

This is Dog Creek—where
a workshop really worked

It Happened in Dog Creek

—MARY HALL AND R. LEE THOMAS

This is the exciting story of one little one-room school that has been the center of a plan of action which may change the way of living and learning for hundreds of rural school teachers and children. Mary Hall is regional elementary supervisor and R. Lee Thomas is state supervisor of elementary schools, both of the State Department of Education, Nashville, Tenn.

THE MOST AMAZING thing about Dog Creek is that it has neither dog nor creek—but it does have a school and thereby hangs a tale.

It is hard to know where to begin this story, for it had many beginnings—in remote one-room schools in Tennessee, in meetings of parents and teachers, in classrooms of teacher-training institutions, in the State Department of Education. These beginnings lead to a workshop jointly sponsored by George Peabody College for Teachers, Tennessee Congress of Parents and Teachers, and Tennessee State Department of Education. The purpose of the workshop was to initiate a teacher-training program designed to prepare teachers for leadership in small rural communities.

On July 25, thirty-four teachers, supervisors, administrators, and staff members from teacher-training institutions set out for Dog Creek from their workshop headquarters at George Peabody College. They had a big job ahead of them. They planned to study Dog Creek School and community, and work with the teacher, the parents, and the children to plan a program of improvement. The experience

was to be an experiment in teacher training, with Dog Creek as the laboratory.

The group decided it would be wise to divide into smaller groups with definite responsibilities. The following five committees were appointed: grounds, building, lunch, records, and instructional program. They planned that there would be a shifting of membership on committees so that everyone would have wide experience. Of course each committee would work closely with all the other committees.

Dog Creek community is twenty miles from Nashville. It is set among low rolling hills and small valleys through which Dog Creek meanders. (Yes, you can find a creek if you push through the brush and willow trees looking for it. No doubt there is a dog or two, too, to reward a diligent searcher.)

What the Workshoppers Found

Dog Creek School has two acres of grounds which, when the group arrived, were covered with briars, bushes, weeds waist-high, and plenty of poison ivy. There are roads on the north, east, west, and through the middle, cutting the

grounds into patches. The schoolhouse is a square, white frame building, with a hipped roof painted red except for the section over the porch, which is green. No one seems to know who devised such a color scheme! The girls' toilet building is located in a clump of bushes a good distance from the building. The one for the boys has no trees around it, is closer to the schoolhouse, and only thirty-five feet from the well.

The group found a broken swing fastened between two trees near the building. Across the road on the playground was another swing, a see-saw, and a rickety horizontal bar, all needing repair.

The interior of the schoolhouse was not inviting. As the committee reported it: "When we entered the building the musty, dusty smell of a closed classroom greeted us. Dust covered faded pieces of last year's work. Spider webs and dirt-dauber nests hung in the corners. A broken stove was in the middle of the room. The chairs were arranged in rows facing a low platform on which stood the teacher's desk.¹ There were shelves filled with a conglomeration of old books, papers, boxes, and cans. The arrangement of furniture and

¹ The former teacher had left Dog Creek. The new teacher, a young girl just graduated from a teachers college, worked with the workshop group.

This is what workshopers found

... weeds waist-high



lack of materials and records led the workshop group to feel that the instructional program had been the traditional textbook type."

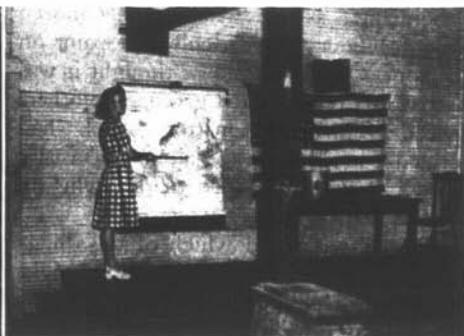
Planning Begins

Twenty-nine children and eight mothers were at the school for the first meeting. Both children and mothers were very much interested in the idea of planning for a better school. The mothers, with a practical eye to what improvement means, suggested that the first thing needed was a good house-cleaning, and all set-to immediately, to dust, scrub, and wash windows. It was a busy day for everybody. To the accompaniment of sweeping and scrubbing, there was a lot of talk about what needed doing.

