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A Study of Outdoor Education in America

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A STUDY OF OUTDOOR EDUCATION
IN AMERICA

A Research Paper
Presented to
The Graduate Faculty
Central Washington College of Education

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Education

by
Vernon T. Reis
July, 1961

THIS PAPER IS APPROVED AS MEETING
THE PLAN 2 REQUIREMENT FOR THE
COMPLETION OF A RESEARCH PAPER

Helen McCabe
FOR THE GRADUATE FACULTY

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. INTRODUCTION	1
Statement of the problem	1
Importance of the study.	1
II. OUTDOOR EDUCATION IN AMERICA	2
History and Growth	2
America's Need for Outdoor Education	7
Relation of Outdoor Education to Learning and Curriculum	11
Values of Outdoor Education.	13
BIBLIOGRAPHY	20

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

In this era of rapid social and technical change, the schools of America are faced with the problem of keeping pace. To do this educators will have to rely more and more on new methods and innovations. One of the innovations warranting a closer look is Outdoor Education.

Statement of the problem. It was the purpose of this study to (1) explore the philosophy and historical background of Outdoor Education in the United States, (2) point out its importance to our present society, (3) show its relationship to learning and curriculum, and (4) cite its values.

Importance of the study. Being an administrator of a large Outdoor Education program, the writer is frequently asked to write news articles, give talks, and answer many questions about the historical background, philosophy, need, and value of Outdoor Education. Since this is a relatively new field, the amount of information written about it is limited. This study was made to better prepare the author to relate knowledge on Outdoor Education to his colleagues and the citizens of his community.

CHAPTER II

OUTDOOR EDUCATION IN AMERICA

I. HISTORY AND GROWTH

Outdoor education is also known as school camping and the outdoor school. Children are taken from the classroom to an outdoor setting for classes which can best be learned there, usually conservation study and social learnings. In conservation study, children are acquainted with the natural resources of their particular geographical area. The social learnings of outdoor education include attitudes, habits, and skills, which aid in the proper growth and development of the student. Because this curriculum is real, direct, and in an environment that evokes curiosity satisfied by direct experience, motivation and interest are high. Children are ready to experience and learn (1:1-13).

Until recent years this real and direct learning movement has been considered a vacation activity, its educational possibilities used as selling points to parents. Soon some clear thinking educators connected with camps began to realize that the potential experiences for developing the child were virtually unlimited, that the surface possibilities were only being scratched. These educators believed that learning takes place more quickly and effectively through direct experience. This was one of the

firm bases on which they established Outdoor Education (6:3). To make an additional test of this hypothesis, the Kellogg Foundation, in cooperation with the Battle Creek schools, the Life Camps, and the San Diego City-County Schools, set up a series of experiments in outdoor education. Experts in the field of education found these trials to be so educationally sound that they decided to continue them (6:3-12). These important experiments gave impetus to many hundreds of school districts who now have school camps. Long before the establishment of experimental schools by the Kellogg Foundation, in 1940, however, some foresighted experimentalists started small scale camping programs.

Among early experiments of learning by direct experience was a camp started in 1861 by Fredrick William Gunn. Realizing the values of outdoor life he took his entire group to a campsite where they spent two weeks boating, sailing, hiking, and fishing. This type of experience would not compare favorably with what we call outdoor education today but did provide a very encouraging beginning. Later, in 1876, Dr. Joseph Trimble Rothrock established a "School for Physical Culture," where boys lived out of doors. In this environment they studied forestry, conservation, and their required academic courses. This was probably the second attempt at outdoor education, and at least part of this curriculum is being taught in the up to date outdoor programs of today (12:2).

In the following years other efforts were made to initiate Outdoor Education programs; however, none were particularly successful. In spite of these efforts the idea continued to smolder in the minds of many of the nation's educational experts (12:2).

By the early 1930's many educational institutions and boards of education began to recognize the need for educational camping. Day camps which took place during the school year were conducted in Baltimore, Maryland; Ellensburg, Washington; and Pittsburg, Pennsylvania. In 1934 the public schools and social agencies of New York ran day camps which introduced children to outdoor group living for periods of one to three days. Since the programs involved in these camps were planned by groups of youngsters, they offered many opportunities for creative experiences. By 1944 summer day camps which extended over long periods of time were correlated with the summer school program. The schools of Bloomington, Indiana; Clayton, Missouri; and St. Louis County, Missouri, engaged in this type of camping and reported very successful results (12:3).

Due to the excellent results of these camping movements in the United States, many colleges began training teachers to handle camping programs. Among the first colleges to start this training movement were Indiana State Teachers College and The Lansing State Teachers College at Trenton, New Jersey.

