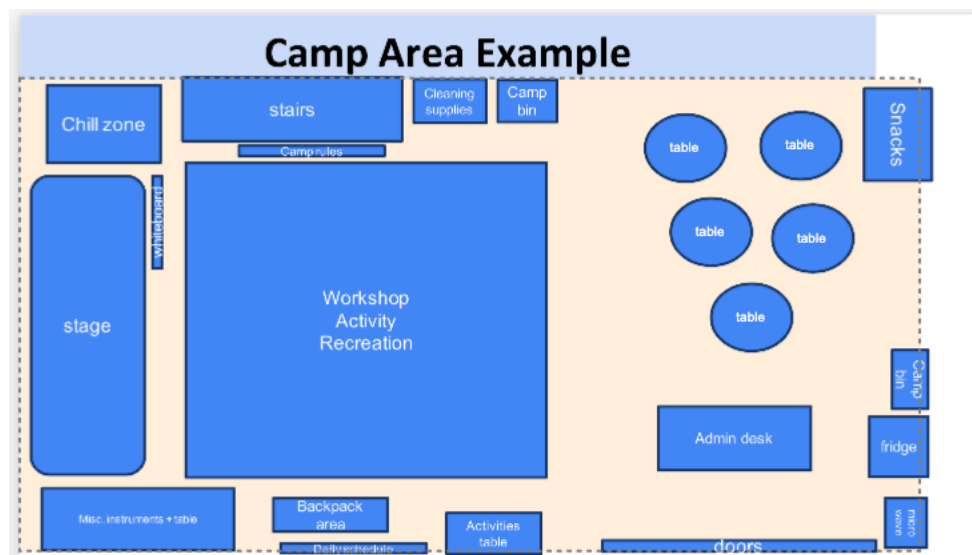


Figure 5.1 Jane Finch's Main Room Layout

As you can see, the main room is the place with access to musical instruments, admin, activities and backpacks. As such, children are tempted by distractions which makes it harder for instructors to command and maintain their attention. During free-play, Jane Finch did not have designated “centers” to engage in specific activities. Tables functioned to facilitate both arts and crafts and board games. Students would play with instruments or activities and bring them to different areas.

Contrast this to the Regent Park site where they designated specific rooms for specific activities. Children who wanted to participate in arts and crafts were brought to a specific room, and children who wanted to play with board games must stay in another room. This makes it easier for staff to supervise activities and clean-up afterwards. The caveat here is that Jane Finch does not have access to as many closed-room spaces

as Regent Park. It can be worth considering how layout and designated zones can be better utilized to manage student behaviour and make it easier to command attention.

Field Trips

During a field trip to the splash pad, counsellors were responsible for supervising children across a large public area. Some children who did not want to get wet remained on a tarp with staff and participated in arts and crafts, while others played in the splash pad. During this activity, an administrator reported feeling responsible for a very large and energetic group because several volunteers were supervising the smaller group at the tarp. Because the groups were physically separated, it was difficult for the administrator to communicate that additional supervision was needed.

This contrasts with the transition from the splash pad to the book bank. Because the children needed to change into dry clothes, use the washroom, pack their belongings, and travel to another location, the transition required greater coordination. Staff effectively divided responsibilities, with some supervising the washrooms, others acting as “floaters” between locations, and others moving groups of children toward the book bank. This allowed the transition to occur efficiently and demonstrated the benefits of anticipating supervision needs and assigning staff specific responsibilities.

The contrast between these two situations suggests that effective teamwork is closely connected to planning for effective role allocation. During a debrief, one counsellor suggested dividing children into smaller groups and assigning specific staff members to each group, particularly during field trips involving streetcars, subways, or major intersections. This approach would give each staff member clear responsibility for a manageable group of children while reducing the likelihood that children wander away or that one counsellor becomes responsible for too many children.

Break-Time

Break-time scheduling was another area where unclear planning affected staff coordination. At Jane Finch, one counsellor reported uncertainty about when she was supposed to take her break because breaks sometimes occurred in the middle of activities and there was not always another staff member available to provide coverage. As a result, her break could be delayed. Conversely, when she eventually left for her break, administration was sometimes uncertain about when she would return, creating additional difficulties in maintaining adequate staffing.

Instruction

One of the strongest themes across both sites is that children responded better when expectations were established as a predictable routine rather than introduced as consequences after behaviour became difficult.