The second day, the group sat down to a more systematic but no less enthusiastic planning session, with Miss Clifton, the teacher, directing the planning period. The workshop group helped her and the children adopt the theme for their year's program—"Better Living in Our Community." They then launched into plans for ways and means. Miss Clifton wrote the following items on the board as the children suggested them:

- Clean the grounds
- Stack the wood

... a teacher's platform





This is the way they planned

... on the campus



... in the field

- Paint the walls
- Fix the window panes
- Get a pencil sharpener
- Fix the well
- Clean the cloakrooms
- Fix a reading center
- Fix a ball diamond

When a lull came in the children's suggestions, members of the workshop group asked some questions. How about the height of some of the tables and chairs for the first- and second-graders? The children decided they were too high and should be cut down. This item was added to the list. In the discussion of how the well should be fixed, the matter of the distance of the boys' toilet from the well was mentioned. "Move the boys' toilet" was added to the list.

Someone asked what the children thought about the two colors of paint on the roof. One child said he thought it was pretty part red and part green. The others agreed. Thus one matter which had seemed a problem to the adults was easily solved! It was *not* added to the items on the list.

Miss Clifton asked which of the things to do on the list might be tackled right away. The children all agreed that cleaning the grounds should be a good starting

place. So the entire group of children and workshopers went out and sat down under the big sycamore tree and talked over the situation and its possibilities. Six children volunteered to bring chopping hoes. Others agreed to bring grubbing hoes, weed knives, and rakes. It was in high anticipation of helping to make a better school and having a good time at it, that the children trooped home.

Everyone Does a Job

In the days that followed, workshopers and children and sometimes parents pulled weeds, dug stumps, laid out a ball diamond, stacked wood under the house, held an ice-cream supper to raise funds for the pump and improvements in the classroom, completed the underpinning of the foundation beneath the kitchen, painted the classroom, put up a big bulletin board, removed paint from the tables and repainted them in a lovely soft green, sawed off legs of tables and chairs for the smaller children, made the teacher's platform into a reading center with low bookshelves, linoleum rug, and a rocking chair, started a science center with a small terrapin in a jar and several pots of flowers, planned lunch menus, painted lunch trays, started a record file, and many, many other things,

big and little, each important in its way.

In planning sessions without the children, the workshoppers and the teacher anticipated some matters which the children might later suggest, and added some which the youngsters might not have the experience to plan for themselves. For example, it was decided to ask the County Highway Department to close the road which divides the playground, and to bring to the attention of the school board the need for a concrete slab around the well, a force pump, a test of the water, and a drinking fountain.

Workshoppers made many plans with Miss Clifton, including such matters as her personal adjustment to the community, how to learn to know the children, how to evaluate and improve her teaching skill and the experiences of children, what records to keep and how to keep them, the lunch program, and the instructional program as a whole.

Unpremeditated Education

A study of sanitation grew from the children's interest in their immediate problems. This led to a study of toilet facilities, water and water-borne diseases. A group visited the State Department of Health for materials giving information about the problem and suggestions for ways of working. The children might have been surprised to know that they were learning "English" when they wrote letters of thanks for this help; "arithmetic" when they laid out the ball diamond, measured the size of the playground and distances between the house, toilet, and well, and determined the cost of the pump, concrete, and labor; "spelling," "vocabulary study," and "science" when they learned to use in writing and speaking such words as "contamination," "typhoid," and "diarrhoea"; "geography" and "science" when they discussed water supplies, and rock formation;



They had some fun
... an ice-cream social paid for a pump

"history" when someone asked why Dog Creek was located in that spot, and they began looking into the matter; and "reading" when they looked in books of various types for real answers to real problems. This was an entirely new way of learning for this group which had been accustomed to "saying their lessons" when called on in turn. And this experience was a new way of learning for many of the workshoppers who in the past had "taken education" by listening to lectures, reading assigned chapters, and memorizing some material to be given back to the professor on an examination paper.

