



Transcriptions

The Finest Sort of Educational Environment

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Annotation: *Christian Camping International Conference, Green Lake, WI, October 27, 1971.* CCI is now the Christian Camp and Conference Association (CCCA), located in Wheaton. Ted Ward challenges the camping movement to make their particular contribution to the church at large. Arguing that we do know something about *learning*, and that there is a global concern about the increasing cost and limitations of *schooling*, Ward predicts that many countries are adopting an experiential focus in education. He suggests that many will see camping as an important venue for nonformal education and as an alternative to schools. He then identifies the particular sorts of learning experiences camping can offer.



Believe me, much of what learning research has taught us is, in fact, painfully synonymous with both common sense and the Word of God. And I find Jesus Christ, himself, paying a lot of attention, a lot of attention to the needs that people come to him with. A man shows up and he's blind. Jesus says, "Well, I'll work on that later. First sit down. I have a sermon for you." That's Hezekiah 5:9. Look it up.

I'm a fan of the apostle Paul. I'm looking forward to glory primarily because of that and also strawberry shortcake. But the apostle Paul is a real fan of mine because I think he's a little hyperactive and I'm really interested in interviewing him because I have a hunch that he's got a slight ailment, and I think I have the same ailment and that's why I'm going to feel a lot better when I find out that that's what's wrong with him, too. He was a pusher, he was always on the move, he was

aggressive, he was a little forward, and he was always ready to move even if he wasn't dead sure where God wanted him. And he never apologized much about being on the wrong road. When God diverted him one time on a sea voyage, he just simply goes right off in a new direction and never even gives you a verse or two about how sorry he was about running ahead of the will of God. I wonder about some of us. We're so anxious sometimes about running ahead of the Will of God that we can't get up enough steam that God can guide us. But I rather suspect that I've found the hyperactives in the church. They're here! I feel a little bit about you folks like I feel about some of the missionaries of the unnamed major denomination that has a particularly strong work in many mission fields. Some of my best friends in in Central America belong to that denomination. They've been mentioned tonight for having had strong works in Guatemala, Costa Rica, and a number of other places that I'm not going to mention.

And in that denomination, when I look at some of their churches state-side and visit with some of their folks, I find the slowest, tired-est looking people and I say, "What's the matter? Did you round up all the real Christians and send them into the mission field?" Because they've got some whiz-bang missionaries. I don't know how in the world they support them. I think the missionaries don't write home.

Now I strongly suspect that we're up against the same problem in the camping movement; and I hope you people don't isolate yourselves from the rest of the church because I think some of the kind of aggressiveness and forwardness and mover characteristic that I'm seeing around here is badly needed and I think you're getting in a crucial posture not only to rally yourselves and join hands and join elbows and all the rest of the stuff. But, in fact, you could make a tremendous contribution on the church of Jesus Christ, at large, and I challenge you to think about that.

I'm not sure why I'm here because I'm not a specialist in camping. I have reasonable, but not terribly eloquent, theological education. In fact, I don't even know enough about biblical precedents to know where you get all this jazz about camping. When I read about stress camping I wonder about that, you know. Seems to me I could think of two or three precedents but they're mostly in the Old Testament. I haven't heard anybody talking about fires and lions today. No, I guess I did really. Then I hear people talking about wilderness camping and I remember that Jesus did that but he didn't encourage it for others; He got awful hungry. He did a bit of mountain camping, I suppose. I don't know how else they would have stayed there as long as they did, but I don't find him directly encouraging that. And certainly I don't find much in Peter's writings about that. But then I see bicycling and I can't find any precedent for that. I've worked on that one. But I do know that the kind of camping that I've done is legitimate, biblical, theologically sound. I've done some tent camping and I like Paul. That's what I started with. (Applause) But I'm not really too bright when it comes to camping, and I'm not going to try to impress you that I am. It's really getting late around here I can tell you.

There are a few things that I do know about, and I want to share with you some of these, and I want to recommend them for your consideration. I think we do know some things about human learning. I think we do know some things about the condition of education in the world, and I think we do know some things about problems and their solutions. And I think we have to talk about problems and their solutions together. The real reason I'm here is because anybody has a very tough time saying "No" to your chairman, Harv Krauser, your program chairman. And even after it was clear that I was going to have to spend the great block of time up until virtually right now in the

Orient, and I would be living on the 12-hour off cycle time zone. Like right now I want breakfast. *We'll get it for you.* And I haven't quite wakened up yet.

