
Outdoor Education

Constant contact with the mystery of life and the loveliness of nature, as well as the tenderness called forth in ministering to these beautiful objects of God's creation, tends to quicken the mind and refine and elevate the character; and the lessons taught prepare the worker to deal more successfully with other minds. . . . God's healing power runs all through nature.¹

Nature and its many lessons hold a primary place in the inspired scheme of education. Jesus used lessons from nature in much of His teaching. Ellen White clearly believed in education in a natural setting and in using natural lessons to show God's grace and power and the destructiveness of sin.

Today many educators advocate that children spend less time within their classrooms and more time studying and learning in meaningful, real-world situations. Outdoor education is a means of translating this often-theoretical idea into an exciting educational experience for boys and girls. Far more than just a camping trip, outdoor education is a series of carefully planned

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firsthand experiences that offer children opportunities to increase their knowledge and understanding of the natural environment. In addition, the setting is most conducive to developing positive values and attitudes toward education.

Participation in an outdoor-education program helps students to better understand God's creation, the incredible interrelations that exist there, and the effects of their actions upon it. These, for example, are just a few of the potentially serious problems we face in our environment:

- Various kinds of pollution may irreversibly damage human and animal health.
- We are losing the use of our open land because of abuse by commercial interests.
- Chemicals in the food chain could produce disease and genetic defects.



Studying specimens from the river.

• Diminishing supplies of non-renewable energy resources could force dramatic changes in present life-styles.

An outdoor-education program creates unique opportunities for developing student-student and teacher-student relationships. Since the program goes beyond the time limits of the normal school day, the opportunities available cannot be readily duplicated anywhere else in our educational system. The results are often subtle and hard to measure, but they are nonetheless real and valuable.

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A teacher does not need to be a Master Guide or an accomplished naturalist to hold an outdoor-education program. Basic requirements include professional skills and dedication. Although it definitely takes time to plan and organize such a program, those who have been involved agree that the rewards are well worth the effort.

The following list presents general objectives for using outdoor environments as an extension of the school curriculum:

1. To provide children with a clearer perception of the incredible complexity and balance within God's creation.

2. To cultivate the children's appreciation and concern for the natural environment and the effect of people's actions upon it.

3. To provide children with firsthand experience in using scientific processes such as observ-

ing, measuring, classifying, and hypothesizing.

4. To make the school program more meaningful by applying the knowledge and skills acquired in the classroom to real-life situations.

5. To help children learn to live together democratically and responsibly, considering the welfare of the total group.

6. To improve relations among students and between children and adults.

7. To improve children's use of leisure time by exposing them to both man-made and natural leisure-time activities.

8. To cultivate an esthetic appreciation of a historical event by studying the site where the phenomenon occurred.

9. To motivate children to develop positive attitudes toward learning through varied experiences in the natural environment.

Planning

Planning the outdoor-education program requires the most time and effort. The quality of the



Preparing lunch.



Studying a historical plaque.



Visiting a local cemetery.



Visiting a dairy farm.

effort put into this planning is directly related to the success of the program.

Planning an outdoor-education program involves a large number of variables. A major consideration is the students who will be involved in the program. In a school with multigrade classrooms, the program must be tailored to students of varied ability levels. The same techniques used in the multigrade classroom will be effective in the outdoor program. Grades five to six are generally considered ideal for outdoor-education programs, but because groups in multigrade classrooms tend to be smaller and more familiar with one another, success can be expected from combinations of students

from grades four through eight.

The site of the outdoor school is also a basic consideration. Church or conference-owned camps are most often used. Scout camps or camps owned by other denominations are options if reasonably priced. State or national parks usually do not have permanent shelters for groups, but often offer exceptional nature centers and trail systems. Rangers at government-owned areas are very helpful if arrangements are made well in advance, it is demonstrated that the group is organized and orderly, and the facilities are used during the off-season. However, a successful outdoor school is still possible even if such facilities aren't available. I once helped conduct an outdoor school in a local farmer's "lower forty." Though some additional preprogram work was re-

quired to prepare proper sanitation facilities, it was a valuable and successful experience.

The group must be adequately supervised. A ratio of one adult for each eight to ten children is usually recommended. Energy and a willingness to work with children are higher priorities than expertise in subject areas. College students are often available and interested in such programs. Pastors, principals, supervisors, and school board members can also be called upon. Positive results can be gained from allowing children to see these authority figures in a uniquely relaxed setting. Involving the adult staff in planning not only relieves some of the teacher's burden as chief organizer, but also ensures that the staff is aware of the overall aims of the program. No matter who is included in the staff, a prime requirement is enthusiasm. Spreading from the leader down, this quality can mean the difference between success and failure.

Preparation of Students and Parents

Early in the school year parents and students should receive a series of letters outlining the goals, activities, and expenses of the program. During the first few years the curriculum is presented, it is often helpful to hold a public meeting to discuss plans and answer questions raised by parents. Written permission from parents should include information such as special medical and dietary needs of the child, and people to contact in case of emergency.

