

American Camping Association National Convention
San Francisco, California
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Nature Workshop - "Who are our Neighbors -- Naturewise?"
L. B. Sharp - Leader

The purpose of this workshop was to exchange experiences and provide opportunities for discussion among directors and program specialists, to determine the reasons why nature programs do not flourish and to develop ideas and suggestions for improving nature programs in camp.

The workshop discussion and outcome centered on a theme concerning the development of a strong, all inclusive nature program in camp. The problems and difficulties which usually stand in the way of an all out nature program were found to be:

1. Lack of exposure to the natural environment.
2. Lack of leadership.
3. Lack of knowledge on the part of the counselors.
4. Lack of counselor training.
5. Need of information and resource materials.
6. Lack of inspiration and enthusiasm on the part of the campers.
7. Lack of communication between the counselors and the campers.

It is important that attitude, interest, and enthusiasm of the campers should be at a high level when they prepare to take an active part in a nature program. Through the use of good motivating techniques, worthwhile relationships and understandings towards nature, the campers, and the counselors can be developed. An effective experience can be the initial factor in bringing about a series of

related activities and discussions which will offer value to the campers and the counselors. An experience in the woods and open spaces should stimulate curiosity and initiative on the part of the campers. A nature program should have meaning to the campers and the counselors. Opportunities for adventure, exploring, and discovery should be the prime motivating factors in a nature program. In order to develop interest, such terms as "nature hike" or "study in the out-of-doors" need not be used. The campers should be made to feel that they are going to accomplish much more than simply observe nature or collect native materials.

Lack of leadership ability and basic knowledge on the part of the counselors can be the main cause of an ineffective nature program. The counselors should be happy in what they are doing, enjoy working with children, and realize that their primary purpose is to provide a guided, worthwhile experience for the campers. Leadership training programs should offer opportunities for direct first hand experiences in the out-of-doors along with factual information. These programs can be provided by the camps, schools, and other professional organizations.

Camps are areas in the out-of-doors, and are therefore surrounded by a world of interesting natural phenomena. Therefore, camp nature programs should consist of learning about and understanding the total environment. The development of worthwhile nature activities is the responsibility of everyone on the camp staff.

It has been demonstrated that the small group plan of camping provides a better all out nature program. When a program revolves around small camp groups, a larger amount of responsibility is placed upon the leaders. As a result, there will be a more rapid

increase of acquiring knowledge and skills by the leaders. In the small group setup the campers are working and learning together. They have a feeling of interdependence, and the program is theirs.

When campers venture into the out-of-doors, a learning experience should take place. The method of lecturing and simply transmitting factual information is not the best method. The leader should hold back information to a certain degree and lead the campers to discover things on their own.

The important thing is to arouse curiosity. Identification should be the last thing. One does not need to know all the technical answers to all of the questions which may be asked on a nature trip. Many answers about what you want to know may be solved by the asker from reference materials which should be taken on field trips. Method is more important than fact. Knowing how to find the desired information is very important. A leader should have the courage to say "I do not know". It is important, however, to have the information when it is needed.

Along with learning and observing nature, it is also important to know how to use native materials. Building an oven out of clay, lashing and building structures from reeds, grasses, and saplings, making an egg beater out of a four-pronged pine branch, using burls for cups and bowls, twigs for chopsticks, and many more articles can be made from native materials as a part of an effective nature program. Even in places where these materials are not readily available or there are restrictions, it is always possible to find native materials of some kind. One must be observant and resourceful.

The leader often meets discouragement and even opposition in carrying on a nature program, but there is always something worth-

while in every situation if we will but look for it. The leader should remember that respect for the out-of-doors is as important as knowledge about it.

Some of the reference materials which might be used in connection with nature programs are:

1. The Audubon Society's list of materials on nature.
2. "Web of Life" by John Storer.
3. "Guide to the Out-of-Doors - The Forest Community".
4. "The Golden Nature Guide" series.
5. "The Strand that Grows" and "The Strand that Breaks" films produced by the Encyclopedia Britannica.
6. "Nature Crafts" (new book) by Mrs. Janice Nickleburg
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The names and addresses of the people who participated in the workshop are as follows:

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