

The Magic and the Practical

Camp has many magical moments, but one that rises above all of them for me. A few hours into camp, there is a moment. It is the highlight of camp for me. Every single year. I stand on the deck of the lodge, looking over the large green field down towards the lake. I pause and listen. I hear the sounds of camp. Campers laughing, playing and taking it all in. Counselors stepping into the leadership roles and making the first connections with campers that they will remember forever.

This moment is a moment that we have been prepping for, planning towards, working really hard to create for months leading up to camp. In this moment, all the hard work and anticipation becomes a reality. This is the spark of the magic of camp. And I love it.

I pause. I soak it in. I take a deep breath. I smile.

There are many many magical moments at outdoor school. Many moments for 5th grade campers, high school counselors, adult directors, teachers and more. But this is my favorite.

Outdoor school is one of the highlights in our elementary schools, in our school district and in our community. We are a small community with two elementary schools that feed into one middle school and then one high school. In the spring of 5th grade, all students come together for camp. They form friendships that bridge into the fall of middle school the next year. It is where they are creating their class-wide community that they will carry through to graduation. We use juniors and seniors in our local high school as counselors. It is just as important of an experience for them as it is for the 5th graders. They all (5th graders and high schoolers) grow and learn incredible things about the pacific northwest forest, being a part of a community, and a deeper understanding of themselves during the week of camp.

I have been helping out with our outdoor school for 20 years. I snuck my way in as a helper when I was a new teacher and worked my way up to being a director. I am a 1st grade teacher and I do camp simply because I love it. I have seen the transition from no outside funding to being fully funded. Before we had financial support, the PTA/parent groups had to fundraise like crazy to make camp happen. And- we had to charge kids to come. This also meant less money for all the other classrooms at the school because most PTA fundraising went towards outdoor school. My first graders had less field trips, less classroom supplies and older playground equipment because there was very little extra. Outdoor school struggled on a very tight budget. As soon as the fully funded budget came our way, it was a game changer. Outdoor School became a stronger program. Other classrooms and school programs were able to be supported as well. The PTA even got to pay for a short term music teacher to come in for some music enrichment for the whole school. (We do not have a music or art program in elementary school).

The practical side here is that the funding helped ALL students at the school. We were not only given the ability to run a great camp and have resources we needed for camp. We also did not drain the resources of our parent-group's fundraisers. Other classes (my first graders!) got to have better classroom resources. My classroom field trip budget was almost doubled so I could now go to the pumpkin patch and the local science museum with my first graders. We didn't have to ask for money for camp and convince reluctant families that \$100 was a great deal for 4 days at camp.

The magic cannot happen without the practical.

My second favorite moment at camp is about 10 minutes after the last campfire. We end the campfire, arm in arm, singing The Flicker of the Campfire. Campers are sad it's the last night. Friendships are deep. We are all exhausted. We're looking forward to our own beds again. Campers have walked quietly off towards their cabins with their counselors. The directors team just pauses around the campfire for a little while. We quietly smile and stand in silence. And we know, without a doubt, that campers, counselors and adults are all leaving with full hearts.

Please, for the magic, keep fully funding outdoor school.

Sincerely,
Angie Pebworth, aka Cedar

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