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Photos: Clockwise, from upper left: Sawing wood for a campfire; a blind awareness walk; searching for insects; students singing during worship.



try to encourage and praise whenever possible. To help accomplish this, I purchased some decorative notepads at the local Christian bookstore. I've found that sending little notes of encouragement or praise not only builds rapport but also assures the students that I'm concerned. And I enjoy getting notes back, too!

8. *Manners.* I find that treating the students as adults greatly enhances our relationship. This seems reasonable—they *are* adults! True, many do hang onto juvenile tendencies, but acknowledging and encouraging their adult side seems to bring that side out in my students. I try not to interrupt or speak condescendingly. I've

A lack of fairness breeds anger, diminishes credibility, and destroys the student's desire to integrate faith and learning.

learned to say "I'm sorry," "I made a mistake," and "I was wrong." I try not to become defensive or aggressive when challenged about exam questions or scores. I try not to change the schedule without asking permission or taking a vote. As a matter of courtesy, I religiously observe breaks and end class on time. I'm also learning to laugh when the joke is on me.

Last, but most important, I strive to be fair. Nothing will damage rapport more than for students to feel they have been treated or graded unfairly. A lack of fairness breeds anger, diminishes credibility, and destroys the student's desire to integrate faith and learning.

These, then, are some ways I've found to make learning a Christian

experience for the student. Our perfect example is Jesus Himself. His ministry of caring and pastoring went far beyond His teaching ministry. He taught and ministered to the daily needs of His hearers.

I can never play the role of savior (Believe me, college students won't let you!), but I can minister to them through my teaching. That very integration on my part seems to provide the basis for student integration of faith and learning. *(Part II will appear in the December-January issue.)*

Outdoor Education

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Students are usually eager to participate in outdoor school. To be sure this enthusiasm carries over to on-site activities, students need to be prepared for the outdoor curriculum before they leave the classroom, and must understand what behavior standards are expected in the areas of health and safety. Teaching new concepts amidst the distractions of the outdoor environment may be difficult, but if a strong background is laid in the classroom, seeing those concepts come to life in nature creates one of the strongest learning environments possible.

A common misconception about outdoor education is that it is almost singularly related to the science curriculum. In truth, every subject in the daily schedule can be easily adapted to the outdoor-education program.

Applications of Subject Matter

Science may be the easiest subject matter to translate into outdoor education. Endless possibilities can be found in the fields of astronomy, ecology, forestry, physics, and geology. Activities can be as elementary or complex as warranted by the needs and abil-

ities of students. The following are some suggested science activities:

- Construct a nature trail. This could include identification of plants, trees, flowers, rock formations, soil types, et cetera. Object lessons could also be drawn.

- Develop a wildlife feeding station with observation blinds.

- Measure the depth, width, rate of flow, and volume of a stream and project its capacity to support human life.

- Follow a prescribed course by use of a compass.

- Construct an elementary wind vane, barometer, hygrometer, and wind gauge.

- Observe, record, and predict weather.

- Identify small animal tracks and make a plaster cast of them.

- Locate and name major star constellations.

- Observe the effect of moving water on the earth's surface.

- Measure the *ph* level of a pond or stream.

- Collect and identify insects.

Mathematics. Outdoor education provides numerous activities that give practical applications of mathematical skills. The routine processes of addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division become valued means of solving real-life problems. This transference of mathematical skills from the textbook to three-dimensional problems that students can see, touch, and manipulate leads to a high level of cognitive learning. The following is a list of sample activities:

- Learn to estimate distance by pacing.

- Measure the diameter and height of a tree.

- Find the height, length, width, and area of a building on the campground.

- Determine the average morning and evening temperature at the

weather stations.

- Estimate the cost of gasoline required in traveling to and from camp.

- Take a field trip to a grocery store and utilize unit prices to identify best values.

- Using fractions and mixed numbers, construct signs, posts, and benches for the nature trail.

Social Studies instruction can also be improved through outdoor education. Concepts studied inside the classroom take on new meaning when students observe them enacted in real life. Outdoor education need not be restricted to a camp setting. Although many activities related to social studies can easily occur within a typical camp environment, other valuable experiences can be obtained in the vicinity of the campsite. The following are examples of both types of activities:

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- Visit a cemetery and note information on gravestones.

- Draw a map, to scale, of the campground.

- Take a walking tour of a small area focusing on its origin, history, and contemporary trends.

- Visit an old church.

- Travel to a historical site and afterwards discuss the outcome and significance of the event.

- Use a topographical map to identify basic land structures of the campground.

- Visit a local industry.

Language Arts is an area that is surprisingly adaptable. Outdoor school creates experiences that inspire even slower students to express themselves in writing. Beyond the obvious possibilities of poetry and creative writing, a multitude of other more pragmatic activities can be integrated into the program—activities that students will hardly recognize as “school work.” Some suggestions follow:

- Keep a daily journal of activities and reflections.

- Write a story describing an experience at outdoor school.

- Write a poem about one creature or object observed at outdoor school.

- Collect stories and assemble a newspaper to distribute to parents and friends after returning to school.

- Write letters (friendly, business, or appreciation) in preparation for or as the result of outdoor school experiences.

