THE OUTDOOR APPROACH IN EDUCATION

George W. Friedrich

"The trees and the skies and the lanes and the brooks
Are more full of wonders than all of the books.
And always out-doors you can find something new;
You never are lacking for something to do;
You never hurt others, or get in the road
In taking the pleasure by nature bestowed;
For there's room on the shore where the great tides rolls,
And there's freedom and peace that are good for your soul;
There's hardly a way you can have so much fun
As in being out-doors with the brooks as they run,
With the birds as they fly and the stars as they shine,
With the drift of the years as they rise and decline.
It doesn't cost much and it doesn't take long
To get your ear tuned to the mighty world's song.
It brings in its train no unpleasant regrets,
And the farther you go, the better it gets.
So come where the wild things are waiting outside
And let your soul taste the joys that abide."*

Written almost in doggerel form by Professor James G. Needham, Chairman of the Department of Entomology, Cornell University, this poem is stamped with the age-old love of man for the great out-of-door world. Man lived in close touch with nature for many thousands of years. More often than not his bed was the grassy ground and his cover the trees and "the stars as they shine." He found his environment held more than enough "pleasures by nature bestowed" for himself and his whole community of people. He learned through close attention the nature and habitats of the wild life, the beauty of the earth's covering mantle; was awed by its astronomical and geographic forms. He saw, heard, and felt the wonder all about him. Time and again his soul tasted joy in its simplest and purest form. Consciously or unconsciously he must have held communion with the great spirit that motivates the universe.

It is a sad commentary on modern civilization that, while man's life has been made immeasurably more comfortable and secure, he has turned his face quite completely from the world of nature. It was not inevitable that he has to choose between the heritage of the awareness of nature

*P. 3 Out of Doors, MANN AND HASTINGS

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and our modern civilized advantages. Both could have been and still can be enjoyed more fully. People do, on occasion, emerge from their homes, office, and factories, pushed by some half forgotten urge, to browse in the open. Moles, pocket gophers, bats, and other denizens of underground galleries and caves at times leave their places of security and venture into the bright out-or-doors. Like man, they blink, experience a feeling of discomfort, and retreat to their holes again.

Women as a group seem to live more happily within doors than men. This is due, perhaps, to the age-old urge for security both for themselves and for their children. In recent years some, however, have been able to overcome their timidity and now partake in hazardous canoe trips and exhilarating mountain-climbing expeditions. Poor man, who works nearly the year round within factory and office walls, keeps alive the hope that for one or two weeks he can relive a few of the experiences of his prison-free ancestors. He orders seed catalogs, plans his garden, oils his fishing gear and hunting equipment long before vacation time arrives. He reads volumes of out-door sports magazines and imagines himself the hero, or at least a participant, of every fishing or hunting trip described. He walks across the portage with the writer and balances himself on a rocky trail with the mountain sheep hunter. An editor of a sportsman's magazine has stated that the success of his business depended not so much upon the intrepid outdoors man as upon the factory and office-tied arm-chair subscribers. The great majority of men still want strongly to go where the moose's call is heard and the muskie rises to the pull of the line.

Should this instinct be curbed? Do other considerations for a worthwhile civilization necessitate its elimination? One would think so from the absence of reference to the world of nature and its accompanying pleasures as taught in our schools. Even when curricula contain such teaching units, minor consideration is given them by teachers both in the grades and high schools.

Our schools are manned, or shall be say womaned, almost entirely by the gentler sex. Yet fifty per cent of the children are young males. It can be said with minimum contradiction that the great majority of the teachers have not been prepared even in the simplest elements of the out-of-doors. For example, how many women teachers even know that minnows are not the young of game fish? To many women, animal life, especially the cold blooded members, is revolting. Rather than use a boy's pet toad or turtle as a nature lesson they too often order him to "throw that nasty thing away", and then keep him after school for punishment. Woman teachers as a rule have not brushed up against nature in the raw in their childhood as have the young of the opposite sex. After asking students on numerous occasions how many had ever seen a live crayfish (so-called crab) more than 75 per cent of the young women answered in the negative. Yet they are everywhere in streams, ponds, and lakes. Contrary to common conception, it is the teachers who determine largely what shall be taught. What is being taught does not adequately recognize the boy's point of view. True, male educators most often determine the curriculum but it is the woman teacher who selects and interprets. This is
not intended to white-wash the curriculum makers as the units interesting to the out-door boy are too frequently absent.

