Out-of-Door Education—
A Point of View

The greatest educational assets the nation has—to study, explore, and use as part of the curriculum—are its fields, streams, open spaces, communities.

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OUTDOOR education places the main emphasis upon learning through direct experience. How can we really know or understand a thing unless we experience it directly? We sing about "rocks and rills and templed hills" to stir our patriotism and increase understanding of country, but we cannot really know and understand unless we have experienced them thoroughly. Youth needs to know the height of a hill or a mountain by the pull of his muscles and to see the vista at the top; to feel the perspiration from toil, to expend energy beyond a pleasurable point, and get satisfaction from the results of his work; to know the strength of a stream as it gives resistance to the canoe and paddle; to gain the satisfaction of making himself comfortable in all kinds of weather; to acquire the knowledge and assurance gained in protecting himself. All these experiences develop a broader point of view—of our earth and its possessions, of people and how they live. Youth can gain something by reading, but what is read does not take on real meaning until there is direct experience.

We are beyond the point in our thinking that education consists only of learning to read, write, and figure. Many educators are sufficiently "Deweyized" to agree that education is a way of life: it is living right here and now, each and every day, and that in itself is the best preparation for whatever the future holds for each individual.

Schools, in the main, however, have always followed the pattern of teaching subjects. All the subject matter is taught inside the classroom when actually most of the material itself comes from the outdoors. Why not get as much of the learning as possible first-hand? Outdoor education is the wedge that can open that interesting door to realism, adventure, and other values.

Urbanization Removes Youth from Reality

An increasing concentration in large urban centers and a reduction of the rural population is leaving its impact upon our people and consequently upon our nation. Our American life has moved from that of
early pioneer living—close to the soil, working and
struggling for existence, to a highly developed tech-
tical-industrial society where individuals do less and
less for themselves in the way of providing food and
shelter and their own recreation.

Crowded city life, which restricts experience, has
resulted in an upsurge of youthful combustion which
is commonly called delinquency. In the main, youth
just naturally want to be doing something and often
end up by doing almost anything. Another effect of
crowded living is the decreasing appreciation that
young people have of real work. A group of high school
graduates found that during the 16 years of city
living they had spent only 15 per cent of that time in
direct contact with the earth. It is indeed difficult to
gain much real understanding and appreciation of the
out of doors and its possessions today.

Education Has Had a Hothouse Development

By nature, young people are adventurous and ex-
ploratory minded. It has not been their decision that
education should be confined to the classroom. They
are ready to explore, fend for themselves, if it is in the
educational cards to do so.

Why, then, have the schools failed to use the natural
and educational resources so inexpensive and abundant?
The answer is obvious. Schools began in a building. As
more and more children came to the schools, more and
larger buildings resulted. Subjects added to the curricu-
um were also taught inside these buildings. Further-
more, teachers were educated for their jobs at college-
ate institutions which carried on their programs inside buildings. It is easy to understand, therefore,
that teachers are utterly unprepared to understand, or
to help others to understand, that much learning can
take place out of doors or, in other words, beyond the
walls of a building. School administrators are trained
to operate the big school buildings and supervise teach-
ers, and many of them grew up administratively in the
school building. Outdoor education has not been a part
of their work. It is a new field for them.

Genuine Article Is Out of Doors

An all-out effort of outdoor education can be sum-
marized under five phases. First, the basis for applying
the curriculum to the out of doors, at any level, is to
decide which things should be learned and where they
can best be learned. This will result in a larger amount
of time being spent in the out of doors, in the com-
community, and in school camps. Many school adminis-
trators and teaching staffs could be introduced into the
outdoor way of teaching by conducting a special insti-
tute built around the outdoor education idea.

Second, the all-out effort will require the immediate
education of school administrators and teachers in the
philosophy behind outdoor education and in the methods
and organization for carrying it out. Every teacher
training institution should have a camp as an integral
part of its program.

Third, the program projects the establishment of a
school camp or place where school boys and girls can,
under proper guidance, live, work and study together,
to explore, to learn to be on their own, set up their own
camp community, and manage their own affairs. There
they can come to grips with the realities of living and
have a chance to build their shelters or places to live,
plan their own menus, cook their own meals, cultivate
gardens and farms, reap the harvest and engage in all
kinds of honest-to-goodness work.

Fourth, every school can start immediately with day
camping in or near the school grounds. These experi-
ences should include exploration, gardening, cooking
and living out of doors.

Fifth, through the years the public has been taught to
believe that education goes on only in the school build-
ings and has responded to the appeals to build bigger
and better buildings. It is now hard for Mr. and Mrs.
John Public to understand that in many respects better
education can take place out of doors. This puts the
burden of responsibility on the administrators and their
fellow teachers to take to the open spaces, for the
public has confidence in those who are trained to teach
their youth.

Love of the out of doors, ability to live safely and
happily in the open, understanding of plant and animal
life, and a profound appreciation of beauty and the
phenomena of natural surroundings is, basically, edu-
cation.

The trail has been blazed. Our schools have a splen-
did opportunity to take a most forward step. They
should wait no longer.

Children develop love of country through intimate
contact with its "rocks and rills and templed hills".

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