

National Convention A. A. S. A.
Atlantic City, New Jersey
February 19, 1963

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OUTDOOR EDUCATION CENTER:

A Projection for Universities, Colleges, Teacher Institutions, and Community School Systems.

Introduction

In presenting this topic, as I have captioned it, the thought is that it would be more helpful to make a brief coverage of the background, some basic essentials for a center for outdoor education, and then to project a basic plan for a center for outdoor education. This would serve as a model or example for any school system, university, or teacher education institution.

It is difficult for anyone to analyze the situation and make a projection without more or less injecting his personal experience into the situation. I trust that I may be permitted to do this. It is felt that to enumerate some experiences might serve as a guide for other endeavors and be of assistance to those getting under way at this time initiating programs in outdoor education throughout the country.

Acutally, there is little that is new in educational thought and procedure. Rather, the dilemma is finding out new ways to do more effectively some of the things that have been done in the past.

Background and Basic Essentials

Historically speaking, our first effort in this direction spanned a four-year period from 1925 to 1929. There was extensive research and experimentation made into how learning takes place - directed especially to conditions in a favorable outdoor setting and using objective criteria for educational principles and procedures.

Emphasis was particularly given to how one learns as an individual, with another, and in groups of three, four,

or more. Research revealed that the larger the group, the less effective were the results accruing to each individual.

The next task was to relate these learning experiences to the school curriculum and to see what subject matter might be implemented more effectively and efficiently when related to direct experience in the out-of-doors, wherever it was feasible to do so.

Consequently, the next logical step was to project this plan and concept into the school situation. This was done by establishing an outdoor program which was at first called the School Camp.

The concept of the School Camp and its proposal as a part of the school program was received favorably by many educators. On the other hand, the idea was met with frowns and vigorous objections from some private and organizational people and groups. An example of this protest was clarified in a panel discussion on school camping in 1927 in New York city. The idea that schools should be interested in land remote from school and called a camp was, to many, far-fetched and almost ridiculous. Youth possess a natural yearning for the vigorous outdoor exploratory life and they respond readily and happily to it. The movement grew rapidly. It was soon discovered that some things originally learned in the classroom became a part of the school youth much more quickly and effectively through direct experience outside. Our nation's schools are today, some thirty years later, utilizing literally thousands of acres of land as an integral part of the educational program.

Further experimentation and research with this concept were carried on in a number of areas around the country.

An intensive study of the school drop-out problem was made as it affected the New York city schools. In cooperation with the late Mr. George Chatfield, head of the Bureau of Attendance and later a member of the New York city school board, we spent a period of years in studying and working with the juvenile delinquency and drop-out problems. These experiments were conducted with the cooperation of the schools in direct camping situations. As a result of this research we found that most of the school youth needed activities that challenged them and gave them opportunities to use their hands as well as their minds. It seemed as though they were suffering directly from an experiential anemia in the school program. Startling results were obtained with enough of the delinquents and pre-delinquents to give direction to some new concepts and procedures in education.

Since these youth in difficulty and dropping out of school were in the minority, it was decided that a larger effort should be made with the total school youth and

program as the best means of getting at the delinquency and drop-out problem. Therefore, outdoor education and school camping were directed toward the total school population and curriculum rather than dealing with only a select few. This does not say, however, that the schools should ignore what outdoor education can do for the delinquent and the pre-delinquent.

In 1934 and 1935 I made extensive studies of over fifty school courses of study at the elementary and secondary levels to determine what part of the subject matter areas could best be acquired by direct experience outside the classroom.

As a result of this six-month research, some definite conclusions and directions for the future of the outdoor education program were evolved.

It was projected, on the basis of these studies, that the first place to start was in the immediate area of the school - just outside the school door for five minutes, for ten minutes, for half an hour, for an hour, or for a part of the day - provided there was careful planning for the efficient use of this time. Classroom study through experience outside should first be a part of the application of this program. Out of these studies and experience evolved the term, now in common use, OUTDOOR EDUCATION.

The keynote of outdoor education is efficiency in learning.

The basic thesis rests in the established premise that we learn most through direct experience. We learn faster, we retain longer and have a deeper appreciation and understanding of those things we get first hand.

Much of the subject matter in all areas at all levels can most effectively and efficiently be learned through direct experience, wherever it is feasible to do so outside the classroom.

Further, outdoor education divides the curriculum on the basis of where things can best be learned. It is a common sense method of learning. It is natural; it is plain and direct.