Educators soon turned to camps which ran as long as four weeks. In 1940 the Schools of Battle Creek, Michigan, developed a year-round school camp at Clear Lake near Dowling, Michigan (22:31-34). During the school year groups of eighty children attended this camp for periods of two weeks. Most of the pupils in this experiment were drawn from the fifth and sixth grades, although students from the third through the ninth grades participated (7:67). Soon other programs were developed in San Diego, California; Allegan, Michigan; Greenville, South Carolina; Tyler, Texas; Cleveland Heights, Ohio; Austin, Texas; Atlanta, Georgia; Long Beach, California; Los Angeles, California; The University of Wyoming Elementary School; and Boston University. Some of these camps operated on a year-round basis with the help of various state and local agencies (12:3). These year around or long term camps were owned by either the school, the city, or the county. Short term camps are usually rented from private agencies (12:7).

Recently, some interesting and successful developments have been made in the field of Outdoor Education. For example, Bay Cliff Health Camp in Big Bay, Michigan, offers a camping experience for handicapped children. The state department of instruction provides a coordinator; the special education division supplies instruction in speech and lip reading; and The Department of Psychology at Wayne University supplies intern students in occupational therapy

(12:3).

In addition, several cities in Michigan are using camping activities to meet the needs of boys who have quit school. These boys are offered a semester of camping in lieu of one in the classroom. This program gives boys an opportunity to explore vocational fields and to receive free tutoring if they wish.

Many states have employed directors and passed legislation concerning camp education programs. The department of Public Instruction in Michigan employs a full time director of camping and outdoor education, and in Virginia and New York the state laws give boards of education the power to operate school camps as a part of their program. All of the following have set forth statements recommending camping and outdoor experiences for all children: The National Resources Planning Board, The American Association of School Administrators, The Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, The American Association for Health, Physical Education and Recreation, and The American Camping Association (12:3).

Outdoor education has made great progress since its beginnings, proving both its worth and need (4:107). Its values are immeasurable, its philosophy sound, and contrary to the opinion of the uninformed it is no longer considered a fad or a frill (12:3).

II. AMERICA'S NEED FOR OUTDOOR EDUCATION

"Today more people seek recreation in outdoor environments than through any other channel" (18:1). Most camping activities enrich the recreational life of the individual. Sound Outdoor Education programs involve activities that further the development of the whole person and thus are an integral part of his education.

Educators are finally becoming aware of the fact that we must learn to use our resources wisely. This need was dramatized when, in 1959, more than 30 million hunting and fishing licenses were sold in the United States, and over 270 million people visited our parks and forests. In 1955 and 1956 more than 25 million boating licenses were sold. Millions of men, women, and children from 8 to 80 have taken up camping; more than 12 billion dollars are spent annually for travel and vacationing (18:1). Industries specializing in the production of camping equipment are marketing millions of dollars worth of goods annually.

Today approximately seventy-five per cent of our children attend city schools; we have become a nation of city dwellers (18:2). No better explanation than that of Lippman's can be made concerning these huge masses and their lack of opportunity to gain an appreciation of the true concept of our national resources (10:Frontis piece):

There are collected in our great cities, huge masses of people who have lost their roots in the earth beneath them and their knowledge of the fixed stars in the heaven above them....

...They are people who eat, but no longer know their food is grown, who work and no longer see what they help to produce, who hear all the latest news and all latest opinions but have no philosophy by which they can distinguish the true from the false, the credible from the incredible, the good from the bad.

...This feeling which pervades the great urban centers, that all things are relative and impermanent and of no real importance, is merely the reflection of their own separation from the elementary experiences of humanity.

How can educators help children living this unremitting pace, filled as they are with emotional strains and pressures?

It is our job to face the situation realistically and prepare these people in the skills of outdoor living. For in the coming years ever increasing numbers will leave the cities to enjoy at least some degree of seclusion.

The problem is even more significant if we keep in mind that the life span of man has increased over twenty years in the past fifty years (18:3). Medical technology is making breath taking advances in extending our longevity. This will mean that more people will be engaged in more leisure time activities.

Labor unions and industries are becoming very concerned, for in the next ten years millions of hours of additional leisure will be the inevitable by-product of this push button revolution. The four day work week will become a reality for millions of people in 1965 (18:3-6).

Recently the CIO raised the following pertinent questions:

Will the nation's educational, cultural, and recreational facilities be capable of meeting the challenge of increased leisure made possible by automation, longer vacations, reduced work week, two and one half or three day weekends?

Will power and natural resources be sufficient to meet the potential increased output made possible by automation (18:4)?

Yes, industry is concerned. Production lines, feedback and computing machines are technological developments that define automation and create this problem. Along with fewer working hours and more production, these devices will change the working life and thus the emotional needs of the individual. Modern innovations will create a new working class, and outdoor leisure will become a primary and meaningful leisure-time diversion. Census experts have predicted that by 1975 our population will have risen to 221 million, an increase of 7,000 persons per day(18:4-5).