Reinforcing Routine Transitions

Within a camp day, there are multiple points of transition where large groups of children must organize themselves accordingly to move towards the next activity. Transitions are difficult because they take up a lot of time when children don't understand the expectations. Children often spend time waiting with nothing to do, making it frustrating for them to co-operate.

When entering a location, children need clarity about where to go and their behaviour to show that they are ready to listen. Some camp classrooms do not have tables or chairs, making it unclear if children are meant to sit down in a circle, sit anywhere, or if they can walk or run around until instruction is given. At Jane Finch, one of the faculty instructors lined up all the children before they were allowed into the classroom and explicitly told them the instructions. This included finding a chair to sit down, not touching any instruments in front of them and general rules about listening to the teacher and respecting each other. This made a significant difference in classroom energy levels when students knew that they had to sit in a designated spot and listen quietly for instructions.

At Regent Park, the line system was reported to be working well because children knew that they had to line up whenever they moved. Staff explicitly noted that the key was to "tell them the expectations first" which meant that they could not move until everyone was in a line. Because lining up had become part of the routine, transitions became easier. At Jane Finch, there was one incident where the administrator had to intervene because children could not line up quietly. As such, everyone was required to sit silently before being allowed outside.

Proactively Discussing Expectations

At Jane Finch, there were lots of incidents where games became difficult to control because rules about running, tagging, and acceptable play had not been established beforehand. For example, the counsellors played freeze-dance with the children during free-play. Since rules were not discussed prior, kids began running and chasing each other to play a game of tag. One of the counsellors makes the intervention that if they wanted to tag each other, they must crab-walk to prevent collision. The other counsellor did not hear this instruction, so she told the kids who were crab-walking to stand up. This miscommunication meant that children began running again and the previous instruction about crab-walking was dismissed. On another occasion, one of the staff brought out a parachute to play a game with a ball. Children were meant to stand in a circle, each grabbing a corner of the parachute and shaking it to prevent a ball from bouncing outwards. However, the parachute activity quickly became unsafe when children scrambled under it and one child was shoved and started crying. The activity was ultimately removed because the rules were not properly discussed which led to unsafe behaviour.

Getting Student Attention

An expressed difficulty from all counsellors was the ability to gain attention, especially in large group settings. At Regent Park, a counsellor specifically identified that a personal

goal was to “improve getting attention and taking control.” Similarly, at Jane Finch, a counsellor identified their personal difficulty using a more assertive voice when addressing the group because they are usually soft-spoken. They observed that children becoming increasingly difficult to control toward the end of the day, due to built-up energy, restlessness and a lack of emotional regulation when they are more tired.

Observations further suggest that counsellors were more successful when they used specific, structured attention-getting strategies. For example, an instructor at Jane Finch used the prompt, “if you hear me clap once, if you hear me freeze,” which successfully brought the children into a quiet circle and allowed the activity to begin. One of the staff at Jane Finch used a whistle to gain attention when groups got too rowdy, which would be effective since the sound would cut through noise. At Regent Park, one of the staff would use the strategy of counting every time they needed to repeat themselves. For each time they repeated themselves they restated, “that’s once, that’s twice, that’s three times, etc.” They kept a calm, stern tone that demonstrated to the children that each time they repeated themselves, expectations were not being followed. They would repeat this strategy at different points in the day, validating the group when they improved their response time and the instructor only needed to repeat themselves three times instead of six. These observations suggest a need for practical strategies to gain attention, including prompts that counsellors can use. When the group ignores a counsellor’s attempt to gain attention, this can feel invalidating to the counsellor. Especially for a counsellor who struggles to be assertive, repeating themselves after the group has not listened can be intimidating. Counsellors reported frustration about “constantly repeating” and having to project their voice.

