

Educational Aims of the Civilian Conservation Corps

By HOWARD W. OXLEY

WHEN the Conservation Corps was established in April, 1933, a new type of educational opportunity was born in the United States. The grand sweep of imagination which resulted in the creation of the Corps was inspired by an emergency—the relief of unemployment—but the organization which it created accelerated a great movement which had been initiated in the days of John Muir and Gifford Pinchot. That movement was conservation, the conservation of our rapidly diminishing natural resources. The Civilian Conservation Corps added to that movement a second and far more important phase of conservation, that of our human resources embodied in the unemployed and out-of-school youth of the nation. The camp program indeed was not a new one. William James had suggested it as long ago as 1912. The churches and many private social agencies had utilized the camp as a means for the remedy of sociological problems. European countries had utilized the youth camp, though largely for pre-military training purposes. The Civilian Conservation Corps was created as a youth work camp movement for the conservation of both natural and human resources without military implications. Today, the camps are a living symbol of a new era in American life, namely, that intelligent planning for the preservation of our country and its youth is imperative if the social and economic life of the nation is to be preserved.

EDITOR'S NOTE: The Civilian Conservation Corps, better known as the CCC is one of the most successful and certainly one of the most popular devices to cope with juvenile unemployment in the United States. The use of its methods in Canada has been repeatedly demanded in Parliament and outside. At the request of PUBLIC AFFAIRS Dr. Howard Oxley, Educational Director at CCC headquarters in Washington has given a broad outline of the CCC educational programme for which he himself is mainly responsible.

The Civilian Conservation Corps has accomplished a tremendous amount of useful work in the conservation of natural resources during the past five years. Experts in these fields state that the Corps has advanced the conservation program by twenty-five years, although there still remains work to be done for many decades to come. Under the supervision of such agencies as the Forestry Service, Soil Conservation Service and the National and State Park Services, this work has been carried on chiefly in reforestation, forest protection and improvement, soil conservation, wild life restoration and the development and protection of national and state parks. Included among the many projects which have been completed by the Corps during its six years of existence are the planting of 1,741,000,000 trees, the construction of 45,000 buildings, and the expenditure of 9,000,000 man days of fighting fire and on fire prevention. The Corps has also constructed 4,700,000 check dams, seeded and sodded 380,000,000 square yards, and completed 22,400 miles of terraces. Since 1933, state parks have been increased in number from 816 to 1397 and in acreage from 3,310,691 to 4,332,000. More than 643,000,000 young fish have been planted in lakes and streams. These are only a few of the outstanding activities from among the many achievements of the Corps. Being a large, mobile and disciplined force, the Corps has also been of great assistance in a large number of major and minor disasters, ranging from hurricanes and floods to fires and the recovery of a lost child.

In addition to being a work agency, the CCC has been designated by Congress as an educational organization. The educational activities of the Corps cannot

be dissociated from its work aspects. The enrollee cannot be a student, nor is the CCC a school in the traditional sense.

The typical junior enrollee is a young man, barely twenty years of age, who left school when he was in the eighth grade. He has had little or no work experience and has been bewildered and disheartened by his futile efforts to secure a job. A survey made in June, 1938, indicated that 56% of the men came from rural areas and 44% from urban areas. The average man has had no vocational training nor has he received any vocational guidance.

When this typical enrollee enters camp, he is subjected to a score of new influences. Work, play, study, the routine and discipline of camp life, association with his fellows and with the supervisory personnel—all of these aid in his development. The whole of camp life, the twenty-four hours of the camp day are, in the best sense of the word, educational.

From the regular hours, outdoor life and good food, the enrollee gains a sound body and good habits of health and punctuality. In the daily routine of the camp, he learns cleanliness and neatness, and acquires respect for authority, good manners and consideration for others. From his work he gains useful skills and information and the consciousness that he is able to carry a man's share of work eight hours every day. From the fact that he is earning money and assisting in the support of his family, he gains self-respect and a sense of responsibility for those who depend upon him. Travel, contact with the forces of nature, association with different types of people in various sections of the country have also played an important part in stimulating and developing the men.

In addition to these intangible values which arise from the very nature of the camp situation, organized educational activities are provided during leisure time. The program is guidance centered and is based upon the needs and interests of the men. The extent and kind of educational activities, therefore, vary in each camp.