Nevertheless, I would be here and I would share with you some things that I didn't have any idea at the time would be relevant to what I was doing in the Orient. But I really wasn't aware of that 'til today and I re-wrote my speech at supper-time. Because I've learned some things as I've been watching you people today and working with some of you. And I think that what I'm going to talk with you about is even more important than I thought it was going to be. Somebody back here just mumbled, "Oh, ye of little faith."

I was in the Orient at the request of the governments of ten southeastern Asian nations plus Korea and Japan. I was sponsored on that trip, along with four other Americans, by the Asia Society, which is a division of the Rockefeller Foundation. We were out there at the request of these ministers of education discussing with them world trends in nonformal education because whether you're aware of it or not, there's something going on all over the world. It's not just in the United States where you can pick up a magazine and find people fretting about, anxious about, concerned about what's wrong with the schools, what's wrong with our people, what's wrong with our young people. It's a worldwide phenomenon and there are many people, serious people, quite seriously concerned about it. We know more about the problem than we do about the solutions, but people are working on it.

There's been a great trend in education in this century; a trend for the better. There have been several trends for the worse, but the great trend for the better is highly relevant to the kind of thing that you've been engaged in in camping. The great trend of education worldwide in the twentieth century has been the trend toward more use of field experiences within the educational structure, more use of interaction with the environment, a little less of the ivory tower, abstract verbal learning kind of thing that happens typically in schools, and more getting out with the school and getting out, in some cases, from the school. For example, in the United States it's legitimate to take a class out and involve them in a school camping program. In a nation like Korea, to take a classroom out to even look at a butterfly would be absolutely illegitimate. If you can't get the butterfly in the classroom it isn't worth studying. It's a highly developed country educationally, but they have this very narrow view of what constitutes valid education.

Most of the countries in the twentieth century have moved to more and more of a field and experience focus in education. But recently there's been a very severe jolt that has really hit educational planners. You may or may not be aware of it, but there's a very profound disillusionment with schools. It occurs in many forms. It occurs in North America where suddenly there's a kind of taxpayers' revolt going on across the country; where so-called "wealthy" States that have real trouble financing your schools. There are schools that have filed preliminary papers for bankruptcy—I'm talking about public school districts. The willingness to support high-cost educational plants is going down.

At Michigan State University we used to have everything we asked the legislature for minus 20%—that was automatic—but all we did was ask for a bit more the next time around and we got that minus 20%. And people knew fairly well how to play the system. The same thing's true in the great State universities all over the country. But not in the last three years at all. All of a sudden there are real ceilings, and there are real pressures to say, "Stay within your framework. Don't increase." We're

saying, “The kids are getting more numerous. That’s not our fault. We have to respond to needs.” They’re saying, “Money is money; that’s it.” But the impact of this is also felt in Africa, in Asia and other countries especially those countries that became newly independent after World War II. Countries that stake their future on the Jeffersonian value of common schools. Stake their future on the notion that if they put a substantial percentage of their national wealth into building educational plants and to building educational systems that this would provide a basis for democracy. We sold it. They readily bought it. The United States was one of the great pushers of this idea. Almost twenty years in some of these cases now and they’re saying the first generation has completely been affected by these schools that we’ve built. Has it made any difference in our country? And the answer is: not much.

In Latin America there’s a tremendous frustration over the increased elitism that is fostered by the schools—not broken down by the schools. In Africa, there’s a continual vexation with reference to the kind of values that were assumed to come to pass in places like Nigeria and Ghana, in terms of common understanding of democratic values that have not come about because of the schools. You say, “Well, they haven’t really built enough schools. They haven’t really expanded enough.” Well let me tell you, they’ve expanded to the point where their budgets are breaking down and they can’t go any further. The whole national economic problem in many countries is severe and educational leaders all over the world are calling for consultations on what are the alternatives to building more schools. There’s no real doubt that education has value, especially education of a certain sort. But there’s a great disillusionment with schools and schooling—the formal establishment.