How can this disparity between the grade teacher's outlook and training and the boy's be lessened? It would seem that the study of nature forms and the habits and methods of obtaining them should be given more emphasis. More reading material on these subjects suited to the boy mind needs to be written. The field trip should become a normal procedure of teaching. Every teacher-training institution ought to be giving a larger amount of time to the teaching of these subjects. Live and other museums should play nearly as important a role on the college campus as the library, and surely more than the generally accepted type of biology laboratory of today. These improvements would help to overcome the apparent deficiencies in the training of women teachers who now control the molding of the youthful male population. A great step in advance would be taken if men were to teach in the grades. A mind-set, wrong as it is, has been developed over the past hundred years that women can train the young mind more skillfully. Nothing can be further from the truth. Children in nearly all other nations have been taught successfully by men teachers. Why are boys sent to private schools? It isn't because boys are necessarily incorrigible. Many healthy out-door minded boys resent, though not always consciously, the training they get from an all-woman faculty. Parents, not always consciously either, agree with the boys' ruminations. If the money is available, the boy goes to a school that is male oriented. A great part of the education in academies takes place out of doors. Public schools might take their cue from this. Men will enter the grade teaching profession when they no longer will be expected to work for salaries of single women. Thousands of young men who are now returning from war, or soon will be, shun the profession chiefly because they would have to take salaries on which it would be impossible to care adequately for a home and family. Contrary to common belief, young men like to teach young children, especially boys.

The school system of the future, properly to train all of its children, should ultimately employ as many male teachers as female. Their slant on life surely is an necessary to a growing mind as that of a women.

The State of Minnesota comprises 53,000,000 acres of land and water but its towns and cities fit into a relatively few thousands of acres. Yet, only dribbling amounts of the child education deal directly with nature's covering of the remaining millions of acres. Myriads of lakes and ponds with their rich nature lore dot the grain and tree-covered land. If the criterion that a child is educated when he meets successfully with his own environment is true, the education of the children of Minnesota leaves much to be desired. Generally speaking we don't teach about it; we just ignore it. For too small an amount of the educative process concerns itself with the all pervading nature forms and their ways.

On the other hand the children of New York and Brooklyn are educated to meet with the needs and surroundings of the side-walks of their cities. Little time is spent here on the great out-doors. That, to a large extent, would be extraneous education as most of the children never expect to live any length of time in the country. Much of our, and other mid-
western states', educational impetus comes from the crowded cities of New York, Boston and Chicago. Much of it is of secondary importance to a people who gain their living from the soil and seek their recreation in our lakes and forests. It would seem that now is the time for Minnesota educators to strike out boldly to establish a curriculum or series of local curricula that will fit our particular environment more closely. Much material that is functional in a city child’s growing life will also be of equal value to the children of rural Minnesota. Much of it is of such questionable value, however, that whole areas can be eliminated without appreciable loss. Now is a good time to do a little weeding. Each teaching unit and its sub-divisions should be closely scrutinized by the teacher herself as well as by an impartial jury of parents, businessmen, farmers, and educators. Unproductive weeds should be pulled from the educational garden. A home gardener tries to balance the amount of vegetables planted to best meet his needs. There is a small bed of lettuce and radishes for early summer consumption, beans, peas, and carrots for later use. He might plant a few hills of pumpkins, but it would be rather foolish if half of his garden were turned over to pumpkins. Likewise our school curriculum must be evaluated in terms of balanced utility. Through elimination and re-evaluation of traditional subject matter ample time may be allotted to a serious study of the out-of-doors and its attendant social significance.

When actual research figures are unobtainable one may use percentages to indicate an hypothesis or hunch. Man acts normally from his emotional instincts perhaps 85% of the time while 15% of his reactions are due to thinking. Yet in our educational institutions the emphasis is so reversed that man must react intellectually 85 per cent of the time, with only scant opportunity for healthy emotional reactions. Education should be fitted more closely with our biological inheritance. Some real advancement has been made along this line in recent years in the field of music, art, and physical education. If man is controlled largely through stimuli of emotional character, then this phase of education should have much greater emphasis whether we as teachers wish it or not. It is here that the sociologists, the biologists and physical educationists can find a common ground upon which to work. Nor should the psychologist, professional educationalist, industrial art teacher and even historian be indifferent to the possibilities their fields might offer.

