THE term "outdoor education" has been a convenient handle for denoting educational programs and processes involving the use of the outdoors. The outdoor environment, ranging from wilderness preserves to man-influenced areas, has been used by the schools as a setting for implementing curriculum objectives. Teachers and children have historically ventured beyond the classroom for brief school-ground walks, field trips, outings, study excursions, camping, and extended travel experiences. Other social agencies and organizations, too, that have an educational role in the community have provided programs involving the use of the outdoors.

Taking school groups outdoors has served as a means of tearing down subject matter walls, provided a key to breaking out of lockstep patterns, and offered opportunities for learners to be freed from excessive verbalism and abstraction. Proponents of outdoor education have been enthusiastic in pointing out the releasing and opening-up effect of outdoor experiences. However, as with any idea, outdoor education needs to be viewed in relation to long-range goals, priorities and directions, and other valuable ideas. The concern here then is for the appropriateness of outdoor experiences in helping unlock the schools. Due consideration must be given to such questions as: Help for what? To what ends? For what person or group?

Outdoor education can mean more than just a type of activity or a description of where learning takes place. The key to defining outdoor education functionally is in utilization. The administrator’s and teacher’s role calls for giving leadership in the effective use of the outdoors as an integral part of the curriculum. This interpretation implies that the users will consider the questions of how, what, when, and for what intent in planning and evaluating outdoor experiences. Outdoor education can involve processes applicable to all grade levels and to many disciplines and content areas.

Where an early elementary unit may focus on becoming aware of the natural environment through perceptual and sensory experiences, a secondary social studies course may be concerned with local problems of pollution and their
HELP UNLOCK THE SCHOOL

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Effect on man. In both examples, appropriate outdoor experiences may help in developing deeper personal meaning and appreciation.

As an organized movement, outdoor education has existed over the past thirty years. Efforts in such areas as camping, nature study, conservation and science, recreation, aesthetics, health and group work have been closely associated with this movement. A strong expression of outdoor education grew out of the educational implications in summer camping during the nineteen-thirties, and led to the development of several school camping programs around the country in the decades that followed. In professional teacher education, the outdoor education movement has found expression in programs that aid in understanding methodology and learning processes, and that provide opportunities for practice teaching experiences.

An outdoor education rationale serves to differentiate and call attention to the values of using the outdoors for instructional purposes and for preparing individuals to make the best possible use of the outdoors for themselves and society. Conditions today that create a need for help through outdoor education include the misuse of natural resources, human problems associated with crowded living conditions and lack of open space for leisure time, and deteriorating physical and emotional well-being. Educators recognize the need for more deliberate development of rational processes and affective sensitivity.

Trends in Outdoor Use

The inception of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 has created a new surge of interest in outdoor experiences. The impetus of Title I and Title III funds has spurred the development of several planning and operational proposals, resulting in projects that focus on the use of the outdoors. Some of these projects have outdoor education as a major emphasis while others call for the use of outdoor experiences as an essential element. Answering the question of how and for whom outdoor experiences under Title I and Title III are perceived as being helpful provides a clue to unlocking the school. A survey of recent proposals indicates that some innovative and exem-
Example outdoor education programs have (a) identified selected participants rather than an entire school population, (b) worked cooperatively with other community agencies, and (c) recognized basic value in experiencing reality directly through involvement.

The following trends seem to be evident in outdoor programming under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act:

Outdoor laboratories. The laboratory concept, already accepted within the school building, can be applied to outdoor areas and sites as well. A vast laboratory for direct contact in the world of reality exists outside the school building. In more natural areas, the discovery of man’s relationship to his environment can take place in a broad interrelated context. Laboratories planned as nature centers, farm centers, and outdoor resource centers serve as supplemental “classrooms.”

Extended school year. Education is becoming more of a year round function for which schools are assuming increasing responsibility. The summer months afford excellent opportunities for operating outdoor programs both within the city on a day basis and in resident outdoor facilities for extended periods of time. Programs are provided for recreational as well as academic goals. Special programs already exist for such groups as culturally deprived, advanced science students, and low achievers.

Natural science and conservation. With current attention being given to developing new science curricula that emphasize conceptual development, the use of outdoor experiences is a natural! Opportunities for direct experience in phases of problem solving, including observation, sensory awareness and experimentation, are abundant in the outdoors. Science interest coupled with an
increasing concern for conservation of resources largely account for funded projects in outdoor education having a major focus in these areas. Work-learn experiences and mobile science units are unique approaches being tried.

*Cultural enrichment and community resources.* A number of projects include field trips and excursions to gain experience with community activities, places and events. Providing teachers with in-service programs to explore possible uses of all community resources is an important part of some projects. Title I outdoor programs help to provide a broad experiential base as motivation for school studies, including reading readiness and language arts.

*Resident outdoor education.* Both Title I and Title III proposals have included projects that provide for a week of living and learning in a resident outdoor education center. Resident outdoor education, sometimes referred to as school camping, affords students a more integrated type of learning experience in which cooperative group activity strengthens social support for desirable behavior changes. The extended period of time in a children’s community allows for functionally integrating study, work, recreation, and healthful living under the guidance of teachers.

Increased activity in outdoor education today, highlighted by federally funded projects, has been attributed to several factors. But perhaps most basic to continued development is the recognition of a sound basis that has at its core the belief in the unity of nature and man’s place in that unity. The outdoors as a setting for education, especially in more natural areas, exemplifies a uniqueness that abounds in beauty, mystery and power. Man as a part of a universal unity is challenged to discover, analyze, interpret and use that which surrounds him.

In the world of reality the learner is encouraged to gain a deeper awareness of himself and his environment. Educational leaders have the responsibility for making outdoor experiences meaningful within the school program. The teacher is one important key to unlocking the schools so that pupils may become actively involved in experiencing the outdoors.

The teacher is essential in helping learners gain personal meaning while in the outdoors and in tying learnings together later in the school. Administrators and supervisors also can help by providing leadership in exploring ways in which outdoor education can become a truly integral part of their own community’s curriculum.

**References**


