

Ten Days of Teacher Education Out of Doors

By E. D. PARTRIDGE, L. B. SHARP, and W. G. VINAL

THOSE WHO are familiar with the writings of Dallas Lore Sharp may remember his treatise, "Five Days and an Education," published in Harpers in the middle twenties. In this delightful

and stimulating summary of his education the author concludes that although he went to school for nineteen years, "an appalling length of time," he received his real education in five different episodes which he describes in some detail. The major changes in his life came as a result of certain experiences that were capitalized upon by adults who happened to be present at the time.

Several times Mr. Sharp asks wistfully what can be done to give all teachers something of this quality that will help them to look for opportune moments in the lives of young people so that such rare experiences can be multiplied and that educational method will not rest so firmly cold on lesson books, assignments and grades.

It may be that an answer has appeared to this need for new education for youth and teachers. At any rate, thirty-two student teachers from the six state teachers colleges of New Jersey met in a ten-day Camping Education Institute last June. They participated in a series of experiences designed to give them this very approach to teaching—an approach that rests basically in the belief that education can be a joyful as well as constructive experience and that youngsters can be educated in the out of doors.

The institute was organized and conducted by National Camp of Life Camps, Inc., in the Kittatinny Mountains, at the request of the New Jersey State Director of Teacher Training. Unlike most courses of this type there were no classes, no fields of specialization. Rather there was a rounded and full program of outdoor living, nature education, adventure, recreation and inspiration. So wholehearted was the response of the students to this approach that it seems advisable to pass on the general outline of approach for what it may be worth. Who knows, this may be the beginning of a real movement to train prospective teachers to use the out of doors as a part of their teaching material!

The authors of this article are well known in the fields of camping and education. E. D. Partridge is author of *Time Out for Living*, L. B. Sharp is Director of Life Camps, Inc., and "Cap'n Bill" Vinal is familiar to all readers of *Recreation*.

The students who participated varied in age, experience, home background, and ability. Some were recent graduates, others freshmen just beginning the course of teacher education in the state.

Nearly half of them were planning to serve as counselors in summer camps in the summer. Several had never been in camp before and one or two had never slept in the outdoors, and yet they were about to go forth as teachers to inspire youth.

According to the evaluations by the students themselves the ten days gave them unforgettable experiences and demonstrated the value of teaching through meaningful patterns of experience. Every part of living was designed to have meaning. Meal planning, shelter construction, nature explorations, evening programs, Sunday vespers, overnight trips, creative handcrafts were all part of the pattern. Typical of the evaluations by students are the following:

"To me, as a prospective teacher, this course has helped bridge the gap that so often exists between camping and school work. I have learned that by careful integration camping can be made a vital and almost necessary part of the school work. Many children have practically memorized a text book and yet when the time comes to use that knowledge under actual working conditions, they are hopelessly lost. I believe that each child should have the right to actual camping experience almost as much as he has the right for actual schooling. Therefore, how can we as teachers provide this right if we ourselves are not prepared to do so?"

"When I came to camp I expected to learn the usual camper's knowledge of building fires and learning how to make camp trails. Instead we have gotten many, many times that. Not only did we learn fundamentals, but we learned them from the necessity of needing to use them. To illustrate, I might mention our experiences of cooking our own breakfasts and suppers out of doors. Even after the cooking of at least seven meals out I was still as thrilled and surprised when the last dinner was edible as I was when the first time our salmon loaf went the rounds twice and we were still longing for more."

What kind of a program gave young people this feeling about outdoor living? Perhaps the content

of the course can be set forth even if the spirit cannot.

Trips of Discovery

After 7:15 breakfast the group usually met for a forenoon "session" with "Cap'n Bill." These sessions were designed to give the students a progressive series

of experiences in exploration and induction. After a careful buildup together they would separate into smaller groups and go in search of various things. Care was taken to include the whole range of teachable material in these experiences rather than to limit them to subject-matter demarcations. Biology, entomology, ecology, psychology, history, and sociology were evident as the students explored an abandoned farm, read the history of a stump or trudged into an ancient bog. Perhaps one of the biggest discoveries of all was that one could have real fun without turning a radio dial, driving a car, or going to the corner movie. Many of the students brought tennis racquets, party dresses, and spending money which gathered dust for ten days while they were out living real experiences which cost nothing. These morning explorations included the following:

Thursday—The Wood Alphabet. Collecting and making miniature boards from chestnut and white oak by use of saw and axe. Obtaining a pine and oak board. Finding examples of wormy chestnut, quartered oak, hard pine floor, veneering, and plywood in the library. Understanding the construction of the building and furniture.