Both the children and the workshoppers—each on his own level—learned much about group processes, about problem solving, and about how true, meaningful learning takes place.

At the close of the workshop, the group gave a report of its activities and made recommendations to a meeting of presidents and deans of teacher-training institutions, county superintendents, supervisors, supervising teachers, and district PTA presidents. The recommendations concerning curricula for teacher education presented by the Small School Rural Work-

shop speak for the experiences of the group, the value of the experiment, and, perhaps, for a new vision in education. This is what they had to say:

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR TEACHER EDUCATION

1. Each institution in Tennessee which trains elementary teachers should, in its curriculum for training such teachers, include certain aspects of rural education.
 - a. Elements of methods, management, grouping pupils, planning daily programs, the playground supervision that are peculiar to one- and two-teacher schools should be included in the currently offered courses in methods and student teaching.
 - b. The course in student teaching at the sophomore level should include one or more weeks' participation in a small rural school.
 - c. There should be added a course in rural life which will acquaint prospective teachers with rural problems and the community resources and agencies available for their solution.
2. Each institution should sponsor a small rural school and cooperate with the local school personnel and community in setting it up as a demonstration school for pre-service and in-service training of teachers, supervisors, and superintendents.
3. Every professional course—in addition to student teaching—should include observation and participation in school activities and the study of individual children in the training school and a typical small rural school.
4. All the institutions in Tennessee which train teachers should, in the immediate future, cooperate with the State Department of Education in planning a program of periodic and frequent meetings to continue the work of the Small Elementary School Workshop in improving teacher-training curricula. They should consider matters such as the following:
 - a. Analysis and determination of the information, skills and techniques, and professional activities to be included in curricula for prospective teachers.

This is the school as the workshoppers left it

... learning rather than "saying lessons" in turn



- b. Setting up curricula which will include results of such analysis.
 - c. Lengthening the curricula so as to include more general education which will make of the prospective teacher an intelligent citizen and a well-rounded teacher of children.
 - d. Providing realistic experiences in school and community that will make all professional courses practical.
 - e. Deciding on the desirable common elements in curricula for elementary and secondary teachers, with differentiation kept to a minimum and general education made almost identical for first two years of the four-year curricula.
 - f. Setting up curricula in broad general fields, as the social studies or the biological sciences, rather than in narrow fields of specialization, as history or zoology.
 - g. Determining which courses should be specifically required and which may be elective in the broad general fields set up.
 - h. Planning a program for attracting and recruiting promising candidates into Education curricula—possibly under the auspices of Tennessee Education Association.
 - i. Planning a guidance program for adjusting the student as a person and as a prospective teacher in matters such as
 - (1) Avoiding undue duplication of high-school courses;
 - (2) Teaching him to study;
 - (3) Choosing electives so as to further develop aptitudes and fill in gaps; and
 - (4) Determining levels at which he prefers to teach.
5. The period of practice teaching should be lengthened to include a half-day of diversified participation and teaching for a period of at least twelve weeks at the senior level and should include extensive contact with typical rural schools.

WHAT'S NEW ON MILITRAINING . . .

THE DEPARTMENT of Supervision and Curriculum Development is being represented at the Congressional hearings on compulsory military training scheduled to begin this month in Washington. Militraining has become one of the most hotly debated topics to come before the seventy-ninth Congress, with educators and church groups leading the opposition.

Hearings are being conducted by the House Committee on Postwar Military Policy, with testimony and discussions based on the universal service bill introduced early this year by House Military Chairman Andrew J. May of Kentucky. The question is being considered informally by this group, since this committee has no legislative authority. Its findings will be brought before the House where follow-up action may be taken by the regular House Military or Naval Committees.

May's bill provides for one year of military or naval training for all males upon reaching the age of 18, or within four years thereafter. Trainees could choose the branch of service they preferred. Preparatory or high school graduates could begin training after their seventeenth birthday, with parents' consent. After a year of service, trainees would be enrolled as reservists for six years.

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