

The Public School Camp

*Some Considerations of Camping
Activities in Public School Systems*

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Camping Activities

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N. Y.

Reprinted from THE CAMPING MAGAZINE, March, 1935
Second Reprinting, January, 1944

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THE success of the public school camp will depend upon the extent to which the camping activities can be made an integral part of the total educational program of the school. They should expand no faster than they can intelligently and scientifically justify their existence. The educational virtues of well-conducted camps have been demonstrated and these outcomes are of paramount help in molding character and giving more wholesome expression to youthful personalities. The problem to face is that of integration, dove-tailing and weaving into the total life of the school that benefit which camping so effectively contributes outside of school time.

It should be made clear that the public school camp should not duplicate the types of camps which we now have outside of the school. It should not set up a camp primarily for charitable welfare or corrective purposes or be a place for various kinds of abnormals and delinquents. Camping is an effective measure for children who may rightfully belong in some of these groups, but the public school camp should be conceived and planned primarily on the basis that it is designed to fit in with the *total* educational scheme in school.

The school should not dodge its responsibilities with those special groups which present particularly difficult learning problems. The function of the school is to educate all. Camping can make an effective contribution to all of these various special groups as well as to other school children.

The chief reason why schools should develop camping as part of their programs is that camping, when properly carried out, is so thoroughly sound educationally and so effective in its outcomes. It should not be looked upon as merely adding another subject to the curriculum but rather as a totally *different* approach and procedure in the education of the child. This camp plan of education has been well pioneered by private and organization camps all over the country, and the schools should not fail to take advantage of what the camps have already accomplished educationally.

Once the value of the public school camp is established as a part of the year-round school program the splendid work of many organization and private camps will more likely be recognized as an accepted part of school procedure. This would be a significant aid to the whole camping movement.

Educational philosophers, administrators and teachers, all recognize the weaknesses in the school curriculum and are working to make radical but sensible changes. The school has been too much insulated from life as it goes on outside of school. There has been too much abstract material unrelated to the life of the students. There have grown up "hand me down" requirements from the college level, and the elementary and high schools have struggled to



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meet these requirements rather than teach the child what is best suited to his interests and abilities on his particular level.

There have been many progressive changes made in the school curriculum. Scientific experimentation has greatly altered curriculum content and teaching methods. A goal toward which educators would like to strive is well expressed by Dr. Harold G. Campbell, Superintendent of New York City Schools, "From the beginning it has been the dream of educators to conduct the training of youth amid natural surroundings. The way of nature is the way of life, and since the purpose of education is to teach children how to live, the ideal school is the school that is closest to nature."

The school camp will make possible a continuous unbroken educational experience throughout the year. The gap between the closing and opening of school can be bridged. In fact a very different plan of school time could be arranged, relieving much congestion and improving instruction. The public school camp should not be merely a *continuation* of school at camp. On the contrary, camping and all that it stands for should come into the school. Many of the values of camping would be lost if we made

it a repetition of school procedure and a compulsory matter.

What then are some of the considerations which must be taken into account? It will be necessary to make a careful and thorough analysis of the contribution that camping makes to children and how it is brought about. Also, these values must be arranged according to various levels of learning, in order that they may be matched with those within the school.

It will be necessary also, to study the curriculum of the schools at the various levels and fit their values into the life and activities of the camp. We must then see that more regimentation is not added to that which already exists in too many camps today.

EXPERIENCE METHOD

A great deal of improvement has been made in methods of teaching in our schools because of newer educational philosophies and scientific experimentation. New techniques and devices have been developed and curricula reconstructed. The newer interpretation of the meaning of education itself, has been an important factor in these changed methods. One of the most widely accepted definitions is that education is living, it is *life* itself, and not merely a preparation for life, therefore, it is



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not sufficient in any phase of education to teach abstractions.

It is not possible for one to grasp the full import of a fact or situation, until he himself has experienced it. Perhaps we need an E.Q. (Experience Quotient) to help in our educational program. Some children have an experience range so narrow that they cannot comprehend things they read in their books or are told to them by their teachers. In this connection, Dr. George J. Ryan, President of the Board of Education in New York City, states "The plan is to attack the problem of environmental handicaps on a new front. There are in the schools of this city thousands of children whose contacts with the world are limited pretty largely to the neighborhood in which they live. Their only transportation beyond the border of their surroundings is by means of the radio and the motion picture."

The teacher may dramatize, use many teaching tricks and devices, but the result is limited. To appreciate music most, one must have some knowledge and skill in music. A fuller appreciation of art is had when one himself paints, draws, or models. One has to see and feel, and become a part of a happening in order to understand its full significance. When personality changes take place as a result of one or more desirable experiences, we call this *education*. Camping, therefore, represents more completely than anything I know, this *Experience Method* of learning.

