

Brave Leadership

A visitor from Liberia finds inspiration and help as he observes and participates in the functional program of teacher education at Jackson College, Mississippi.

JUST how does Jackson College, a state college in Mississippi, go about preparing teachers to serve in the small rural schools and the larger and very recently established consolidated schools? An African teacher from Liberia found the answer by living and learning for six weeks with a group of 30 teachers from such rural schools as Friendship, Little Rock, Turner Chapel, Hopewell, Tutwiler and Oak Grove located in 20 counties.

The thirty were teachers who, though they were at Jackson College to get the A.B. degree which the State would require in 1954, were concerned primarily with the stark realities of teaching in Mississippi; that is, they wanted help on ways (a) of getting school buildings improved, (b) of persuading the school authorities to increase the financial support of the school, (c) of building good relations between whites and Negroes, and (d) of relieving the distress of tenant farmers who were no longer needed as the community changed from cotton growing to cattle raising. They wanted help on ways of teaching children the fundamental skills in a teaching year of only 7 months, when a teacher has from 2 to 8 grades and little equipment and, in many cases, inadequate education. They wanted help on securing attendance when children are

This article is reprinted by permission of The Christian Science Monitor, in which it originally appeared on January 9, 1954.

kept out of school scraping cotton and picking cotton.

What the young African experienced at firsthand with this group of teachers is a cross section of features of the four-year program by which Jackson College prepares teachers for service in the rural schools of Mississippi. It is typical insofar as six weeks can give a sampling of a four-year program.

The "traveling class" or "the school on wheels" as the young African described it, was especially interesting to the visitor. The college bus, although good lungs were required for one to be heard over its rattling, was the scene of vigorous, valuable and even heated discussions growing out of a number of field trips. The teachers went to see for themselves the Oakley Training School for delinquent boys. Here they cheered up and encouraged the boys from their respective towns; they planned with the school superintendent for the rehabilitation of boys who were released; they even adopted a boy

Jane Ellen McAllister is professor of education at Jackson College, Jackson, Mississippi.

in a "Big Brother" relationship, in which they furnished not only his scholarship, but promised to send letters of friendship and encouragement to him throughout the year. On another trip they spent an afternoon and evening at the 4-H Club camp, greeting the girls who were coming in for a week's camping, and they planned with the 4-H Club Director for a cooperative program back home. In the evening the teachers took a vital part in a State-wide Leaders Meeting training 4-H Club leaders from all parts of Mississippi.

Improving Public Relations

In order that the teachers might—if given a chance—plan with their local authorities the local school buildings, they visited a number of good community schools. They learned at first-hand how a principal organized for the split-session required by the neces-

sity for most of the students to drop out of school to "go cotton-picking." In science and social studies the teachers studied natural, historical and archeological features by going to the Natchez Trace Parkway maintained by the government in memorializing the post road and highway which in the 18th and early 19th centuries bound the South and Southwest to the Union. Since the South is rapidly becoming industrialized, the group visited the Mississippi Products Company and other industries to study working conditions which their pupils would have to meet as they shifted to jobs other than farming. One of the most far-reaching trips was to the newspaper office of the *Jackson Clarion Ledger*; one of the largest Mississippi newspapers. Because of advice and encouragement given by the *Clarion Ledger* newsmen, the teachers were able later to build better public rela-

The Audio-Visual "Each One, Teach One" Group operates various projectors.

JANE ELLEN McALLISTER
JANE ELLEN McALLISTER





JANE ELLEN MCALLISTER

Principals work in the art room and at the same time try out a possible "Each One, Teach One" procedure to be used in their schools back home.

tions with hometown papers, some of which had never before printed news on the activities of Negro schools and teachers. For instance, *The Meteor*, Crystal Springs; *The Mt. Olive Tribune*, Mt. Olive; *The Morning Star*, Greenwood; *The Delta Democrat Times*, Greenville; and many other papers carried articles on the work of the teachers.

The teacher from Liberia was impressed also by the means used to reduce the distance between members of the State Department of Education and teachers of small schools. The State Department experts on buildings, credentials, curriculum and other fields came out and talked sympathetically and simply with the teachers on the problems that troubled the group. Later the visits of the county superintendents and a member of the Board of Education did even more to reduce

the barriers between people and between races. All these meetings were important in showing how the sensitive Negro teacher reacts to attitudes of white people in the community and how the white people react to him.

The most essential part of the program according to the Liberian visitor was that every class and every course was carried on so as to develop people who understand others, who see people in their simplicity and humility as human beings, and who themselves feel their worth as individuals. This aim was achieved partly by having each individual (a) tell the things that he, the children and the community had done of which they were proud and (b) share with the class members actual letters written to the people back home.

For instance, the following excerpt is typical of the teachers' reports:

A Consolidated School Is Born

Picture a school in one of the worst locations anywhere. When it rained during school, neither the teacher nor the children could get out of the building until the water ran down. If the rain came before 9:00 a.m. the teacher and children could not get near the building. The people were dissatisfied but did nothing. The teaching-principal called a meeting of the PTA, businessmen, ministers and others to discuss the need of a better school. What can we do? Some said, "Cut ditches"; others said, "Raise the building." Other good-thinking citizens said, "We want a larger school at some other location in the community." The plans were presented to the County Superintendent and School Board. After several meetings the Board agreed to give a larger school with a ten-acre plot, nearer the central location of the community and combined with another school having the same difficulty.

Then the trouble started. The people did not want the school moved to the highway and they gave their reasons. It was a hard fight! The building program was delayed more than two years. The teacher called a meeting of the community people to discuss plans for selling the people the idea of a larger and better school; its location and consolidation. The teachers met with small groups, parents, clubs, societies and churches, businessmen and ministers.

After a long struggle the teachers and others succeeded in changing the minds of the people of the community. Now they have a new school and two

all-steel-body buses for transporting the children.

There were many other things which the African visitor saw, such as the "Each One, Teach One" groups in which each one who knows wood work, interior decorating, soap carving, how to teach reading, how to operate the audio-visual machines will teach it to others who do not know. As one teacher said, "There are so many things to learn, we can't wait always for the regular instructor"; and another, "We can use this Each One, Teach One idea in our community organizations back home." Then there were the services—led by three rural ministers who were also teachers—which were intended as an incentive to teachers to make contributions to the religious life of the community. There were the square dances, the leisurely meals together in the dining hall. There were the speeches made by members of the class to the lodges, churches, PTA's as the teachers urged the townspeople to take part in the college public affairs forums on "Great Issues in a Democracy."

All these and more too are typical ways by which Jackson College turns out students with new courage and hope for the future, students who care about teaching, and want to increase their ability to live and work with their fellowman.

These are the ways in which Jackson College gives a program close to the lives of rural teachers and their communities; the ways in which the college, as one elderly trustee said, saves the teachers from "losing a lot of education during four years of college."

Copyright © 1954 by the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development. All rights reserved.