RESIDENT OUTDOOR EDUCATION AND THE NEEDS OF MIDDLE SCHOOL STUDENTS

HERBERT W. BRODA

The year was 1823. The place was Northampton, Massachusetts. A group of students from Round Hill School and their teacher, Joseph Cogswell, became involved in a unique method of extending the classroom — resident outdoor education (Bennett, 1972).

Today, 156 years later, resident outdoor education is still utilized as a means of enriching and expanding instructional opportunities. Resident outdoor education programs can be found in all parts of the United States. Although programs can be found at nearly every grade level, resident outdoor education seems to occur most frequently during the middle grade years. Yet, despite its age and the wide extent of its use, resident outdoor education is still not as prevalent as its merits would warrant.

What is Resident Outdoor Education?

For the purpose of this discussion, resident outdoor education is considered to operate when the following conditions prevail:

1. The experience lasts at least two nights and three days. (An optimal length is four nights and five days).
2. Grade levels involved could include any grade, 5-8.
3. The regular classroom teacher is an integral part of the instructional program at the camp.
4. Students are involved in well planned pre-camp and post-camp experiences.
5. High school aides or others living in cabins have been trained for their duties.
6. Emphasis in curriculum and instruction is upon flexibility, discovery, and awareness.
7. The curriculum contains more than only science related topics.

The above conditions are set forth in order to separate resident outdoor education experiences from overnight field trips, sightseeing excursions, unstructured camping experiences, or purely recreational camping experiences.

Why Schools are Involved in Resident Outdoor Education

Schools take part in resident outdoor education for many reasons. Some teachers hope to instill a sense of environmental concern in students; others want their students to appreciate the aesthetic qualities of nature. Expansion of the curriculum in math and science is given as a reason for school camping by some; and still others claim benefits in terms of improved student-teacher and student-student relationships.

Since resident outdoor education is often utilized in the middle grade years, justification for resident programs should be strongly based upon ways that resident outdoor education can meet the needs of middle grade students. If student centeredness is an important aspect of middle grade education, then all curriculum and instruction in the middle grades should reflect attempts to meet the needs of students. A carefully planned resident outdoor education program can provide a setting that is optimal for focusing upon the needs of middle school students.

There are strong indications that resident outdoor education programs may have the capability of meeting many of the needs of middle school students. Alexander, et al. (1969) state that middle school programs should stress personality development, skills for continued learning, and organized knowledge. Eichhorn (1966) feels that middle school learning experiences should foster curiosity, creativity, and independence. Lounsbury and Vars (1978) stress self-understanding, human relations, and problem solving. All of the above factors are compatible with the characteristics of outdoor education presented in the classic work by Smith, et al. (1970).

Resident Outdoor Education and the Needs of Middle Grade Students

A recent study looked at resident outdoor education in the context of curriculum development and middle grade education (Broda, 1977). One segment of the study was concerned with the extent to which resident outdoor education could meet the needs of middle grade students.

The first step in the task was the compilation of a list of generally agreed upon needs of middle grade students. The following writers were used as a source of information concerning the needs of middle grade students: Alexander et al. (1969); Bergmann (1976); Eichhorn (1966); Havighurst (1972); Lounsbury and Vars (1978); Noar (1961); Tyler, Hunt, Flatter, & Marcus (1975); VanTil, Vars and Lounsbury (1967).

Based upon the writings of the above authors, the following list of most frequently mentioned needs of middle grade students was developed:

Academic Needs
- Need to develop fundamental skills in writing, reading and calculating
- Need to learn about the natural and physical environment and its effect on life
- Need to develop skills and interests that can contribute to worthy and satisfying use of leisure time

Physical Needs
- Need to learn physical skills necessary for ordinary games
- Need to develop an understanding of growth changes taking place
- Need to relearn to manage the body skillfully during a period of rapid change in body dimension
- Need to learn standards and practices of good health and hygiene

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Social Needs
Need to develop conscience and moral judgment based on a set of personal values
Need to achieve new and more mature relations with age mates of both sexes
Need to develop a sense of the value of material things and for the rights of ownership
Need to develop skills and attitudes that contribute to effective group living

Psychological Needs
Need to learn an appropriate masculine or feminine role
Need to achieve personal independence
Need for affection, security, and a sense of belongingness
Need for fun and adventure through new experiences
Need for success and recognition (Broda, pp. 56-57)

A jury of ten, active and acknowledged resident outdoor education experts was asked to react to these sixteen needs. They were sent copies of the list and were asked to rank all of the needs according to the extent that they theoretically might best be achieved in a resident outdoor education program. The final ranking of needs is given below.

### Needs of Middle Grade Students That Can Best Be Met Through Resident Outdoor Education

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Final Rank</th>
<th>Needs</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Need to learn about the natural and physical environment and its effect on life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Need for fun and adventure through new experiences</td>
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<td>(tie)</td>
<td>Need to develop conscience and moral judgment based upon a set of personal values</td>
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<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Need to develop fundamental skills in writing, reading, and calculating</td>
</tr>
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<td>12</td>
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<td>14</td>
<td>Need to learn an appropriate masculine or feminine role</td>
</tr>
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<td>15</td>
<td>Need to learn physical skills necessary for ordinary games</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Need to develop an understanding of growth changes taking place</td>
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</tbody>
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### Curriculum Based Upon Student Needs

Persons involved in the planning of resident outdoor education programs should look carefully at the first eight needs. This top half of the ranking list should serve as a foundation for the development of curricula for resident outdoor education.

Very often schools that engage in resident outdoor education develop their camp curricula primarily on the basis of nature study. It is proposed here that curriculum be developed utilizing the list of the top eight needs that can be best met through resident outdoor education. The eight top ranked needs could almost be used as a checklist by teachers developing school camp curricula to insure that the resident outdoor education program is truly focusing upon the needs of the student.

Resident outdoor education can be a powerful approach to use in meeting the needs of students. Though, a five day camping experience won't magically meet the needs of middle grade students, resident outdoor education should be included as one major program that can be used by middle schools to establish a student-centered climate and meet known needs.

### References


Bergmann, S. P. Developing and implementing a drama guidance model to enhance the self-concepts of transcents (Doctoral dissertation, Kent State University, 1976). Dissertation Abstracts International. 1977, 37, 6255A. (University Microfilms No. 77-7811)


