

The Bulletin

OF THE NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF Secondary-School Principals

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Outdoor Education for American Youth

Prepared by a Committee

of the

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THE CONTENTS OF THIS BULLETIN ARE LISTED IN "EDUCATION INDEX"

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THE NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF SECONDARY-SCHOOL PRINCIPALS

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1201 Sixteenth Street, N.W., Washington 6, D. C.

Introduction

OUTDOOR Education is a common sense method of learning. It is natural; it is plain, direct and simple. The principal thesis 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.

This realistic approach to education rests squarely upon the well-established and irrefutable principle of "*learning by doing*."

Scientific research and psychological testing have been going on for many years to determine how learning actually takes place. Not only was the Dewey theory of "learning by doing" established as sound; it was also proved that through direct experience, the learning process is faster, what is learned is retained longer, and there is greater appreciation and understanding for those things that are learned at firsthand.

Thus it becomes crystal clear that much of what is called for in the standard curricula of the public schools can most effectively be learned in the out-of-doors. Moreover, learning in the open is a mutual process. In the classroom, subjects tend to become artificially separated from one another, as do pupils from teachers. Regaining touch with the real world leads to their becoming reunited. People and things are seen in their true relationships; facts and ideas that are most important emerge in perspective.

While school camping is not synonymous by definition with outdoor education, it rests on the same premises and is recognized as one of the forerunners in its development. It furnished the laboratory in which testing could be done, processes refined, leadership identified. Experiments were conducted which related camp learnings to the progress of the camper in school. Results were conclusive—and amazing.

More than a decade ago we conducted further experiments to see whether some learnings could be achieved more quickly and effectively in a favorable school camp environment than in the classroom. Scientific testing used in these experiments did prove that the camp setting was more effective for certain learnings. The outcome of these significant findings and the pilot programs which followed went far to establish the validity of outdoor education.

Today, outdoor education, including school camping, is accepted as an integral part of the total school program. Few administrators doubt its vital role in the curricula of their schools. It is generally accepted that every school youth should have, as a regular part of his school experience, opportunity to adventure and explore—thus solving for himself some of the questions posed by life outdoors.

Educators believe it is good for our boys and girls to experience at first-hand something so direct, so plain and simple and natural. Perhaps that is why as you turn the pages that follow, you will find them documenting more than half a hundred plans by which American schools are now seeking to fit outdoor education into their existing patterns. They are committed to a principle and to a way of life.

L. B. SHARP