

# 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.*

**By L. B. SHARP**

Director, National Camp, Life Camps, Inc.  
New York, N. Y.

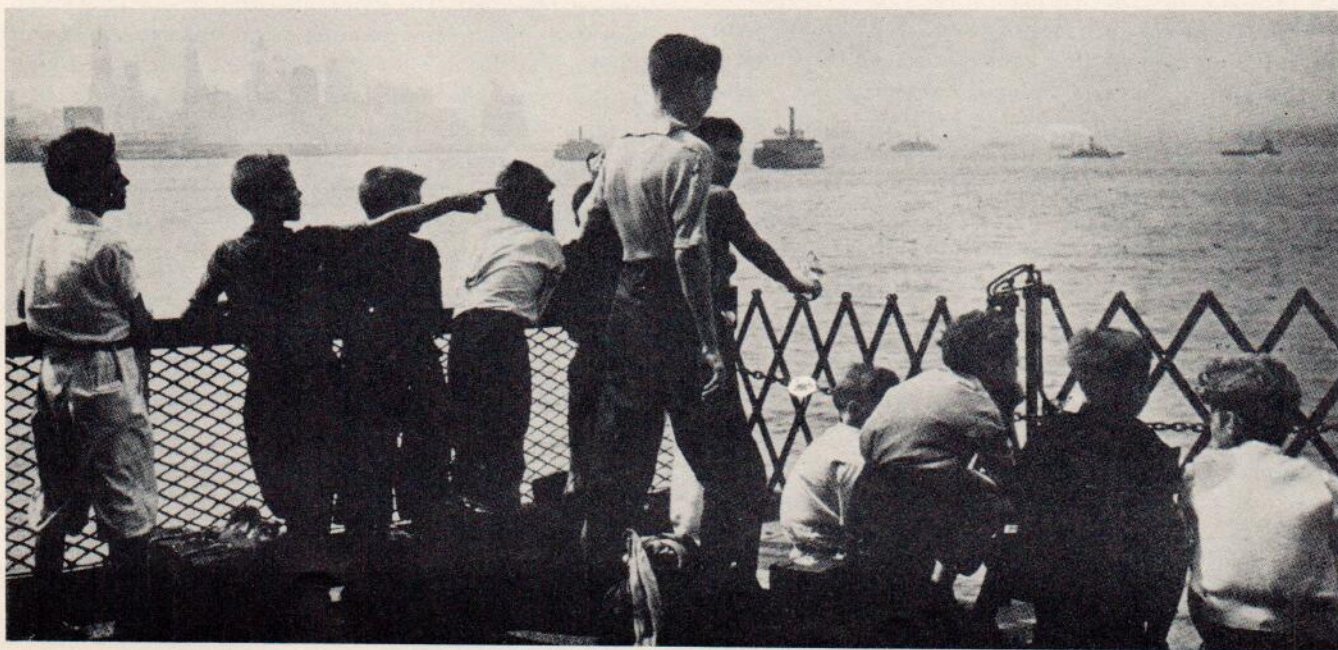
OUTDOOR education places the main emphasis upon learning through direct experience. How can we really know or understand a thing unless we experience it directly? We sing about "rocks and rills and templed hills" to stir our patriotism and increase understanding of country, but we cannot really *know* 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 technical-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 exploratory 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 curriculum were also taught inside these buildings. Furthermore, teachers were educated for their jobs at collegiate 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 teachers, 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 summarized 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 community, and in school camps. Many school administrators and teaching staffs could be introduced into the outdoor way of teaching by conducting a special institute 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



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

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 experiences 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 buildings 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, education.

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