Although the average enrollee is twenty

years of age, three per cent are totally unable to read and write when enrolled and about forty per cent have not completed the eighth grade. More than two-thirds of the men have never received any vocational training and the majority have made no plans as to how they shall earn their living. One-fourth of the men never held any kind of a job before entering the CCC and of those who had been employed, the average enrollee had been jobless for eight months prior to entering the camps.

During the past five years, since the organization of the educational program, 70,000 illiterate enrollees have been taught to read and write. More than three-quarters of a million have been enrolled in elementary, high school and college courses and 8,838 have obtained eighth grade certificates; 2,307 have graduated from high school; and 52 have completed college.

All of the men have, of course, secured work experience in the camps. The sixty major types of projects in which the CCC is engaged may be broken down into more than 300 jobs for training purposes. Most of these jobs are related to forestry, soil conservation and park development. Others, such as cooking, clerical work, and truck driving are connected with the administration and maintenance of the camp. The fact that enrollees are working in these jobs for forty hours a week provides an unusual opportunity for vocational training. In most cases, instruction on the job during work hours is combined with courses in related subjects during leisure time. It is estimated that some 1,100,000 enrollees have received vocational training of this kind.

In addition to these job training activities, other vocational or pre-vocational courses which are not related to the camp jobs are provided in the camps or in nearby trade schools for those enrollees who are interested. About 1,000,000 men have taken such courses in the camps.

There is a variety of other educational activities carried on. All companies, for example, provide instruction in health,

first aid and safety. In many camps, the officers, foremen, enrollees and others who volunteer as instructors attend teacher training, foreman training and leader training courses. Libraries are provided in each camp. Each month, more than 7,000 educational films are shown to the men.

An unusual feature of the camp program is the emphasis placed on the informal types of education such as arts and crafts, dramatics, music and other hobbies. About 400,000 men have participated regularly in these informal activities.

In summarizing the present status of the educational program, it may be said that 91% of the men participate in the organized educational activities. Figures computed from the monthly reports indicate that the average enrollee who participated in the program spends four hours per week in these activities.

It is the objective of the educational program to make the individual (a) vocationally more productive, (b) avocationally more constructive, and (c) socially more cooperative. These sum up to make him functionally a better citizen.

In more detail the program in its approach purposes (a) to develop in each man his powers of self-expression, self-entertainment, and self-culture, (b) to develop pride and satisfaction in cooperative endeavor, (c) to develop an understanding of prevailing social and economic conditions, (d) to preserve and strengthen good habits of health and of mental development, (e) by such vocational training as is feasible, but particularly by vocational guidance and adjustment activities, to assist each man better to meet his employment problem when he leaves camp, (f) to develop an appreciation of nature and of country life.

The educational program attempts to present to the individual enrollee a nicely balanced offering of personal adjustment, including both educational and vocational guidance, and of vocational training and cultural vocational activity, including as large an amount of so-called recreation as the individual may require. No formula or curriculum for enrollees en masse is accepted as valid. Each

camp program must be made out with the utmost careful reference to the attitudes and interests of the individuals concerned. These attitudes and interests more often than not are obscured and undisclosed, difficult of discovery, and seldom are revealed without sympathetic individual interviewing and counselling.

Instruction falls within the following general areas.

1. *Removal of illiteracy*—This phase of work is most strongly emphasized.

2. Formal academic instruction with the emphasis on fulfilling special individual needs, such as remedying of common school deficiencies, high school graduation, college entrance, and the like.

3. Vocational training with the emphasis on the reemployment of the individual after his discharge from the CCC.

4. Systematic instruction on the job, which includes occupational training with both a production and a carry-over value.

5. Citizenship instruction with the emphasis here on the development of right social attitudes, rather than on the imparting of intellectual information regarding the mechanics of government.

6. Health instruction with emphasis on rural sanitation, the prevention of malaria, hookworm, typhoid, venereal, and the imparting of first-aid and life-saving instruction.

7. Leisure-time activities, music, dramatics, athletics, social activities, arts and crafts, hobbies, with the emphasis on leadership, and activities with a maximum carry-over value.

The CCC has demonstrated that education and work can be successfully combined in a program of practical training for nation-wide purposes. The camp work project presents, with certain limitations, the situation which the good instructor desires as the best basis for teaching. There is an opportunity in the camp to get back to what might be called a natural type of education in which the learning processes are natural, realistic, and pragmatic—working, learning, and living are all one process.