

Are We Planning for Rural Teachers?

IVAH GREEN

MANY YOUNG PEOPLE whom we help prepare for teaching go out to one-room schools. Some of these are good rural schools, many of them equal, if not superior, to some city schools. They have fine movable furniture, electric lights, piano, radio, running water, libraries, furnaces, and kitchens. But a far larger number are poor one-room schools or graded schools in small villages, with barren, dirty, unattractive classrooms. Today many of these poor schools stand empty, and the teachers who once taught them are gone.

If we ask them why they leave their jobs they say:

WE GOT TIRED of teaching under the conditions we have had to face in one-room schools. Would you like to walk a mile or two to school in sub-zero weather and find it twelve degrees below zero inside the schoolhouse? We have done that.

Would you be able to build a fire and get the rooms warm before 9 o'clock? Would you know how to deal with frozen cheeks and ears? Would you remember to have lunch pails brought inside so that the lunches wouldn't freeze solid? Could you take morning inspection and determine signs of contagious disease or illness?

How would you divide your day into classes? Here is an arithmetic problem for you:

333 minutes

8 grades x 25 children x 12 subjects

Work it out. Don't forget, either, that this time does not include time out for singing, for washing hands, for flag salute, for putting in coal and carrying out ashes, for dusting, sweeping, and carrying in water.

We must teach everything in grade arithmetic from beginning counting to using the theorem of Pythagoras; explain movements of the earth, tides, winds, and planets; interpret tariffs and constitutional procedures; teach

Ivah Green, who writes for us here about the problems of rural teachers, has recently joined the Iowa State Department of Public Instruction as rural supervisor. She was formerly at State Teachers College, St. Cloud, Minn.

children how to draw, paint, model; we must thaw out frozen pipes, shovel snow, keep innumerable records, direct plays, and participate in all community affairs.

We did all these things and hundreds more for many years. We waded through snow drifts in getting to and from school. We lived on farms with no modern conveniences and saw no one but our pupils and our householders for weeks at a time. Our average monthly salary was \$85.

This summer, when school boards and county superintendents urged us to return to country school teaching, we saw advertisements in the papers stating: Work in an essential industry; grade-school education all that is necessary. Earn \$150 to \$175 a month at the start.

Don't think that we didn't like our pupils. We did. We liked the parents in our communities. And we had not expected teaching to be a soft snap. But—there were too many things to do, and most of them we were doing the hard way. Many of the things we must teach were never mentioned in our college classes; all we can do then is to try to remember how we ourselves were taught in rural schools (if we were!) and do it as much as possible like that.

You may wonder what all this has to do with you, an instructor, in some content subject. Aren't you answerable to us for something more than you gave us? True, you did give us some valuable things. And we received passing grades in numerous "Education" courses.

But you could have done more. You could have thought about our needs and our final destination in a small school, teaching chil-

dren, and have helped us a little more. You made us take a course in world literature when you knew we'd be teaching in one-room schools and doing the things we have enumerated above. If we had had four years to get ready for teaching, world literature undoubtedly would have added to our culture and esthetic appreciation. But two years is *too little time* for all we need, and what we must have are the things we in turn must teach our pupils.

You kept us three months in an English course reading Greek plays and in composing 2000-word essays on such IMPORTANT topics as: "The History of Greek Drama" and "A Contrast between Oedipus and Dr. Faustus." We were to find later in our schools 15-year-old children unable to read anything above third-grade level and unable to write a coherent paragraph with proper punctuation. What should we do about that? If some of us had raised the question, "How is the writing of these essays to help me *teach children?*" I wonder what answer we would have received?

At the end of two short years some of us go to poorly equipped schools and do a mediocre job of teaching. In four, or five, or six years, our pupils come to teachers colleges, to *your* classes, having been taught

grammar and composition by those whom you had coached for three months in the rise of Greek drama—and you deplore their ignorance!

You despair of ever teaching them anything. You say, "These youngsters just out of high school! Especially the ones from rural high schools. They are so inadequately prepared for my course! They have no background! They can't spell—they have no conception of grammar—they don't know how to read—their English is full of horrible errors!"

Most of us would not be willing to take jobs in one-room schools under such conditions as have been related. But if we will see the gargantuan problems facing rural teachers—most of the problems involving how to teach, not what to teach—perhaps we will turn the searchlight a little more forcefully on the procedure in our college classes. Young people about to teach look forward, as they say, "to the privilege" of living with children and to having a share in moulding their lives. We who are able to do so, must open doors to this privilege for these future teachers—for their own sakes and for the sake of the future citizens they will build.

DSCD Becomes an Association

The *Department* of Supervision and Curriculum Development of the National Education Association is now the *Association* for Supervision and Curriculum Development, a department of the NEA. The change in status became effective February 1 as the result of a vote by the membership approving a constitutional amendment providing for the new name.

Copyright © 1946 by the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development. All rights reserved.