Classroom Management and Conflict Resolution

Conflict Resolution

Observations from both Regent Park and Jane Finch suggest a training gap in managing conflict, setting boundaries, and responding to power struggles without escalating the situation. These challenges appeared both between students and between students and counsellors. At Jane Finch, one camper deliberately touched a counsellor inappropriately, requiring the counsellor to reinforce personal boundaries. Power struggles were also evident when children were unwilling to participate or follow instructions. At Jane Finch, a camper refused to sing during a workshop and sat separately. The debrief suggested giving unwilling participants a choice between sitting on the side or participating actively, rather than forcing participation. Regent Park also presented situations requiring counsellors to navigate conflict and boundaries. One camper threw an object at another child, resulting in his mother being called to pick him up early. Defiant students engaged in negotiating rules, leading to staff being stuck in power struggles. In one instance at Regent Park, one camper struggled to understand why he was being separated from his friend. The counsellor reiterated the two of them were disruptive together and struggle to follow instructions. The camper then began to use the Camp Contract to argue how separating him from his friend is in violation of the camp contract’s promise to have fun. On another occasion, students who brought a bouncy ball had their ball taken away because they were throwing it inappropriately.

This also resulted in a power struggle where the children nagged the counsellor for access to the ball, complaining that their personal belongings were being taken away from them and confiscated unfairly.

Social and Emotional Well-Being

Counsellors are tasked with supporting students through emotional dysregulation and resolving conflicts that arise between students and counsellors. These challenges were often interconnected, as emotionally dysregulated students were more likely to refuse instructions, withdraw from activities, or engage in disruptive behaviour, while attempts to enforce rules could sometimes develop into power struggles.

Recognizing Emotional Dysregulation

At multiple points of the camp, observations reveal a training need around supporting students that are emotionally dysregulated. At Jane Finch, there were several incidents of students demonstrating that children could no longer respond to instructions. One instance where a camper refused to move or speak from a chair, requiring the counsellor to contact their parents. Another camper with special needs was dysregulated after playing a loud and stimulating group game, crying and refusing to participate in other activities. As such, this camper was redirected to go on a walk around the building. At Regent Park, there were incidents where students would resort to behaviour such as throwing objects at other children, using inappropriate language and refusing to comply and engage with the group. Multiple students at both sites, especially younger ones, struggled with missing their parents and crying to go home. Counsellors gave them the opportunity to call their parents using the admin phone number.

Other Findings

Gender and Authority

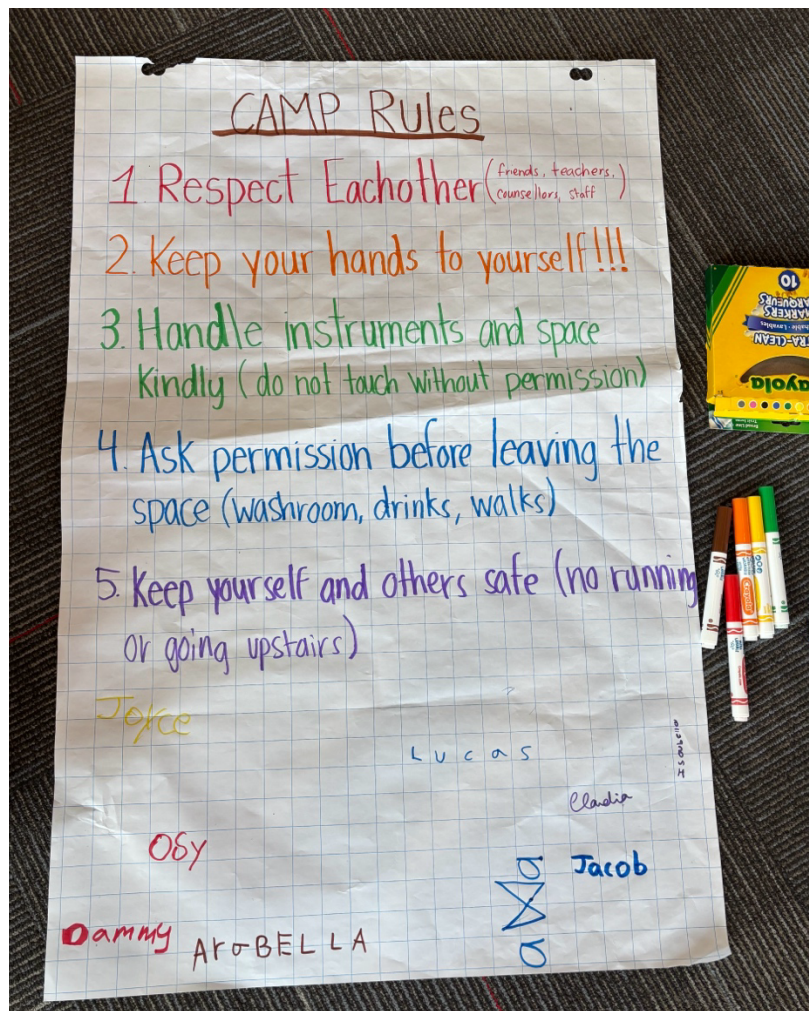
An emerging theme from the counsellor reflections concerns the relationship between appearance, age, gender, and perceived authority. One counsellor from Jane Finch described difficulty establishing authority because younger counsellors could visually appear closer to the children's age. She felt that children sometimes treated younger female counsellors more like friends or "mother" figures than authority figures. She also described situations in which students crossed physical boundaries and noted that it could be more difficult to command authority when counsellors did not appear to be older adults or when they were perceived as younger girls. This is also supported by instances where students at Regent Park sat in the laps of female volunteers. She contrasted this with observations where taller, male counsellors had an easier time commanding attention and being respected. This is an interesting topic that requires further investigation about how gender and perceived age influence counsellors' ability to command attention and have authority in group settings.