The factors stated serve as a preamble to resolving the problems which conservationists and educators must face together. Educators must take steps to educate people in the wise use of natural resources through the medium of outdoor education.

J. W. Smith makes this point very clear in the following statement:

The impact of an evergrowing flood of recreation-bent city dwellers upon the remaining outdoor areas becomes the direct concern of the conservationist, for he is committed to promote the wise use of natural resources by people. What if millions descend like Attila's horde of old, untrained but armed to the teeth with every type of equipment and gadget that a modern sporting goods store can furnish? What will they do to each other--morally and physically? Anyone who has ever watched a youngster playing in a deserted building will know the answers (18:5-6).

Wasteful exploitation of human and natural resources could be the end result, leading eventually to tighter federal control or even to a national weakness (18:5).

An example of industry's recognition of the need for Outdoor Education is the Weyerhaeuser Timber Company of Tacoma, Washington. This firm has opened its vast holdings to the public for outdoor activities. In making its land available the company hopes to educate people in the use of the outdoors. The Weyerhaeuser Timber Company realizes that the pyramiding population, with its increased ability to buy material things, will make increasing demands upon our already hard pressed natural resources (18:92).

In this push button era the family automobile has become very significant, for there are now more than 50 million automobiles in the United States. These represent a symbol of freedom for city dwellers. Thousands of miles of super-highways are creating a new concept of geography. Travel to the outdoors has definitely become a reality.

The government estimates that by 1965 our national income will be 52 per cent higher than it is today. More

people spending more money reinforces the idea that we will have to be wiser in our use of resources in order to insure their preservation. The most intelligent way of solving this problem is by education through direct experience via the media of the schools (18:6).

III. RELATION OF OUTDOOR EDUCATION TO LEARNING AND CURRICULUM

The United States has arrived at an era in history where education has become the right of every one rather than the privilege of a selected few. This is the first time in history that a nation as large as ours has offered so much to so many. Because education became the right of every one, grave problems were created (2:83).

We had a well established curriculum developed when schools were for the select few--the classical curriculum made up of solid subjects. This old curriculum had become one of the most static things in this changing world. Many of the youth in America neither wanted nor understood this curriculum. Because this condition existed, educational psychologists began research into the nature of learning. Among the significant findings was the fact that students learn by experience: they learn when they are involved in what has to be learned, and they learn when they are ready to learn. These important discoveries have had a significant influence on outdoor education (2:83). The

relationship between learning and outdoor education can be no better expressed than by L. B. Sharp, who says:

The principal thesis which underlies the implications of outdoor education for all subject matter in all areas is: That which can best be learned inside the classroom should be learned there.

That which can best be learned in the outdoors through direct experience dealing with native materials should be learned there.

This approach rests on the principal of learning by doing (16:43).

"The basic aim of the school is to prepare the young person for life and adjustment to life. This is also the basic aim of the camp" (13:275). The basic means in school is educational while in camp it is recreational. The ends are the same but the means are different. Both the camp site and the classroom contribute to a good learning situation. Camp represents a merging of recreation and education--out-of-doors in a relaxed, informal atmosphere. The child comes to camp to have adventure and, therefore, approaches this new experience with enthusiasm. Because of this attitude, the child is eager to learn whatever is necessary so that he may participate in the program. Direct experience makes the level of curiosity high (13:215-216).

J. M. Smith points out the values of camping in relation to education as follows:

Camping is a logical development in American education. It returns to the educational realm because modern living has robbed children of many outdoor opportunities. It is not a fad or a frill, but is the most

simple form of learning--real and direct. It is not a new force to be injected into the curriculum. It is logical, particularly in the elementary school, where the teacher deals directly with the whole child. Is it not reasonable that the teacher and the child should leave the classroom when something can be learned better outside? The camp thus becomes part of the school, separated only from the central campus by the distance to the camp site. There, out-of-doors, the children experience reality and learn by doing. It gives them roots in the land, which will be expressed later in the best uses of our resources. It offers balance to an age of city dwellers. It may be the only safety valve to modern living (18:6).

It is important that educators, parents, and citizens recognize the part that outdoor experiences can have on the total program of the school. Educationally oriented camping experiences provide students with an ideal opportunity for practicing democratic living, and, even more important, these activities familiarize the participants with the natural resources available to them and provide instruction for using them wisely (11:3-40).

IV. VALUES OF OUTDOOR EDUCATION

Through its rich and varied program, camping holds a hope for a more wholesome life through recreation and offers unplumbed possibilities of such educational importance that it may well become the most significant social development of the new half century (1:13).