The basic principal which underlies the implications of outdoor education for all subject matter, in all areas of study, and at all levels is:

"That which can best be learned inside the classroom should be learned there.

That which can best be learned in the out-of-doors through direct experience, dealing with native materials and life situations, should there be learned."

Outdoor Education comprises all learning that can best be carried on in the out-of-doors. It's as simple as that. It is not a subject, and to use it as a subject is using it incorrectly. It's really a method, it's an environment and climate for learning. Further, it is not a department and should not be housed in any one department. It is integral with all areas of learning.

All of these educational efforts must result in the joy of living and learning in the out-of-doors. Whatever happens to the person engaging in the educational procedure, must be basically satisfying. We can't conceive of any real learning taking place unless there is, surrounding it, an atmosphere of pleasantness and interest. If these direct experiences in the out-of-doors during school time are satisfying, they will have greater significance and application for use beyond school time.

There is not full and complete learning until a concept is accompanied by a change in behavior. There is no separation between thought and action. One has to act to put thought into operation, and if there is an action, there is a thought behind it, so the two are necessary and they do take place. Outdoor education brings thought and action back together. Things take on more significant meaning and arouse curiosity and desire for inquiry, for research, for reasoning, and for reading and investigation.

Fact and truth may seem to be final, but in reality they are changing concepts as further research and reasoning take place. They may not, therefore, always be constant. They will depend considerably upon man's skill, reasoning power, and direct research. They may change more often in thought than in reality.

It is not contended in the philosophy of outdoor education that there is conflict between reality and philosophy. They are interdependent. Without man, there would be no philosophy. Without reality, man would not exist. What is recorded in the archives and is constantly being added to comes as a result of man and his power to reason.

The library and books will always be the essential reservoir for the storage of what man discovers. No one has observed any scientific expedition using a geiger counter to probe among the stacks in the library. There still remains the necessity for scientific research to determine the soundness of the program in actual practice.

In 1947, a cooperative research project was set up after two years of preparation with New York city schools. This was during the administration of Superintendent William Jansen. The purpose of this study was to see whether or not some learning could be acquired more quickly and effectively in a favorable outdoor environment than in school.

This experiment lasted for nearly a month and involved two classes of children, a fifth grade and a seventh grade. Control groups were set up with corresponding fifth and seventh grades. The research technique was the matched pair. Both groups were evaluated according to standard school achievement tests in many subject areas, both before and after the experiment. The control classes stayed in school and studied their lessons in the usual way. The experimental, or camp, group followed a non-structured program. They did not have formal lesson plans, nor did they have any classes similar to those in school. They followed a totally experimental program based on explorations, using the immediate surroundings. They did, of course, have counselor guidance, a program, and library materials to use. At the end of the month, both groups were retested. The test results of both groups greatly favored the experimental camp group, measuring far ahead of those who stayed in school and studied their traditional lessons. Naturally, the results were convincing; otherwise, I would not have been able to make this statement. In fact, I might not have been here today.

As a result of these and other findings a great need presented itself; that of providing advanced leadership to spearhead and deal with this phase of education.

In 1940, National Camp, sponsored by The Outdoor Education Association, Inc., was founded for the specific purpose of preparing advance leadership in outdoor education.

There were many colleges and teacher education institutions which began experimentation in the preparation of leaders in outdoor education.

In the early 1940's for a period of 5 years, groups of students and faculty members from the six state teachers' colleges of New Jersey attended National Camp for ten-day institutes in outdoor education. Subsequently, New Jersey developed its own center for outdoor education at Camp Wapalanne, New Jersey State School of Conservation. This outdoor education center is a cooperative venture between the State Department of Education and the New Jersey Department of Conservation and Economic Development. All students from six of the state colleges spend a minimum of one week in this outdoor setting to become oriented with the environment and to see how science, geography, history, music, art, literature, and other areas are interwoven and interrelated, before they become sorted, cataloged, and divided into separate departments.

The New York state teachers colleges in 1942 started a similar movement sending groups of students and college faculty to National Camp. Their programs took a slightly different turn, but in most of the institutions today, they have their own programs in operation in one form or another.

It seems needless to give time to a report of happenings around the U. S. concerning outdoor education.

There seems little doubt that a substantial rooting has taken place. The movement is well-established, well-advanced, and is gaining momentum.