Some educational areas in which all of these educators could improve their effectiveness are:

1. Beautification of all school grounds.
2. Development of play areas on school grounds in conjunction with the beautification project.
4. Acquisition and development of camping and out-door nature teaching situations.
5. Development and supervision of swimming facilities.
6. Acquisition of buildings for craft work and development of a large craft program.
7. Organization of summer playgrounds away from the school.
8. Organization of summer choruses, band concerts, and pageants.
9. Development of use of schools during the summer. Each school system to have an out-door summer school with voluntary attendance, its teachers to be paid on an all year round basis.
10. Introduction of story telling and children's forums in which they discuss any problems of importance to children including the school, town, or city, state, and nation.
11. Establishment of and care for a tree and shrub nursery.
13. Organization of trips to natural, historical, and recreational sites.

Throughout all of this work emphasis should be placed on the stewardship of all our resources. Without becoming pedantic the teacher should instill in the growing mind the oneness of God and all of His bounties.

The teaching load should be adjusted to allow for full participation not only in these activities but also to assist in Boy Scout, Girl Scout, Campfire programs, and in summer recreation programs and the general beautification of city and town.

Let us consider one such project, rural school ground beautification.

Unkempt grounds are the rule rather than the exception in rural areas. It almost seems that the early rural school boards made an effort to find the ugliest piece of land on which to build a school and then made it more hideous by crossing it with wagon tracks and piling several years' supply of wood about the building. No doubt there always were worried souls who would have liked to improve the looks of the school grounds but were deterred because of the anti-social members of the group and because they just didn't know how to go about it.

The Hill School near Ronneby was built on just such a barren piece of ground. True, the school building was a good one, but the two acres on which it stood were most unattractive. Fortunately Hill School was able to change this unattractive area to a place of beauty because:

A majority of the farmers and their wives and children believed that beauty was as important to them as to city dwellers.

They had a rural teacher who believed that children would do better work and live happier lives if surrounded with good lawns, trees, shrubs, and flowers.

This school was affiliated with a Teachers College, a college that fortunately had a rural supervisor with vision, administrative ability, and ability to sell a good idea to the school board and parents of the children.

A college faculty member understood landscaping and had previously supplied the college with an extensive nursery that could be drawn on.

Under the leadership of the supervisor all of these elements were put together into a pattern with the result that a once ugly school yard is now landscaped to a thing of beauty.
Many varieties of evergreen trees may be obtained without charge from the State Division of Forestry for planting on school grounds. A list of some of the most practical trees and shrubs of proved ability to withstand the rigors of Minnesota winters and have beauty value are given here.

For Wind Breaks:

- **Shrubs**—Rose, Nankin Cherries, Common Lilacs, Willows.
- **Trees**—Norway (Red) Pine, Jack Pine, White Pine, Cottonwood, Red Cedar (Savin Juniper)

For General Beautification:

- **Trees**—Norway (Red) Pine, Douglas Fir, White Pine, Colorado (Blue) Spruce, Red Cedar (Savin Juniper), White Spruce, Arbor Vitae (White Cedar), American Elm, Balsam Fir, Lombardy Poplar, Silver Maple.

A public-spirited teacher who has learned the elements of beautification can change her school environment from what it is to what it should be. True, she might find the school board reluctant at first and have difficulty in getting sufficient planting stock, but these obstacles are more imaginary than real.

Perhaps nothing gives a teacher, school board, parents, and children so much downright satisfaction as to turn an ugly place into something beautiful and useful.

While all of this trains the children in healthy emotional responses, the mind incidentally becomes trained, too. The emphasis in this work, however, must be placed on feeling and inspiration. We arrive at the intellectual through the emotional.

Teachers Colleges ought to be making it their business to acquaint the prospective teacher with a healthy out-door philosophy of beauty, or at least to give him the social concepts and the simple technics of landscaping that can be used by the socially minded people of the community in which the young person will teach. Children spend the greater share of their working hours in the school plant. Ugly surroundings surely are not conductive to lofty thinking, or, to put it another way, lofty thinking does not result from ugly surroundings. Where beauty is absent, intellectual processes are stunted.

Although a school ground beautification project is just one of many projects and is only a beginning in bringing inspiration to the children of that school, it is the beginning which will give the whole community a spur to realize a fuller and more abundant life. And what better promise can we have than that we shall live more abundantly?
1. The first plantings.

2. Black dirt for shrubs.

TIMES PHOTO
1. Moving the woodpile

2. Another truckload.
   TIMES PHOTO

3. Fertilizer for garden.

4. Preparation for lawn.
1. Small Norways arrive.

2. Playing horse.

3. Mothers begin the garden.

4. Shrubs get attention.
1. Bordering the driveway.

2. Garden and lawn. TIMES PHOTO

3-4. From the Teachers College Nursery.