In the opinion of one leader in education, the values of group living are among the most promising of the features accruing to school-sponsored camping. Just living together twenty-four hours a day for one or more weeks gives children the opportunity of learning the necessities and techniques

of living together in a community. The give and take of camp life and the adjustment to a new and real life situation are learnings not readily obtained from books (19:30-32).

Foley (9:152-154) agrees with the classification of group living as probably the most important single contribution camping education can make in the adjustment of the individual. In addition to the foregoing, Studebaker recognizes the values of self discipline, health, physical education, hobbies, crafts, nature study, and life. He states that some of these values are attainable in the classroom but that the outdoor situation provides a far superior setting for them (19:32).

Crawford and Mitchell deal quite effectively with the intangibles of group life. They believe that camping makes use of group living in an environment suited to the interests of children--an environment in which each individual develops independence, self control, and self reliance by planning activities and accepting the responsibilities necessary to provide for the needs of his own daily living (5:5).

Camp...is a cooperative community where people react on each other and where the actions of one have an effect upon all the others. Each person is accepted as an individual with powers as well as responsibilities equal in importance to each other person's. The ideal in camp education is to give campers an approach to life which is individual and creative, yet also cooperative, and to make people independent and self-reliant, yet harmonious and disciplined (5:24).

In discussing the Long Beach Public School Camp, Pike says:

The unique opportunity of the school camp to contribute to the education and development of children seems to lie in the general areas of healthful living, democratic social living, basic scientific understandings and appreciations, work experiences and developing worthy skills in recreation (14:25).

Camping provides an ideal opportunity to learn through first hand knowledge as well as ideal opportunity for practicing democratic living (14:25).

"Planning, sharing, discussing, and evaluating are as essential to camp living as they are to educational practice in the classroom" (11:5).

In evaluating camping as it relates to certain needs of children, Caswell expresses the opinion that in order to help children develop desirable personal evaluations and understandings or relations with environment, the children must be provided with experiences which will teach them the facts of reality as fully as possible. Many times the environment of elementary age pupils is limited and they have few opportunities for first hand experiences. Understanding of their larger social relationships and the development of a realistic concept of themselves as persons and their relationships to others will be fostered through much first-hand experience involving broad relationships (3:99-100).

In answer to these needs, Thurston states:

The community school camp is a place and instrument through which children and youth can have educational experiences otherwise difficult to obtain. In the woods, in the field, along the lake or stream, youth can hear, see and feel. He can taste and smell. Reality is all about him. In the wide open spaces about the camp or on the silent and friendly trails deep in the forest, there are endless varieties of nature to be examined: an environment abundant in meaningful work experiences, the conditions eliciting robust health and a life that is simple and wholesome. Where can youth better learn about these important elements of successful living than in the natural environment of a school camp (20:5)?

A school camp experience gives the child security by providing an opportunity for him to really feel that he is an important part of an actively working group.

There have been many appraisals and evaluations of school camps; however, the methods used in the evaluations have varied from entirely subjective to partially objective. In all cases the reported reactions have been enthusiastic (6:3-5).

Dewitt, of the George Peabody Demonstration School, divided his program evaluation into two parts: tangible and intangible results. These were obtained from statements made by parents, pupils, and teachers. The tangible results listed were "knowledge of nature, how to prepare food, safety, camp crafts, and how to plan programs." The intangible results listed were "cooperation, knowing each other better, knowing other people, independence, good time, and better social adjustment" (6:3-5).

The same benefits are cited in describing the San

Diego County-City Schools Program for sixth graders. Even though they are not divided into tangible and intangible areas, the results are approximately the same: happiness and adventures in democratic living, new understanding of people and opportunities to apply their learnings in the classroom. There appears to be gain in the areas of self reliance and responsibility, self confidence and cooperation, and there is more interest in nature and the arts. These factors imply that this will help children grow into useful and well balanced citizens (28:12).

One of the most objective evaluations of a school camping program was made of the camp operated by the New York City Board of Education.

In this experiment, the children were carefully tested both before and after a two week camping experience and the results were compared with a control group which did not attend the camp. In addition to objective tests over regular classroom subjects, interest and attitude inventories were given (8:3).

The group who had been to camp established favorable test results. In no instance was there a significant loss, and in many instances there was a significant gain by the campers over the children remaining in the classroom. Competent observers measured those areas which could not be measured objectively. They were of unanimous opinion that the objectives of the camp as defined had been reached. As a conclusion, this report states emphatically that the gains are such that one is impatient for further development of

school camping programs with continuing evaluation of their progress (8:101).

Seman, who has studied and worked in this area of education, proposes that every effort should be made to facilitate the extension of camps until every child in the land enjoys camping as a part of his education (15:3-5).

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