
A “Seussian” Philosophy on Pre-College Programs

Georgette Edmondson-Wright, M.B.A.

By opening yourself to possibility, there are no limits to what you can discover and where you can go

O*h, the places you'll go!* Dr. Seuss, the master of ridiculous and philosopher of fun, had it right! His moral parables, penchant for alliteration, and comic messages have stood the test of time. Theodor Geisel (Seuss was his middle name) understood the fundamental sameness of our humanity. In his children's books, he used nonsensical rhyme and rhythm to champion his political views promoting the need for tolerance, self-determination and democracy. Geisel understood that life's adventures were to be experienced fully, and that by opening yourself to possibility, there were no limits to what you could discover and where you could go.

No season offers the promise of adventure and discovery quite like summer. In literature, summer symbolizes love, maturity, knowledge, and a coming-of-age. Summer sets the stage for adventure and journeys, vacations and beaches, a slower pace and time of reflection. Yet our world is changing, and this romanticized view of summer is changing to an increasingly pragmatic one. Summer, for most high school students in this country, is less the idyllic lazy dog day afternoons of old and more a hectic schedule of “résumé-able” activities. The norm now includes camp, work, internships, test prep courses, travel study, and—of course—pre-college programs that promise college credit, a preview to college, and life-changing experiences. No one would argue that these are not all wonderful and meaningful activities. It's no surprise that with the increasing pressure of college admission, the college-bound student thinks of summer as the season of opportunity—a time to add that “something extra” to an already stacked résumé that will help them stand out from the pack when the all powerful admissions committee reviews the application.

Yet truthfully, an interesting summer experience—or even several extraordinary summer experiences—rarely guarantees admission to a university. College admission really isn't the point of summer pre-college programs. Of course the admissions counselor is interested in knowing more about you and how you spent your summer. But this is only one factor among many under consideration. Caveat emptor: let the buyer beware! As you consider your next summer

program, keep Geisel's wise philosophy in mind and be reminded that the true value of a summer experience is the experience itself. In opening yourself to the experience, you allow yourself to reframe your perspective of the world you have known.

With many good options from which to choose, how do you know where to begin? What makes one pre-college program the “right” program and another not? As with so many other decisions that you will face in your life, there is no one right decision. In choosing a program, there will be many unknowns. But that's the point: in taking a “Seussian” approach, we should not fear the unknown. The experience to be had is the knowledge or wisdom that you will gain from unknown encounters.

Without question, the best pre-college programs are those where you discover your academic passion, make new friends, and get a sense of something greater than what you have known. More often than not, pre-college programs are enjoyable, life-changing, and as students say, “the best summer ever!”. Yet, equally enlightening, and arguably more valuable, are the imperfect experiences.

Dr. Seuss said the same when he wrote,

*Wherever you fly, you'll be best of the best.
Wherever you go, you will top all the rest.
Except when you don't.
Because, sometimes, you won't.*

GEORGETTE EDMONDSON-WRIGHT



Director, Summer Sessions
George Washington University
Washington, D.C.

*I'm sorry to say so
but, sadly, it's true
that Bang-ups
and Hang-ups
can happen to you.*

What you won't see on our web pages and in our literature are the "bang-ups" and "hang-ups." You won't read about the student who is having a rotten day, who is feeling homesick, or who just realized that the study of Bose-Einstein condensates is tough. That's just not good marketing and so you won't see it. But it happens. That is a part of the experience. The point here is to find the experience to be had and to let it guide you. A summer experience is as intense as the season itself. That's perfectly fine and that's perfectly right!

Give each new experience a chance to shape you and change you. Change, transformation, transition—whatever you call it—is a fact of life. Change disturbs your composure, but change is also how you come to know your abilities, capabilities, likes, and dislikes. It helps you to grow and adapt. That ability will serve you well in college and beyond. Opening yourself to change is an essential part of any summer experience. So as you choose your next summer program, certainly look for the things that are of interest to you, but at the same time, step out of your comfort zone. Leave your quest for the perfect summer program at the door and allow an imperfect experience to inform your thinking and outlook.

If ever there was an argument that makes the case for the need to be open, flexible, and adaptable, blogger Karl Fisch has said it. He wrote,

"We are educating students for jobs that don't exist, using technology that hasn't been invented, to solve problems that haven't been identified."

Shift Happens

In an increasingly connected society, technology has forever changed the way we live, what we teach, and how we learn. Our cultural boundaries have grown soft as the internet gives us access to communities and cultures different from our own. Our economy and financial stability depends on the economies and political realities of our world neighbors. The toppling of authoritarian regimes in the Middle East, the cataclysmic changes in our weather systems, the renewed focus on environmental sustainability, and economic difficulties are our realities. It is nearly impossible to envision the future, but we can imagine next summer. So as you plan your next pre-college program, seek one that will inform you about your world and your place in it. Take a look at just about any university or college website and you will see some shared priorities. We seek to educate global citizens. We want to encourage intellectual curiosity, creativity, critical thinking, and social responsibility. Our programs develop problem-

solving skills, hone communication ability, and deepen cultural literacy and awareness. This is what our world and your future will require. Ours is a globally connected society, and there are no *us* and *thems*, no *star-belly sneetches*—just *sneetches*.

Yes, Seuss said it. And you have to wonder what type of pre-college program he would have chosen, if they existed back then. As the son of German-American immigrants, Theodor spent his formative teenage years in Massachusetts. Born in 1904, he would have been sixteen in 1920, an era characterized by radical change. It was the time of the roaring twenties, prohibition and the heyday of gangsters like Al Capone. New technologies spurred the growth of Hollywood, as movies had color and sound. The political climate was tense for Theodor as anti-German sentiment grew. His world was in a state of upheaval as the events leading up to World War II unraveled. Hitler, Mussolini, and Stalin were household names. His world, like ours, was in a state of turmoil at home and abroad. So while we may never know how Theodor spent his summers, we do know that his choices and his writer's voice must have been shaped by his experiences. This Ivy League educated writer followed his undergraduate studies at Dartmouth with advanced studies at Oxford University. He waffled between wanting to become a professor, a writer, and an illustrator. And somewhere on his journey, Theodor Geisel became Dr. Seuss, the writer and illustrator of children books. His path to discovery happened over time and most certainly many summers. Your life experiences and your many summers will also lead you on your path to discovery.

As you consider your next summer program try not to think too hard about the admissions committee. Focus less on what your choice may say about you, and more on what you will experience. Open yourself to the experience for the experience itself. Reevaluate and rethink what you know. Imagine what you can uncover and discover. Summer and summer pre-college programs are passageways to your next set of life experiences. Seuss had it right!

*You have brains in your head
And feet in your shoes
You can steer yourself
Any direction you choose
You're on your own.
And you know what you know
And YOU are the guy (or girl) who'll decide
where to go.*



Kaplan, Melissa. "Theodor Seuss Geisel: Author Study." Melissa Kaplan's Herp and Green Iguana Information Collection. Web. 24 Oct. 2011.

<<http://www.anapsid.org/aboutmk/seuss.html>>.