Washroom Issues

Since there was a younger group of kids this year, Regent Park dealt with washroom accidents and children who struggled to use the automatic toilets since they were not familiar with the auto-detect mechanism. This unfamiliar challenge meant that counsellors had to navigate emotionally supporting children who were embarrassed from having an accident and helping them problem solve the situation.

Debrief Sessions

Observations also suggest that counsellors may benefit from a more structured process for communicating concerns and identifying areas for improvement. At one debrief, the administrator asked counsellors how the day had gone and what could have made it better. The counsellors responded that the day was “alright” and then looked at one another and shrugged when asked what could have improved it. While this does not necessarily indicate that the counsellors had no concerns, it suggests that they may not have had a clear framework for identifying, articulating, and taking ownership of problems.



Campers sign the “Camp Contract” on the first day

Next Steps

Limitations of Formal Training

Pierre Bourdieu, a French philosopher, criticized the assumption that we can replicate mastery by capturing the abilities of an expert. This is because to perform anything at an expert level, people must internalise and automate judgements to a degree that become almost subconscious. Effective leaders may struggle to articulate exactly the judgements and adjustments they are constantly making, because their 'learned ignorance' means lots of their decisions come naturally without much deliberation. Thus, formal learning resources will always be an approximation of what effective leadership is. The best learning resources will be ones that allow learners to internalise, reflect and experiment in ways that feel most salient to them. Over time, they will develop their own ways of thinking and methods that work for them.

Counsellor Recommendations

At Regent Park and Jane Finch, I had asked counsellors to create a tier-list of training resources that they would've most appreciated if they could go back in time to the beginning of camp. At both camps, they ranked reinforcing routines/expectations, conflict/power struggles and attention strategies as the top three.



Figure 6.0 Regent Park on the left, Jane Finch on the right

This was compatible with the answers counsellors gave in their final reflection questionnaire. Two counsellors believed that knowing how to lead games wasn't the issue, but rather grabbing their attention proved to be the most difficult. One counsellor thought that leading the game itself felt overwhelming and would like more support in planning a variety of activities for different circumstances. The remaining counsellor believed that reinforcing boundaries and being stern was a difficult task since she was afraid to disrupt her relationship with the kids if she was perceived as the "bad-guy."

Figure 6.1 End of Camp Reflection Questionnaire for Counsellors

Question	Counsellor RP	Counsellor RP	Counsellor JF	Counsellor JF
What do you wish you could have more support in?	Leading activities with the whole class, when it is his turn to take over for one more of the activities, it feels overwhelming	Grabbing their attention when it is all 20 of them	Leading group activity, getting kids attention, finding better ways to grab their attention and trying to make them excited to play or wanting to listen	Finding it hard to reinforce boundaries, children trying to hug her and she couldn't find it in herself to repeat herself and be stern about it
What do you think is one thing you did consistently well?	Managing small groups, taking them to the bathroom and back	Delegating volunteers to pair up and supervise groups of children	Keeping the kids entertained and playing with them even when they don't want to engage	Prioritize her attention and resources on where she was most needed
What is one thing that put you out of your comfort zone?	Being put on the spot and asked to lead a game before he is ready	Having to raise your voice in a group of kids	Constantly had to project her voice louder, uncomfortable to do because usually a very quiet and reserved person	Asking for help to handle an incident and not feel like she should be ashamed of herself for not being able to resolve the situation independently
Future Training Ideas?	More training about how to be more stern with kids, what	Attention-grabbing strategies	Having more structure and admin	Believes there needs to a "bad-guy" in the staff

	do you do when kids don't care if you call them out?		legitimize their authority	dynamics and not be afraid to be stern
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Future Training Recommendations