Friday — Stump Scouting. Cooperative group work interpreting the life history of the tree, number of forest fires, how and why the men cut the tree, and numerous other

It would not be surprising, it has been suggested, if the ten-day Camping Education Institute which was held last summer in the Kittatinny Mountains of New Jersey should prove to be the beginning of a real movement to train prospective teachers to use the out of doors as a part of their teaching material.

vital items evidenced by the tree stump. An adventure in scientific reasoning. Each group elected a spokesman to present the story of the stump they had studied.

Saturday—More Nature Problems. Carrying the idea of problem solving a little further. This

time the nature problems in one small camp area were analyzed. A bee tree was cut for honey, chestnut trees reproduced by coppice and cut for railroad ties in the first World War, a raccoon den in a hollow chestnut, a woodchuck observation post on top of a hurricane oak, and evidences of prospecting for clay and gravel were assigned to five groups who presented their findings as proof of logical thinking. They were amazed at the wealth of material just outside a camp kitchen.

Sunday—Trip to a Deserted Village. The students pronounced this "one of the most exciting" adventures. They probed old cellar holes, studied abandoned orchards, collected escapes from the herb garden, inspected stone walls, figured where the barn, well, woodshed, horse garden, pasture, and cornfield had been. They composed a story about the trip to the grist mill, to the Pike to see the stage coach, and to Port Jervis. The various resets

Future teachers exploring the wonders of the big 320 acre bog of Labrador scenery



were woven into a story before the whole group. New terms such as submarginal, resettlement, state forests and recreation, and rural relief were clarified. They called it "functional pedagogy."

Monday—Bog Trotting. An adventurous trip to the big 320 acre bog of Labrador scenery—walking in spongy sphagnum moss, climbing over submerged trees and through thickets, seeing aphids (ants' cows), poison sumac, rhododendrons growing wild and in full bloom, through waist-high cinnamon fern, studying insectivorous plants, pitcher plants, and otherwise exploring this unusual natural phenomenon.

Wednesday—The Appalachian Mountains. Type rocks of the vicinity were presented to help the students understand the "Roof of New Jersey." The students then went afield to collect type specimens. The geology and physiography was emphasized that they might get more out of a proposed trip to see the sunrise. They then analyzed the way the various rocks had been used in building roads and fireplaces.

Thursday—Sunrise Trip to Kittatinny Ridge. The first sunrise for all of them. Study of topographic

This Indian cook out was followed by the famed "Indian Friendship Night" ceremony

The Indian Friendship Dance which is referred to was described in an article entitled "The Indian Give Away," published in the November 1941 issue of *Recreation*. Reprints of this article, together with another describing Katchina Dolls, may be secured from the National Recreation Association. Price, fifteen cents.

map in preparation for tomorrow's hike. They had had acquaintance with trees, rocks, glacial phenomena, and maps, and physical preparation as a basis for the more strenuous adventure of the next day.

Friday—Map Trailing. Following down Parker Run via map and compass, a training trip for cross-country hiking with topographic map. This five mile trip was as strenuous as they could do although some clamored for a fourteen mile trip to High Point. It was, also, as complex a map trip as they could take. Some stopped at the Girls' Camp (a quarter of a mile away) to inquire the way and hinted for food.

