

THE EFFECT OF A RESIDENT OUTDOOR
EDUCATION PROGRAM ON STUDENT
SOCIAL RELATIONS

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by

Russell James Irving

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"THE EFFECT OF A RESIDENT OUTDOOR
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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to provide objective data on the effect a resident outdoor education program had on student social relationships. Students' attitudes toward four areas of social living, student-student relations, student-teacher relations, students' attitudes toward sharing and students' attitudes toward working in a group with others, were tested for change due to the effect of a resident outdoor education experience.

In order to evaluate the effect of a resident outdoor education experience on these four aspects of social living a preliminary questionnaire was designed. A pilot study was used to evaluate and revise the preliminary questionnaire. This resulted in the final questionnaire which was used to gather data for the actual study.

Subjects participating in the study consisted of 310 grade five and six students from five public schools in the Winnipeg area. Each of the five schools conducted a resident outdoor education program on separate occasions at Camp Arnes during May and early June of 1975. Students' attitudes toward the four areas of social living were measured on three occasions, five days prior to and the day prior to their departure for the resident outdoor school, and the day subsequent to their arrival from the resident community.

Results indicate that student-student relations and students' attitudes toward working in a group with others were significant at .01 level and that student-teacher relations were significant at .05 level. The resident outdoor education experience did not seem to have an effect on students' attitudes toward sharing.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

One of the most exciting patterns in resident outdoor education that has developed in recent years in the province of Manitoba is the use of outdoor schools for the extension and enrichment of classroom experiences. Many Manitoba teachers have discovered the educational and social values inherent in a resident outdoor education program.

About 300 classrooms throughout the province are using public and private camps (Arnes, Stephens, Wannacumbac, Pioneer, Manitou and Red Rock) for residential programs.¹

A resident outdoor education program is an extended field trip designed to supplement the learning of the many subject matter areas of the school curriculum. The outdoor school provides the setting for curricular experiences that cannot be offered, or achieved as readily, within the confines of the classroom. "The activities at the campsite are as much an integral part of the curriculum as the educational program that takes place in the classroom. . . ."²

¹John Passmore, Outdoor Education in Canada-1972 (Toronto, Ontario: Canadian Education Association, 1972), p. 47.

²Julian W. Smith et al, Outdoor Education (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1963), p. 96.

Resident outdoor education programs enrich, vitalize and complement content areas of the school curriculum by means of firsthand observation and direct experience. The outdoor school program enables regular classes of students, with their teachers, to spend a period of time in an outdoor environment while carrying out a program of learning activities. The activities are planned in the classroom. Practical applications are possible in the resident setting so the experiences are more meaningful.

Extending the classroom into the out-of-doors provides the setting for bringing deeper insight, greater understanding and more meaning to those areas of knowledge which, ordinarily, are merely read and discussed--seldom experienced.³

What a student learns in the affective domain, however, is just as crucial an outcome of our educational system as are the academics of education. Some of Manitoba's schools' goals of education with respect to the affective domain include

. . . the development of a sound moral character
. . . , genuine concern for the rights of others
regardless of race or creed, willingness to act
in the interest of the general welfare, and a
desire ever to improve in those competencies
essential to effective social living.⁴

³D. R. Hammerman and W. M. Hammerman, Teaching in the Outdoors (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Burgess Publishing Company, 1964), p. 1.

⁴Laidlaw School Administration Staff, "Laidlaw School Handbook 1975-1976" (A handbook containing information on divisional philosophy and general school regulations. The information is compiled each year for Laidlaw School of Assiniboine South School Division No. 3: Winnipeg, Manitoba, September 1975), p. 5.

To help individuals cope with different norms governing interpersonal relations, diversity in life styles, overcrowding, and shifting social values requires emphasis upon the skills and attitudes essential to co-operation, interaction and companionship. Learning to live with others is fundamental in forging the common bonds that hold society together. In turn, the individual benefits from an environment in which he can flourish better as a person.

Yet even though there is ample lip service support for the importance of affective education in the schools, there are previous few systematic efforts on the part of teachers or school systems to promote the attainment of these key affective goals.⁵

A resident outdoor education program provides unique opportunities for a better understanding and practice of the affective goals of education. The outdoor school environment provides countless opportunities for learning experiences designed to help elicit a strong appreciation for good human relations. The numerous interactions between a small group for twenty-four hours a day over several days permit the resident school to become a human relations laboratory. Each youth has the chance to live as a personality among his peers, with a minimum of adult domination. What suggestions he needs in order to make him consider others will come largely from individuals in his own group.