Now Dr. Oberdeen [?], this morning, mentioned that young people are tending to be somewhat anti-establishmentarian. Right. And so are some of us that are rapidly approaching seventy. And, it’s rampant in my case, I don’t know about some of the rest of you guys, but it’s much too rapid—I have too much to do. I can’t get that old. Seriously, we are concerned that the establishments aren’t responding to the needs with anywhere near the speed required by the contemporary situation. Leadership people are asking for alternatives and they’re asking for teams like we just sent out to Asia to sit down and talk with them about what some of the alternatives are. And you know what we can talk about? We can talk about nonformal kinds of operations in which you bring people together for short times. You bring people together in non-role kind of situations and you intensively involve yourselves with things that are high value and high concern to the lives of those people. I hear some of you people today talking about the same sorts of values and I think there is a relationship between what I’ve been doing for the last month and what you’re asking me to do tonight and I didn’t even realize it in advance. I was going to do some exhorting. I think all I want to do now is some identifying as I think you’ve probably been exhorted enough.

I think camping is one of the elements in nonformal education and I think you’re on the horizon. I really think you’re on the horizon. Now you don’t have to shoot down the schools. You don’t have to go bottle them or dig holes and push them in or anything like that. Leave them be. But our society here, in Canada, in all of Central America, certainly in Africa, and I believe now surely in Asia are going to be calling more and more on things like camping enterprises to do a substantial part of what now is dependent on the school to do. This could be very important. I think you’re apt to be pushed into new kinds of responsibilities for education that you can’t even envision now. If you see yourself purely as an evangelistic outreach of the church, you’d better hold onto that pretty tight because there’re going to be some other things that are going to be very promising and very

hopeful. And I think what you want to do is hold onto the one and try to interweave it with the other. Don't become extremists. Don't become absolutists. See if you can't find ways to help meet pressing needs of people and to do it in ways that are glorifying to Jesus Christ.

I think here it is the sorts of values, and objectives, and accomplishments you're really dealing with. And I think that observations of yourselves like, you know, things that we want to do, those things we find out we're not doing which is almost a paraphrase of my hero. That's a nice thing to know. I think that's why it's in the Word. I think Paul said from time-to-time, "I check myself up and I look at my accomplishments and I can put them over against my objectives." And I say, "Boy oh boy, the things that I would do, those things that I don't do; and the things that I don't want to do, those things I'm doing." And if Paul can spend that much text, you know, think of the printers' ink over the years that that's cost the world. If Paul can spend that much time in the influence of the Holy Spirit giving us that little tidbit of insight into his looking at himself, how much more should we be engaging in it ourselves when we're responsible for institutions like schools, camps and the like? Not just a personal thing but an institutional corporate thing. And this sort of exercise, seems to me, does have very sound precedent in Christian value system.

However, let me point out one thing. We are great for this business of deciding that something is, or isn't, valid. We are great dichotomizers by nature. It seems to me that that evangelicals in North America tend to be great dichotomizers. We can decide whether a book is a Christian book or not, which is, you know, a kind of pretty good accomplishment when you get right down to it. We can even do more marvelous things. We can decide whether a camp is a Christian camp or not, and whether an automobile is a Christian automobile or not. Now you haven't met many people who can do that but I've got some friends who can do it. I live in Michigan and they know which ones are and which ones aren't Christian. Will Spence used to sell Christian automobiles, right, Will?

No, seriously, we're dichotomizers and we attempt to say, from time-to-time, that something is an objective, it's valid or it's not. This is our business or that's not our business. Now we're not in the business of ecology, for example. We're not in the business of understanding nature. We're not in the business of outdoor experiences and camp craft. These are not our concerns. They're somebody else's concerns. Now I ask you with reference to at least the community of the body of Christ, "Is it possible that any of these things are not our concern?" I submit that all of them are our concern. And I think that one of the issues confronting us, if what I'm saying in the preamble of the talk is true, namely that camping is going to be given a whole new set of responsibility; that we're going to have to get very clear on the things that are more important than others; but we're going to have to avoid this tendency to throw certain things out. We're going to have to get a lot more skillful at blending several kinds of values, several kinds of goal systems, and making a more comprehensive attack on peoples' needs and their problems.

I think we're going to have to really take seriously this topic tonight that Christian camping is, I suggest, the finest of educational environments. Finest for what? For teaching some little narrow view of self and God? I don't mean that that is unimportant. I don't mean that that should be less than your first item of objectives. But I think that we must be very careful not to let that become a sole item because it will not stand well alone. Jesus Christ did not attempt to make it stand alone. He dealt with people in terms of a broad band of needs and when people were hungry, when they needed a stretch, or when they needed to sit down, he thought about it and gave attention to it.

And I think we can do no less. We have to be concerned about a broad band of needs in people if we're really going to take advantage of the fact that Christian camping is, in fact, a very elegant learning environment.

