

# Why Add Outdoor Education to a Full Agenda?

CARL L. SWAFFORD

One sunny day, a dozen 5th graders scrambled over rocks and logs along a lake shore searching for crayfish and salamanders. Jeremy (not his real name) stood apart, quiet and sullen, his red baseball cap pulled down low on his forehead. I was teaching a three-day outdoor school and had already been warned by the other instructors not to expect much participation from Jeremy.

The first day, he had told me, "There is nothing you can do to make me like this class. I didn't even want to come. I know I'm going to hate it!" I tried to entice him to join us by describing the fascinating critters we would be collecting, but he remained aloof the entire time. Animals, activities, and stories—nothing seemed to interest him. Several times, I tried to engage him in conversation, but he just moved away.

As a final project, the students were to collect nature items for bookmarks. While the others busily constructed their mementos, he asked if he had to make one.

"Well, we'd like for everyone to make something to take home," I told him.

"Does mine have to look like everyone else's?"

"You can make yours any way you wish as long as you make one," I answered as I watched him walk back to his spot. I knew he had collected no materials for his bookmark.

After scribbling with a marker for a few minutes, at the end of the class he handed me the bookmark, saying, "This is for you."

"But you need to take it to your mom."

He insisted, "This is for you. Please take it."

Later, I pulled it out of my pocket and read these words, the same words I had used for the morning devotional:

"Remember your Creator while you are young." "There is a way that seemeth right but the end is death." Your friend, Jeremy

I often wonder about Jeremy and what would have happened if we had spent more time together outside. I believe he needed this classroom setting.

You may ask, why devote a whole issue of the JOURNAL OF ADVENTIST EDUCATION to outdoor education? After all, we have so many other pressing concerns in our classrooms—students with learning differences, or deficiencies in math, reading, and other skills. Teachers need help with the challenges of multigrade teaching and behavior management. They have many responsibilities and assignments every day. Why add outdoor education to such a full agenda?

But that is precisely the point. Outdoor education is not a subject to be taught or a skill to learn. It is not a new method or a strategy. It is simply taking teaching into another setting—the outdoor classroom. There students can experience hands-on learning. They are motivated to ask questions about the real things they touch, feel, smell, hear, and taste. In the outdoor classroom, students understand that learning can happen anytime, anywhere—with or without textbooks.

As you read this issue of the JOURNAL, you will find the personal experiences of teachers who have used the outdoor classroom to en-

Carl L. Swafford

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rich instruction in all subjects and grade levels—to interpret lessons, encourage students to ask questions, and create excitement for learning. They have found that students have fewer behavior problems and can learn in a variety of ways. As a teacher participates with students in the out-of-doors, he or she creates opportunities for the Holy Spirit to inspire them and for them to catch a glimpse of their Creator. Students are thereby learning in the same setting in which Jesus was taught and in which He chose to teach.

Wouldn't your students benefit from outdoor education?

*The coordinator for this special issue, **Carleton (Carl) L. Swafford, Ph.D.**, is currently Professor of Education at Southern Adventist University in Collegedale, Tennessee, and coordinator for the outdoor teacher-education master of science program at the university. The JOURNAL staff expresses its appreciation for the time he and Cathy Olson, his assistant, spent in planning and preparing the materials for the issue.*

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