⁵W. J. Popham and E. L. Baker, "Instructional Tactics for Affective Goals," The Prentice Hall Teacher Competency Development System (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall Inc., 1973), p. 3.

Ample opportunities to develop good manners and other considerate behaviors are evident in the many socially interactive occasions imminent in the total living situation of the resident outdoor experience.⁶

An outdoor school offers unexcelled opportunities for the student to assume some responsibility for the operation and control of the outdoor school community. When tables in the dining hall need to be set, for example, or when the buildings need cleaning the pupils decide just what needs to be done and how they are going to go about carrying out the task. The community problems that arise in a normal and natural way in an outdoor school promote in pupils constructive attitudes toward co-operative action.

The day-in, day-out, close contact with others serves to rub off the rough edges of personality, and provides the setting for learning to plan and work co-operatively with ones peers.⁷

Many evaluation studies have been done pertaining to resident outdoor education. Evaluation efforts, early in a developing field such as this one, usually employ a survey or questionnaire design. As a new educational area grows and gains acceptance, emphasis is gradually placed upon more sophisticated designs employing experimental techniques. Most research studies conducted in order to

⁶D. Hammerman and W. Wheeler, "What Is the Education Potential in the Outdoor Setting?," Outdoor Education, A Book of Readings, ed. D. R. Hammerman and W. M. Hammerman (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Burgess Publishing Company, 1968), p. 11.

⁷Hammerman and Hammerman, op. cit., p. 7.

substantiate various social gains that were claimed to be due to resident outdoor experiences, fall into the former category. The present study falls into the latter category.

The purpose of this study is to provide some objective data on the effect a resident outdoor education program has on the affective domain of the educational experience. The study focuses upon four areas of social living: student-student relations, student-teacher relations, students' attitudes toward sharing, and students' attitudes toward working in a group with others. Student-student relations denotes friendship. Student-teacher relations signifies the type of interpersonal relationship that exists between a student and his teacher; whether the student feels comfortable when with his teacher, how easily he can talk and joke with his teacher, and so on. Students' attitudes toward sharing refers to a pupil's willingness to help another student who is having difficulties with his schoolwork. The area of social living termed students' attitudes toward working in a group with others signifies a student's disposition toward working and co-operating with other pupils on assigned schoolwork while in a group situation.

Our school systems, as previously mentioned, are not only committed to the academics of education, they are equally committed to helping an individual achieve a measure of personal stability and to helping the individual learn to live with others. Most schools, due to the way they are programmed, are incapable of offering many learning experiences

in the area of social living. The resident outdoor school is generally accepted as offering unique opportunities for learnings centering around social living. Thus, the resident outdoor education program can be an excellent supplement, socially as well as academically, to the school curriculum. The enigma is that these positive social gains have yet to be proven to occur as the result of a resident outdoor education program. More research on the social aspects of resident outdoor schools needs to be conducted.

Need for the Study

Resident outdoor education in most school programs is justified by its special enrichment possibilities for the regular school curriculum and its stimulating experience in social living.

The outdoor school serves to motivate and vitalize learning and contributes greatly to the development of good human relationships, better understanding between students and teachers, and opportunities for democratic living.⁸

In the resident community environment it is possible for the individual to develop deeper insights into the reasons for accepting and sharing responsibility, getting along with others and understanding of an appreciation for group living and planning.

⁸W. Smith, "Where We Have Been-What We Are-What We Will Become," Perspectives on Outdoor Education, ed. G. W. Donaldson and O. Goering (Dubuque, Iowa: Wm. C. Brown Company Publishers, 1972), p. 31.

The most conspicuous contributions of the outdoor school to personality and character growth, . . . is in the development of desirable social attitudes and more effective social adjustments.⁹

In most instances this development of good human relationships is thought to occur naturally as a by-product of the resident outdoor experience, but is this the case? Do these social gains occur because of the resident outdoor education program? The fact that those who believe in resident outdoor education think this to be the case does not prove the matter beyond a reasonable doubt.