The current training resources provides counsellors with useful frameworks for understanding their responsibilities. However, observations from both sites suggest that the training does not consistently translate into practical strategies that counsellors can readily apply during camp. While there are a multitude of factors that influence why this may happen, a personal analysis of how effective learning happens suggests that training resources did not incorporate enough experiential learning opportunities. A secondary reason could be that certain resources were too abstract and made it hard for counsellors to generalize into the workplace environment.

The clearest example of this is during the management of transitions and activities. Although counsellors understood that rules and routines were important, observations showed that games quickly become chaotic when expectations were not established beforehand. Similarly, counsellors reported difficulty getting students' attention, while successful examples—such as using a clap-and-freeze signal, a whistle, or a consistent counting strategy—were largely learned through experience rather than through a standardized training resource. The same pattern appeared in emotional dysregulation and conflict resolution. Counsellors could recognize that a child was refusing to participate or that a conflict had occurred, but observations revealed uncertainty about how to de-escalate the situation, provide choices, establish boundaries, or avoid prolonged power struggles. This aligns with the lack of experiential learning opportunities during the training session, suggesting that counsellors had a chance to interact with concepts but not enough time to embody them. This made it hard for them to generalise learning into different scenarios, thus hindering workplace performance in these areas. Lastly, the lack of practice meant that their working memory most likely did not store the information for long, so even if strategies were introduced to them, they were forgotten in high-stress situations.

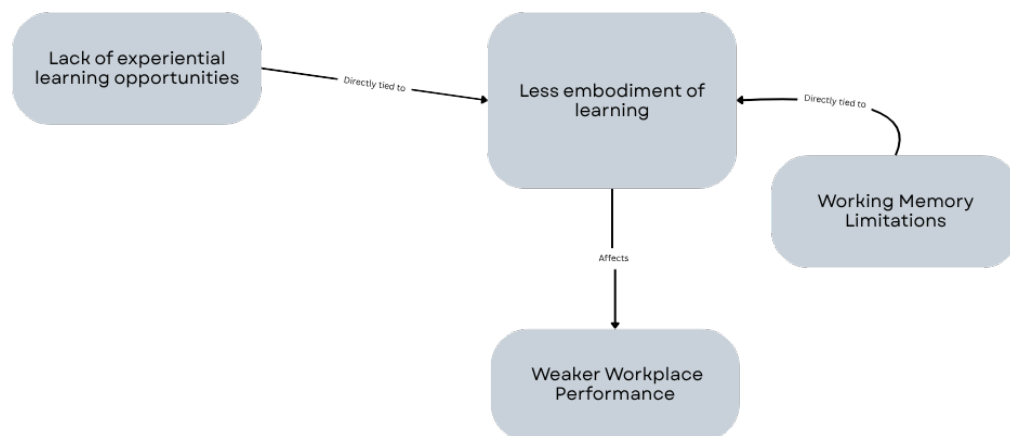


Figure 6.2 Relationship Between Learning and Workplace Performance

Counsellors encountered challenges involving emotional dysregulation, homesickness, physical boundaries, peer conflict, power struggles, activity safety, staff communication, field-trip supervision, and unclear responsibilities. These situations required counsellors to make immediate decisions. Without a predetermined rule or protocol to handle the situations, counsellors felt uncertain on how to best move forward. Counsellors may benefit from resources such as sample scripts, attention-getting techniques, transition procedures, activity-planning templates, conflict-resolution scenarios with clear steps to resolve them, and decision-making guides for responding to common camp situations. These resources could be designed as quick-reference materials that counsellors can consult before and during camp rather than relying on abstract principles alone. By making resources easy for counselors to apply in any scenario, counsellors can adapt and wean off the learning resources once they feel more comfortable.

During the training period, experiential learning should be prioritized so counsellors can embody leadership and practice using resources and adapting them to their personal style. For example, counsellors could independently practice leading a transition, introducing a game, gaining attention, or responding to a hypothetical conflict while another staff member observes and provides feedback. This would allow counsellors to develop confidence while still having appropriate support.