Camping is a way of living. It is real. The camper is segregated from his usual environment and is independent and on his own. Ev-

everything he does is related to his own life. If he eats, he has to help prepare his food. He also is confronted with matters of personal and environmental hygiene in a way that causes him to do something about it. He has to take care of his own sleeping arrangements. He is entirely responsible for all his own knick-knacks, treasures, and other belongings. There is no one to pick up his clothes for him. What is done in camp is not an abstract thing, it is a life of experience of a sort that cannot be had within the four walls of the school room.

Little have we realized, perhaps, that the whole program of camping has been built and shaped around the school vacation time. Schools close the last of May or June, and the legal educational program stops, not to begin again until the first of September. In the minds of the school authorities, teachers and the students the summer is a period of vacation. It is freedom from school work. It is freedom from following prescribed courses of study in the various school subjects.

What the child does during the summer is not in any particular way related to his winter work. There seems to be no recognized measurement of the educational progress of the children during the summer months. Much real education takes place in the summer time because children are having experiences of a wide range and are not taking part in them in any prescribed or set order, but as they unfold in their own lives.

These youngsters come back to school fresh from vivid experiences and they spend a good share of the school year in expanding and enlarging their memories and appreciations of their summer activities. Actually then, a summer in camp or in a similar type of activity becomes a very great part of the total education of the child and in many cases it becomes the greater part.

Various public and private organizations which conduct camps, have had to arrange their camp programs to keep clear of school time. Consequently, practically all the camping activities take place in July and



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August. This has prevented the development of the year-round camp. In most parts of the country, camps could operate from May through November. It is indeed unfortunate for our children that so many excellent educational facilities lie idle during the larger part of the year—an educational waste. Camping is as beneficial in winter as in summer and the public school camp should be open all year.

CRIME PREVENTION

Camping can make a definite contribution to the program of crime prevention. This problem has been approached from numerous angles and by many different groups. It is a paramount problem in the public school. A chief factor in effective crime prevention is to keep sustained interest of the children in worthwhile activities which challenge them. There is no one who has consecutive leadership or supervision over the child as he moves about in home and community life. There are too many avenues of escape for him who is prone to take advantage of them whenever they occur. It is too difficult to carry out organized work in the cities and to keep track of each child as he changes from one activity to another.

Camping has a decided advantage in that there is supervision of the campers for a long unbroken period of time. A camper spends more time at camp in two months during his waking hours than he spends in the public school in an entire school year. Continuity of leadership and supervision is most essential in dealing with maladjusted children, therefore a long season of camp experience of from six to twelve months would be essential for this type of child.

A significant experiment was conducted at Life's Boys' Camp, at Pottersville, New Jersey, last summer in cooperation with the Board of Education of New York City. Sixteen problem boys from the Parental School were paroled and sent to this camp for one month. The story of what happened to these youngsters is significant in considering what camping can do for the problem child. The details of this story cannot be taken up here but the question asked by one of these boys, says much—"Do I have to be committed to the Parental School next year in order to come back to camp?"

SOME EDUCATIONAL CONSIDERATIONS

Camping at its best is an educational process, but it does not follow necessarily that all camp programs are productive of the desired results. If a camp program aims to carry out a sound educational program, it must be built upon sound principles.

Camping is a way of living. The first process of building a sound program is to select the activities from among those camp experiences which are related to living in camp and are likely to appeal to the campers as worthwhile; second, individual differences of campers should be taken into account in all that they do; third, the activities should be based upon specific needs of the campers and carried out with the least amount of restriction.

Camping is made up of real life situations. Campers remain in the one place over a long period of time and are largely dependent upon their own efforts for their personal care and safety. They are in an environment where there is the least amount of controlled supervision and are free from usual city-life compulsions and regulations.

One of the prime errors of the school is that of requiring activities, perhaps desirable enough in themselves, but at a time when there is little or no desire on the part of the child for the activity. Life in camp on the other hand, consists of the unfolding of activities and opportunities as they fit into the feeling and needs of the child.

Camp life presents most favorable opportunities for learning, because campers come of their own choice, thus removing the disadvantages of compulsory attendance; they have a chance to choose their activities; they are under continuous supervision for long uninterrupted periods of time in an isolated situation and are thereby influenced chiefly with what happens within this free and yet controlled environment; social and economic barriers are practically eliminated; individuals and groups are stimulated in many ways to provide their own occupations, and recreations; they live a more closely related and richer group life. It is not possible in all of this, for one to hide himself. Sooner or later his real self will come to the front. There is no escape.

Further, the camp situation confronts one with actual life situations where practically no rules and regulations are already set up to

govern conduct. Thus, learning how to live together in a real situation becomes fundamental in the development of civic consciousness. Out of all the various problems which arise in the natural process of caring for oneself and adjusting to the environment, we are chiefly concerned to leave permanent impressions, understandings, habits and appreciations.

To acquire the love of the out-of-doors, the ability to live safely and happily in the open, the 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. The public school has a splendid opportunity to take a most progressive step. It should wait no longer.