From Local Ag Teachers:

Thoughts in Passing

Why Use The Outdoors In Teaching?

Anything which we learn must relate to something within the realm of our experience in order to have meaning. Without this relationship, knowledge is just an accumulation of facts. It has been known since the beginning of time that we learn best by direct experience, but because of the pressures of today's world we have substituted learning through symbols for this direct experience.

The question then becomes --- are we really learning, or are we just learning about something? An example of how we might learn about rather than truly understand would be a deaf person's study of music. No matter how much he would learn about it, we would have to agree that his appreciation and understanding would be enhanced if he were able to hear the music --- to have a direct experience with it.

To a sixth grade class, "story problems" are the worst kind of math assignment. The students groan and gripe at a problem such as "A six-foot man casts a four-foot shadow. If a flag pole casts a 20-foot shadow, what is the height of the pole?" The same class will jump at the idea of going outside the school building and using the same problem solving technique to measure the height of the school's flag pole. Being involved in a direct experience makes the difference.

Agricultural science, in fact science in general, has "turned off" a majority of our students in schools and has for generations. This has largely been the fault of those of us who have been content to teach "about" rather than become involved in a direct experience. At best we have taken bits and pieces from the real world and brought them into the classroom --- somewhat out of context, and then expected the student to grasp the "whole" concept

Most of us are closely akin to the art teacher who, on a beautiful May day, had the sixth grade class draw from "real life". She had them sitting in the too-warm classroom sketching a worn out tennis shoe sitting on a cardboard box on top of her desk. Just outside the classroom on the edge of the school grounds and in full view of the calss was a strikingly beautiful elm tree with a large rock beside it. Which sketching assignment would have held more interest for these boys and girls? Perhaps the art teacher has been "turned off" by the natural world and didn't even notice the tree.

Dr. Robert D. Herr

Why then should we have agricultural education, environmental education, conservation education, or outdoor education --- whatever you wish to call it --- and why should we have a natural area in the school district to teach it in? All curriculum can and should be involved in this important area of education, both on the high school and elementary levels. As we must be able to communicate, language arts becomes the prerequisite to any experience. Children love language arts in the out-of-doors. Go on a word hunt --- see how many nouns, verbs, and adjectives we can find. Creative writing can be based on the words we have found, the things we have seen, touched, and smelled. Both Art and Language Arts as well as social science come into use as a temporary interpretive trail is constructed. Math becomes more realistic as an acre is stepped off. How large an area did the United States really get for three cents in the Louisana Purchase?

The general population needs to better understand their environment. For generations we have been poorly informed and today's problems have been caused by a lack of concern. We cannot afford to let this generation grow up without understanding their relationship to the total environment.

Action on an environmental problem begins with an interest, so this is what students must first develop. This interest, sustained through qualified leadership and real life experience leads to knowledge and understanding of the problems. Through knowledge and understanding, attitudes are developed. With proper environmental attitudes, concerns evolve. Through these concerns a program of action becomes necessary.

We don't really need an outdoor facility to teach these attitudes --- but it would help One teacher and his students can learn about pollution by collecting all the litter from the school grounds and placing it in a large display case located in the front lobby of their school To add more effect, you can cast a child's hand made out of plaster and have it extending from the pile of trash --- trying to save himself. Or to demonstrate the relation of litter to pollution you can have children place some representative samples of the litter in a gallon jug filled with water. They can set the jar in the warm sunlight and check it every day. After a few days their noses and eyes will tell them how litter can contribute to water pollution. Many more such experiences can be carried out on the school grounds but an outdoor conservation or environmental laboratory could do the job a great deal more effectively and completely.

If today's education is to prepare students to live in tomorrow's world, then environmental education should be given a high priority in the educational offerings of every school district Not only is it necessary to study natural environment but also to learn more about the man-made environment and its relationship to the natural environment.

Man-made environment is everywhere in evidence. Is it not correct to assume then that natural environmental areas are necessary if the proper relationships are to be gained through direct experience?

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Ancient Light

Ancient light is a phrase in English law describing the uninterrupted use of windows or opening for 20 years and barring the owner of adjoining land from obstructing the light received through these openings