There is hardly a state or county where some beginnings have not been made. There are many places where shining examples of progress and new approaches have developed.

To the extent that the program is based on the efficiency in learning and kept as an integral part of the curriculum, rapid progress will be made. It is well known that in Michigan, California, Illinois, New Jersey, and so on around the U. S. advances have been made. Time does not permit the detailed outlining of some of the more exciting developments in all of these and other states.

The critical need today is for more land for learning. Federal, state, and county land is being acquired to add to our school systems. It is right that our federal and state land holding agencies should make land available to our schools for educational purposes.

If the American public is to love and appreciate its land and to use it properly, American youth should have an opportunity to learn this as an integral part of school.

As we look back on the development of our educational system, the one-room school house held only a stove and the three R's. Eventually, a library was added. This was good and made real sense. Later laboratories, the gymnasium, play fields, and sports fields, were added and, as we well know, the old school pump and the two toilets were moved inside. The hitching post was replaced by bicycle racks and parking spaces. Now, education is on wheels and moving to the open spaces.

Today we should not consider a community school plant as complete unless it has a minimum of 500 acres of land owned and managed by the school itself on a year-round basis.

A Projection of a Center For Outdoor Education For Southern Illinois

Through the Educational Council of 100, a community educational agency concerned with education and community affairs of the thirty-one counties in southern Illinois, and Southern Illinois University, The Outdoor Education Association, Inc., was requested to make a survey and develop a master plan for the use of a tract of land of approximately 1,400 acres located on Little Grassy Lake. The land is owned by the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

Adjacent United States Forest Service property is projected to be utilized in the program. When plans are completed, it is estimated that there will be at least 2,000 acres in the total project.

A similar survey and master plan was made for Southern Illinois University in 1952 for the University's 1,000 acre center on Little Grassy Lake.

Some of the basic principles of outdoor education have been presented earlier in this paper. They are also included in this report and master plan.

A summary of how the program is to be implemented should be of interest and help. The main items are as follows:

This outdoor education center will serve on a day-use basis for the public schools within a 25 to 30 mile radius. The year-round facility for housing and program is a part of the plan. Therefore, school groups can spend longer periods of time when desired.

The resident groups can come from greater distances since they will stay for longer than a day.

Some 37,000 or 38,000 school youth can be accommodated during a school year.

An essential part of the total plan and program is that of leadership preparation. Southern Illinois University will assume responsibility for the training program and will establish leadership training teams who will visit the various communities and work with teachers through extension courses. The purpose is to help them use the immediate environment of the school and prepare for day-use and longer periods at the new outdoor education center.

These visiting teams will use our mobile educational trailer which is equipped with program aids and food-preparation facilities. This unit can be used at the school or transported to the center for outdoor education or to any place of interest.

Each school would be encouraged to build its own trailer. It can be used by many school groups and serve the community in other ways. Facilities will be provided at the center for the storage of these mobile units as well as facilities for replenishing their supplies and in other ways taking care of them.

A new unit, the mobile service trailer containing storage space for tools and supplies and including toilet facilities will be available for each of the groups in a central area.

Southern Illinois University plans to establish a center for leadership preparation which will be located within the larger tract of land. This will provide facilities for students who are preparing to be teachers and for other study groups from Southern Illinois University.

The plans call for a full-time, over-all director; an assistant director; and faculty teams for the mobile educational units.

These training groups will be extended to communities within the 31 counties of southern Illinois. Also, the permanent facilities will be provided so that teachers and others may come to the outdoor education center for leadership preparation and experience with school classes.

It is projected that the land be so divided that no more than one class or a maximum of 50 students and teachers would be in one area at a time. In this way, as many as 10 school groups may be accommodated on a one-day basis without over-crowding.

There is projected a central administration building, dining-hall lodge, multi-purpose health center, program library, visitors' center, year-round facilities for student groups, and a rural life center.

There are two large sections of heavily wooded land of nearly 300 acres to be set aside as woodland sanctuaries and not to be developed in any way.

Two small lakes are projected to be established within the property. Little Grassy Lake borders on at least 50 per cent of the property on the north side.

A second center of similar character is in the long-range plans to be located in the vicinity of Southern Illinois University's campus near Edwardsville, Illinois.

Eventually nine other areas are projected across the southern part of the state.

These are the highlights of the plan involved in this report. It is hoped that this will be of interest and help in extending the program of acquiring and using more land for learning.