Many Manitoba schools, in the description of their resident outdoor education programs, indicate various attempts at evaluation. Much of this evaluation has been accomplished through verbal and written reports from principals and from the teachers who have taken their classes to an outdoor school. Pupils have evaluated their experiences throughout the daily outdoor school program and in the post-outdoor school sessions through discussions, questionnaires, and the creative expression of art, crafts, language arts, and letters to resident staff members. Parents have also helped to evaluate the resident programs their children participated in by answering questionnaires and submitting written reports. These types of evaluation yield conclusions which are subjective in nature. Thus personal bias may be in evidence

⁹H. S. Dimock and C. E. Hendry, Camping and Character (New York: Association Press, 1939), p. 7.

in the results of such evaluations. Few objective measures of the social gains credited to a resident outdoor education experience have been done in the province of Manitoba.

The present study was designed to provide some objective data about the effects of a resident outdoor education program on student social relationships. Four areas of social living, student-student relations, student-teacher relations, students' attitudes toward sharing, and students' attitudes toward working in a group with others, were measured, using a before-after design, for change as a result of subjects attending an outdoor school. Student-student relations denotes friendship. An increase in the number of friends a student has as a result of a resident outdoor experience has been cited as a value of resident outdoor education. Friendship choices of a participating group of students are thought to become more diffused following an outdoor school program. This study compares the number of friends a student feels he has before the resident outdoor experience to the number of friends the subject feels he has after the resident program. Student-teacher relations signifies the interpersonal relationship existing between a student and his teacher. A resident outdoor experience is credited with effecting an improved relationship between pupil and teacher. This study compares how a student felt about his homeroom teacher before the resident experience to how he felt about his teacher on returning from the resident outdoor community. Students' attitudes toward sharing refers

to a pupil's willingness to help his peers who are having difficulties with schoolwork. Many educators assume that students acquire more favorable attitudes toward sharing due to the socially interactive environment of an outdoor school. They also postulate that these attitudes are brought back to the classroom and applied to many areas of the student's school life. The present study compares a student's attitude toward helping a fellow pupil with his schoolwork before the resident experience, to his attitude toward the same situation subsequent to his experience in the resident outdoor community. Students' attitudes toward working in a group with others signify a pupil's disposition toward working and co-operating with other students on assigned schoolwork while in a group situation. A resident outdoor experience is credited with instilling in a child the desire and ability to work and co-operate with his peers. The present study compares a students' attitude toward working with others in a small group situation versus working alone, with his attitude toward the same situation subsequent to his experience at an outdoor school.

Description of the Study

A study of this type had not previously been conducted in Manitoba. To evaluate the social aspect of a resident outdoor education experience, therefore, the construction of a preliminary questionnaire (see Appendix A) of fifty-six statements was necessary. The questionnaire had a Likert-type

scale. A pilot study was used to evaluate and revise the preliminary questionnaire. The number of statements on the final measuring instrument was reduced to twenty-five. This preliminary questionnaire was administered on three separate occasions to all subjects participating in the pilot study. Students answered the questionnaire at the pretest 1 session, and again at the pretest 11 session, and once more at the posttest 1 session.

Subjects for the pilot study were three classes, sixty-six students at the grade five and six level, from a school in Winnipeg. The classes and their teachers attended Camp Arnes for four days in mid-December of 1974.

The final questionnaire, revised from the preliminary questionnaire, was used in the actual study to determine if a resident outdoor education experience had a significant effect on student-student relations, student-teacher relations, students' attitudes toward sharing and students' attitudes toward working in a group with others. The subjects for the study consisted of 310 grade five and six students from five public schools in the Winnipeg area. The subjects were the students participating in each of the five school's resident outdoor education programs which were conducted in May and early June of 1975.

Subjects did not supply information as a single group. They were administered to separately by schools. Students from each school were also not dealt with as a single group but were divided randomly, using a random numbers

table, into three approximately equal groups.

The research design used in this study had a pretest-pretest-posttest format. Pretest 1 was administered to subjects in each school five days prior to their departing date for the outdoor school. Pretest 11 was administered to subjects in each school the day prior to their departure. Posttest 1 was written at each school the day subsequent to the pupils' return from the resident outdoor experience. The days mentioned between administration periods were school days. The time from pretest 11 to posttest 1 varied according to each school's duration at the outdoor community.

The Problem

In this study, four dependant variables, student-student relations, student-teacher relations, students' attitudes toward sharing and students' attitudes toward working in a group with others, were measured for change as effected by three independant variables, a resident outdoor education program, the group the student was in and the school the student was from. Three hypotheses were formulated from this. Hypothesis 1 (independent variable one) was: A resident outdoor education experience will have an effect on students' social relationships.

This hypothesis was divided into four subhypotheses (four dependant variables):

- (1) Student-student relations will change as a result of the resident outdoor education experience.