What sort of learning are we really after here? This is the first element in the problem here. What kind of learning is this educational environment intended for? Now, I don't want to get too technical here and I'm going to be brief but let me suggest that effective learning—the kind that's worth going after—has three major characteristics. Effective learning is learning that will last and one of the great frustrations with the schooling establishments of the world is that they spend inordinate amounts of time in learnings that do not last. We have to counsel graduate students coming in after being out of school more than five or six years, not to take the Graduate Record examination as a pre-screening test to get into masters degree programs because they won't make it. Because the Graduate Record examination, by and large, tests the sort of things that are scholastically valuable but very readily lost in recall—forgotten, if you please.

I don't want to get into theories of mind. We can argue that the mind is a great computer that stores everything and that it stalls . . . We just lost the keys to certain parts of it. I don't care what theory of mind you want to use. The fact is that certain information becomes unusable. It's forgotten. It's lost. And learning that is effective is concerned with learning that will last, and it is not concerned with a lot of piddly junk. Now by “piddly junk” I mean the kinds of stuff that is typically taught in Sunday school.

Secondly, learning that will be valued. Learning that will be valued, having to do with those values of life that a person can recognize and cling to. The kind of thing that the Sunday school ought to be doing; dealing with things that kids can say, “You know, that was important,” not just, “That was a good morning,” but “That was important. What that teacher had for me today was important. I need it. It deals with things that I'm concerned about. It deals with my problems and it brings some outside data to my problems.” Kids don't talk like that but they have other ways of saying it and it means essentially that: when learning is valuable. And I'm always asking kids not just “What did you learn?” but “What was important about what you learned?” And you'd be surprised how many shrugs you get. Now I don't get nasty about the Sunday school just here. Ask anybody who was in Cincinnati at the Sunday school convention a year and a half ago.

Third, learning that will change lives. I'm satisfied with nothing less when I talk about effective learning. Changing lives. You say, “I don't want that much responsibility. I don't want to think of my work as changing lives.” Well get out of it, then. Get out of it. You should be in the business of changing lives. You say, “That's manipulation.” Not if you're honest about it, not if you announce it, not if you say, “This is why we're here. These are the kinds of changes we'd like to see in people.” Be honest about it. Be straightforward about it. I think that's the way we started this morning right after breakfast. Let's get clear on what sorts of objectives are realistic and what sorts are valuable. Let's go for them. Don't be satisfied in just telling people about Jesus. People need to hear about Jesus, but they need to hear about Jesus for a purpose so they will make a response to the claims of Jesus Christ. I'm right with what was said this morning. I may be going further. I don't want to hang him for what I'm saying.

What sorts of things do we know about learning today from a psychological point of view and a social culture point of view? How can learning be made effective? What are the conditions

under which learning takes place that is effective learning according to these three criteria? I'd like to give you five suggestions. Some of these may sound a little technical, they may sound a little abstract, but you reflect on them and you put them to work and I think you'll find that there are ways to put them to work. What we know about learning from research in learning and it's a very fertile field right now cranking up much, much insight into what it is that happens in a person when he learns. We know a lot more about the environments in which learning takes place than we do about what goes on in the neural structure of the mind. We still don't know much about that: how the inside machine works. But we do know the kinds of environments, and the kinds of circumstances, and the kinds of experiences that produce this thing I'm calling "effective learning." We do know a lot about that today. And it's amazing to me that the professions that are concerned with behavior change from counseling clear over to school-teaching are able to employ so little of these data. But it's always been true especially in those realms of value structures that we tend not to use data. We tend instead to invent. You know, we get our own little view and we do it our way.

Let me give you some things that can be backed up from data. First of all, if you're really interested in establishing an environment in which effective learning can take place, you need to create an environment that is high in stimulus and low in threat—presents the man a lot of challenges. Call them stress or call them what you will, but there are always adequate supporting structures there so that this does not become threat. Always adequate supporting structures. I think, by the way, that there's something to be said there about the nature of the Holy Spirit in our lives. Challenge? Yes. Undergirding, protection also.

Second, emphasize experiences that build self-awareness and self-understanding. We need to be much more in the business of helping young people confront what they really are. What they really have. What they really could be in their own terms. We need to do much of the kind of thing I was doing with you a while ago in the exercise: letting you get a little more clear view of yourself and then sharing it with somebody. Talking about it. Getting more acquainted with where you are, what you're seeing. How many times have you been in a sermon situation where you were asked really to confront yourself in terms of objectives and accomplishments and really confront it and then talk about it right there on the scene? You couldn't possibly do that because church groups are always too big and you couldn't possibly do that, could you? Because the speaker is up on a platform and everybody else is down here. You couldn't possibly do it, could you? You just did it. We need to be concerned about that: the emphasizing of experiences that build self-awareness and self-understanding.