The Art of Preparing Food

The preparation and serving of nourishing food is an art that all people who wish to enjoy the outdoors should acquire. Outdoor food need not be difficult to prepare—rather there should be real fun in the preparation of the food and more fun in eating it. To help the students gain some of this art a wide variety of experiences was included in the ten days. Besides cooking several of their own meals in the small camp groups, there were the following special eating events:

Buffalo Steak Roast. Learning how the Indians prepared buffalo steak is an interesting experience itself, but to cook steak on a deep bed of coals after preparing it under the direction of Cap'n Bill is something to remember. The steaks were thrown in a deep bed of coals, turned once by long-handled forks and when done brushed off with witch-hazel twig brooms made for the occasion. After a journey through a melted pan of butter the steaks were ready for sandwiches which included pickles, tomatoes, sweet onions, and relishes to suit individual taste.

Indian Cook Out. Fried corn bread, stew in an iron kettle, birch tea cooked in front of an Indian tepee, and fresh fruit is a tempting combination for hun-



gry campers. Committees were assigned to prepare the various parts of the menu and all cleaned up after the feast. Care was taken to plan for balanced and nutritive meals. After the meal came "Indian Friendship Night," described in more detail below.

Progressive Supper. Each small camp of about eight people prepared one course of the evening meal and the whole group moved from one camp to the other in the course of the evening. Fruit cups, cold slaw, meat patties with buns (pickles, relish and onions to taste, the meat had oatmeal added to make it go further) and homemade ice cream appeared at the appropriate time. Homemade ice cream was so new an adventure that the students froze it solid before they got around to turning it.

Cold Suppers. Sunday evening afforded an opportunity for a delightful spread of cold-cuts, salad, crackers, cheese, and fruit. Served buffet style, this permitted the cooks to have their Sunday afternoon off.

Evening Programs

The aim of the evening programs was to furnish a variety of inexpensive experiences which would provide wholesome entertainment and recreation. These programs grew out of the environment and traditions of National Camp, but they could be utilized in any outdoor setting with equal results. In many cases the evening program was related to the serving and eating of food in some unusual way.

The Buffalo steak roast, for example, was followed by typical western games, songs, and stunts. There were whip cracking, roping, and circle games followed by cowboy songs by the whole group.

The night of the Indian friendship dance, the Indian meal was followed by Indian dancing, stories and finally the friendship dance which is an experience few of them will forget. This program consisted of a dance in which members of the group gave their friends presents they had made and friends were expected to return a gift of approximately equal value. This is an authentic Indian custom and a delightful social experience.

The final evening of the institute was given over to a barn dance at which American folk dances held sway. With music from a washboard, harmonica, and piano, the group responded to calls of "swing your pardner," "allemand left with the cor-

ners all and grand right and left around the hall." They had been given some preliminary instructions on square dance formations so that although most of them were new to it they fell into the rhythm readily. After the dancing there was singing around the fireplace with a guitar accompaniment.

Outcomes

The question might be raised as to whether a ten-day experience such as this can have any permanent effect upon the teaching methods or educational philosophy of these students. This question would be hard to answer scientifically, and yet there were many evidences that there was real carry-over. First of all, the students had a great time. This can be inferred from the fact that they voted unanimously to extend the institute and many of them wanted to stay all summer. (One graduate actually signed up for the six-week graduate course which followed.)

Other evidences was to be found in the student evaluations which were written before they left camp. One can understand a certain amount of enthusiasm for an experience of this kind, but their letters indicated a general appreciation for the objectives that were behind the institute. When a student writes a statement such as the following something has happened to his philosophy of education:

"It is quite frequently hard for me to believe and realize—and I am a social studies major—that the things related in our history books are events that really happened. For the most part they are stories of which I learned the facts and then promptly forgot them. When you can read historical facts through, for example, tree stumps, with the evidence before your eyes, there is something you won't be forgetting very soon. American history could so easily be made so much more meaningful to so many children if it could be taught by the exploration method in the out of doors."

"I am quite sure that my own teaching experience next September will be enriched a hundredfold because of this institute. More than any methods course has yet demonstrated have I been enabled to see the vital part that experience plays in the learning process. It is a searching challenge to any teacher to be the skilled and adequate guide of a child; to stay in the background and allow the child to do the learning by his satisfying his needs in useful activity."

The real proof of success came when the students went back to their colleges and convinced their presidents of the values in such an experience. Plans have been definitely made for a two weeks institute this year.