Finally, further thought can surround how debrief sessions are structured to optimize for feedback and improvement. This can include a greater focus on how goal-setting can be incorporated into reflections, since it is currently an activity that they introduce at the very beginning of training but don't refer much back to later. In addition, debrief sessions do not have a note-taker, making it hard to store information and knowledge from debrief sessions that can inform training for the subsequent year. There can also be greater exploration for exploring how leadership is tied to gender and appearance, especially for staff cohorts that are mostly women.

Appendix

Figure 3.0: Notes from Leadership Workshop. Counsellor responses in blue.

Question	Counsellor Thoughts (1-2-3, missing one counsellor due to illness)
	Admin Thoughts (Regent Park only)
Think of a time you experienced good teamwork vs bad teamwork. Reflect on what distinguishes the two?	Good Teams: - 1: When teams are encouraged to collaborate over working independently -> things get done more efficiently - 2: When team members are familiar with each other, they can spot when certain team members are "off" or need space - 3: Communicating super clearly about when you need support Bad Teams: - 1: Teams that expect you to "know everything" and don't really support your development - 2: Inconsiderate managers that didn't care about your well-being - 3: Flaking at the last minute before events which left teams to scramble for solutions ADMIN Good Teams: - Everybody is super clear with their roles and communicate clearly about what they're doing to prevent redundancy ADMIN Bad Teams: - When leaders are quick to get mad and don't treat others with respect - When there is a mismatch of commitment levels (one group member takes on more workload than others)
How do you currently define self-efficacy? What part of self-efficacy is most meaningful to you?	1: - "Knowing your worth" - Know what you can do and do it efficiently by constantly finding new methods and growing 2: - Taking a chance and risk on yourself despite doubts from yourself or others 3: - Identify as a student that's still learning from others and new experiences, even when you feel like you're falling behind ADMIN: - Knowing that you are skilled but also recognizing the amount of room to improve - Learning from your community and skilled musicians/artists/people around you - Struggle with finding motivation to do things without structure or deadline (external pressure)
Limiting Beliefs	1: "I'm defined by my past mistakes" - Fixating on past mistakes and just so preoccupied with all the shortcomings at the moment (eg. procrastinating) that it keeps you from ever taking action 2: "I'm defined by my past mistakes" - For small groups, it feels like you are more watched - When a mistake is made, it feels like you need to "make up" for it and gain the lost respect back - Lots of pressure -> move forward and not stay stuck 3: "I must always be available" - Workplaces that don't value you besides being a worker don't care for your well-being and take advantage of you - Feeling like you show up, put more hours in but it doesn't really pay off "I'm not smart enough" - Being accused of cheating or being in certain spaces where societal judgements make you feel not "smart" enough or "worthy" enough of a space ADMIN: "If I show vulnerability, I'll lose respect" -> recognizing that we must share the load to survive and work more efficiently ADMIN: "I shouldn't ask for help" -> super important to help me with staying on task and deal with procrastination
Goal Setting to the Now	1: - PURPOSE: Watching children seek you out as a mentor and teacher - Month: Being a confident and sociable individual that takes initiative to start conversations with others - Week: Starting conversations with children that inquire about their life or allow shared connection while maintaining professional boundaries

	- Day: Being observant during camp and starting conversations whenever ideas pop into the head (eg. complimenting someone's outfit, asking them what they're doing) - Now: Having the emotional capacity to be aware and engaged 2: - PURPOSE: Watching kids who struggle to fit in make meaningful connections with their peers - Month: Learn the preferences of all the children - Week: Make the effort to connect in new ways with each camper - Day: Strike up conversation with different students - Now: Being in a positive / optimistic mindset to start conversations 3: - PURPOSE: Be someone students can learn from as a "positive role model" - MONTH: Being a confident and sociable individual that takes initiative to play with others - WEEK: Take initiative during camp activities - DAY: Sitting with students and playing with them on a daily basis - NOW: Understanding every camper is different, adjusting based on their individual needs ADMIN: Being a safe person for kids to confide in -> Letting them know that you're available -> Daily check-ins -> Think of different ways to check-in with people ADMIN: Gain skills for effective behavioural management -> be involved with at least one behavioural management situation each week -> be observant -> think of signs of behavioural disruptions "HALT"
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