Third, we need to deal with matters of recognizable importance—recognizable to the learner. And that means you've got to pay more attention to what the learner is telling us about what is recognizably important to him. We need to be very much in the business of saying, "Okay, Chuck, what are *you* concerned about?" Not, "Chuck, let me tell you about what you will be concerned about, or what you are already concerned about, or what someday you might be concerned about. Chuck, where are you now? What is your life? Where can we help? How does the Gospel of Jesus Christ relate to you now?" You're dealing with an existential group. Most people don't describe it in this way because they don't know the big word. But today's young people have one dominant characteristic above all else—churched and unchurched. And I've got some good data to show that your evangelical kids aren't very different—solid data. They're concerned with the here and now. They're preoccupied with today and tomorrow not beyond that. They're very *now* focused. You sing about glory land and joy bells and it turns them off. They want to know about what Jesus is in terms

of their particular kinds of experiences here and now. That's a generalization that I'll make from any platform. I can support it. It's a *now* generation. Now, you don't need to fight that. You say, "Well, Christianity is really future-oriented." Oh, come on. Christianity is a very now-oriented religion among, you know, comparative religion points of view—a very now-oriented religion. You don't need to hide that. What is Jesus Christ wanting to do for you? Save you at last for Jesus' sake, amen, as my grandfather used to pray? No. Jesus Christ is wanting to do something with your life now. Let's deal with that with kids. Let's deal with *now* recognizable importance sorts of matters.

Four, provide opportunities to put new learnings into practice. I think we need to use real and simulated environments rather than abstractions. We need to get out of the verbalism business. By and large, we're raising a culture of visually-oriented people. Americans, for many years, have not been visually-oriented, they've been verbally-oriented. They relate to words. You don't believe that, go to church. Basically, it's a verbal experience. The evangelical church is shot through with a verbal structure. It's more important to know the right answer than it is to live the right answer. If you don't believe that, try it. But the kids are coming on with a whole new orientation—information. Information is primarily now through the eye and not in reading. Kids don't get it at the mother's knee anymore because the mother's knee has been replaced by the television. And I don't mean to be glib about that. The fact is that the primary source of information for today's boys and girls is not in the classroom. It's not at home around the dinner table or mother's knee—it's the television set. Well, you can't knock it. You can't change it. It's there. But what you can do is recognize what that says to you about experiences with Jesus Christ. They've got to be functional. They've got to be put to work. They have to have a focus that can be seen not just talked about. You and I can get together and talk for two or three hours in the evening, you know, and hear a lot of verbal abstractions. But, by and large, this kind of thing would turn kids off cold because they're not that verbally-oriented. I don't deal with kids the same way I deal with you people because kids today want other kinds of experiences. They want them to be involving of putting the new learnings into practice now. That's one reason Campus Crusade has been successful. They say to the guy, "Let's go do it, let's go do it together, let's go do it now." It's that "together" "let's now" focus that wins with kids today and you can't accomplish it at 9:45 on Sunday morning, dressed the way you're dressed.

Fifth, you need to preserve an active relationship among the physical, the mental, and the spiritual functions. Good learning environments—and this is where the schools are falling down—good learning environments do not dichotomize and separate off the mental processes from the physical, the emotional, the spiritual. They treat the whole man in one gestalt being, and they relate to him across the board in one set of experiences. The schools are going down the drain for, I believe, primarily the reason that they're not using that particular element of good learning/teaching strategy, partly because they perceive themselves as not responsible in those sectors. And those who do, are not sure of methodology in those sectors. We should be sure purpose-wise and we should be sure methodology-wise. We should know how it is that we relate to people in the spiritual, mental, and emotional processes all in one environment.

Let me repeat these five for you. The five suggestions I make about learning environments that can be effective:

- Environments that are high in stimulus and low in threat.
- Experiences that build self-awareness and self-understanding.
- Experiences that deal with matters of recognizable importance.

- Experiences that provide opportunities to put new learnings into practice.
- Experiences that preserve an active relationship among physical, mental, and spiritual functions.

Is it possible that what I have just described for you, which is an honest representation about what we know about effective learning environments, also just happens to be a fairly adequate description of what you got in camping?

Thank you.