- Compose paragraphs describing objects to be identified on a nature trail.

- Conduct an interview (in person or by telephone) with a resource person (weather forecaster, forest ranger, map maker, biologist, et cetera).

Religious Activities. Christian educators will readily see the immense potential for religious activities within the framework of outdoor education. Where can students learn more about the loving power of God than through His second book? Outdoor school also allows students to actively participate in spiritual activities that are rarely available within most classrooms. Some sample activities include:

- Composing an object lesson from some object in nature.

- Having a treasure hunt using clues from the Bible.

- Having students organize wor-

ships and campfire programs.

- Emphasizing the witnessing potential of field trips.

- Finding living examples in nature for Christ's parables.

- Having students prepare a Sabbath service to which the parents are invited.

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Other subject areas can also be incorporated into an outdoor education program. *Reading, Spelling, and Handwriting*, although not described individually, play definite roles in the previously discussed subject areas. Outdoor school also offers numerous possibilities in the area of *Art*. Here are some suggested art activities:

- Construct a drawing depicting three dimensions, using the horizon as a point of reference.

- Create a Biblical scene using natural materials.

- Make a silk-screen print using ferns or leaves as stencils.

Outdoor education would not be complete without *Music* activities. These might include:

- Having students plan and lead a song service for worship or campfire.

- Having individuals or small groups give special music using various instruments.

- Having a group sing.

Physical Education is a natural element of outdoor education and should not be ignored. Special consideration should be given to the many noncompetitive physical activities that do not require traditional recreational equipment. The following is a list of physical education activities:

• Construct an obstacle course, or if one already exists, use it.

• Move from place to place in the woods without being observed, while at the same time observing the wildlife.

• Implement an individual growth project for the period of outdoor school (jogging, swimming, hill climbing, et cetera).

Since eating is an essential part of outdoor education, concepts from *Home Economics* are also put into action. Here are some examples of home-economics activities:

• Help plan a menu for the program.

• Aid in the purchase of food.

• Help in preparing and serving meals.

• Assist in miscellaneous clean-up and maintenance activities in camp.

Clearly then, all areas of the curriculum can be easily and naturally supplemented by outdoor school.

Curriculum Materials

Many prepared lessons in these curricular areas are available. Public school systems that run outdoor school programs usually are willing to share their prepared lessons with teachers beginning outdoor-education programs. Basic outlines for some subject areas can be found in the requirements for Adventist Youth honors. Books on the subject can be found in major libraries. One of the best I've discovered is *Tips and Tricks in Outdoor Education*.²

The rationale, objectives, and sample activities presented here are just a stepping-off point to an outdoor adventure. Although activities will be influenced by locational factors, the teacher should not confine himself to subjects with which he feels comfortable. Part of the reward of outdoor education comes from the personal

challenge of investigating new areas of study. Outdoor education requires dedication, careful planning, and organization. The teacher must anticipate the unexpected and be prepared to change even his most carefully laid plans if the situation requires it. Yet if the teacher prepares properly and lets common sense guide him in the field, outdoor education can be an experience that students will always treasure and one the teacher will look forward to repeating.

It is impossible to cite all the benefits of an outdoor education program. Many, such as new knowledge and understanding, can be measured. But the most valu-

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able benefits cannot be expressed tangibly. These result from the interpersonal experiences alluded to earlier. Although the interaction between student and student, teacher and student, and teacher and parent cannot be formally planned like other areas of the program, they should not be neglected. The impressions students and parents form from these experiences will remain long after the memory of formal activities fades.

Outdoor education is not the answer to all education problems, but it is a useful tool, and it works.

(For additional information about schedules, curriculum, and various lists and forms for outdoor school, send a self-addressed, stamped envelope to the Editor, JOURNAL OF ADVENTIST EDUCA-

TION, 6840 Eastern Ave. NW, Washington, D.C. 20012.)

FOOTNOTES

Ellen G. White, *Education* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Publishing Assn., 1903), pp. 112, 113.

Malcolm D. Swan, *Tips and Tricks in Outdoor Education*, 2nd ed., (Danville, Illinois: The Interstate Printers and Publishers, Inc., 1978).

Composition

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Many teachers are beginning to realize that "in the typical assign-write-evaluate process there is really little or no actual teaching."¹ The roles of assignment-giver and then product-evaluator are unsatisfying for the teacher primarily because they are not teaching roles at all.

The composing process isolates both student and teacher. "The student does most of the teaching inasmuch as he alone is present as the paper is being developed, he alone sets specific problems and tries out alternative solutions, and he alone generalizes on this experience in order to develop concrete principles of writing for his future use."¹³ In the traditional classroom, after the teacher gives an assignment and illustrations, there is no more "teaching" unless the student comes in for a conference. The student's actual writing process is hidden from the teacher. Similarly, what the teacher does with the product—correction of errors, evaluation of ideas, and comments on style—is also a private process.¹⁴ This traditional situation involves little actual instruction or shared experience.

Unbalanced Emphasis

Emig also found that the imbalance in the type of writing asked of students produced much work that was vacuous and distanced. School-sponsored or extensive writing such as expository prose