

*School leadership is needed  
to create a new and stable  
rural community.*

Terrell W. Ogg

## Change Affects the Rural Community

THE United States in the past decade has moved rapidly from a rural America to an urban America. The vast expansion of scientific knowledge has given tremendous stimulus to the industrial growth of our nation. Mass production has procreated mass production. Large population groups have concentrated in the urban center providing still greater demands for additional people in these areas.

This growth of technical America concentrating around the urban centers, has drained the great rural America of much of its marginal labor. This marginal labor has left the farms and the small rural community for "greener fields" in the industrial cities.

Agricultural America has not been neglected in the rapid development of the science fields. New methods and machines have been developed. The small "40 acres and a mule" farm has given way to the large mechanized farm with hundreds of acres and few employees. The reign of "King Cotton" in much of the Deep South has given way to new crops and livestock production. In Houston County, Texas, one of the largest cotton plantations of yesteryears

(over 12,000 acres) has given way to the production of cattle. This development of the new rural America has eliminated the need for many thousands of unskilled and semiskilled farm workers. Rural community life is in process of a tremendous change. The population concentration on the large farm or plantation is no longer evident. The shift from the farm and the community around the country store to the center that serves the large rural community is quite evident.

This transition is having a tremendous effect on the education program in rural America. The small, one-teacher school has been replaced by the larger centralized rural school system. This new school district serves, in many instances, several hundred square miles. One of the major problems such a large district produces is that of student transportation. Those students who still live on the farm often have to be transported in excess of 40 miles a day. Another major problem facing schools in this new rural en-

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vironment is providing an adequate educational program to meet the growing educational demands of today and at the same time bridge the gap that the changing socioeconomic culture has thrust upon rural America.

The schools in this new rural community must be alert to the fact that change is taking place. The educational program must be developed to meet this change, and to channel the rural youngsters into a sound productive program of learning. Recent studies show that people living in rural America must become more expert in their field of production. They must become specialists in the new economic enterprises which they serve. In this area particularly the school person must realize that educating for the status quo is certainly not the answer. Rural America today will be different from rural America tomorrow; consequently, education must reach out and provide for that tomorrow.

### Size and Quality

Our schools must develop educational programs that will meet our rural youth where they are and bring them to an educational level equal in quality to the best provided youngsters in urban areas.

The school program must be geared to the idea that a new economic and cultural pattern is developing in the rural America. This pattern must be guided so as to insure the prosperous existence of this great portion of America.

The size of high schools in rural America is small in comparison with the size of high schools in the urban centers. Most high schools in the rural area range in size from 75 to 350. Yet these high schools have a tremendous task before them. The education program must provide the economic and social bases for

continuing the stable existence of the rural community. The rural community is a vital part of our great democracy. It provides a natural laboratory for the development of true democratic leadership, and the loss of this laboratory could well prove fatal to our American way of life. Since there is a constant pull to the urban area, this tide will destroy the rural community if it is not stemmed. The school's function, therefore, is to do the educational job necessary to provide the sound economic and cultural anchor needed for a stable prosperous rural community.

### A Suitable Program

This involves many factors. It involves the teaching of all youth of the rural community the fundamental philosophy of the American way of life with its democratic aims and values. It involves the teaching of all youth of the rural community an understanding of human worth and the finer aspects of human relations. It involves the teaching of all youth of the rural community the skills needed for taking their environment and the products of their environment and producing a more abundant economic life. It involves the instilling in all youth of the rural community the patriotism, the sense of mission, the social consciousness, and the love of country that have made America a unique nation of liberty loving individuals. At the same time it is a responsibility of the schools to develop every youngster to his optimum potential. The school cannot make excuses because it is small or because it is rural. Certainly it has a big job, but no task worth while is easy. To do the job the educator must give his best—no half-way job will suffice.

The next question we must face is how

this job can be accomplished. A first step in doing the job hinges upon public understanding and public approval. The public relations program must awaken the people in this new rural community to the challenge. This transition has brought the rural community to the crossroads. It can easily continue in its movement toward elimination of all rural life and the continuing enlargement of the urban centers or it can evolve into a new life built around a new pattern of rural community living. Citizens need to understand these alternatives as they study the new rural community. Only then will they write in an action program for rural community development. In this operation the schools must give leadership.

A second step in doing the job is the development of a curriculum that provides for the education of the rural youth for the new rural community. This will call for an evaluation of the various courses of study and may lead to the elimination of certain courses, the revision of some, and the addition of others.

A third step in doing the job is the development of a program for the full utilization of time. In the ordinary education program only about 50 percent of the students' days in a year are devoted to learning. An expanded program in the new rural community will require the use of more of the students' time for learning. More courses will need to be mastered. This will involve time beyond the regular school program. Summer programs, workshops, camps, clubs, etc., will have to be exploited in the interest of learning. These programs must utilize all types of learning aids. A fourth step in doing the job is the development of community pride and community opportunity. The school, through its education program, philosophy and facilities, must

instill in every youngster a desire to give, as a student and later as an adult, some of himself to his community for its advancement and its betterment.

We have considered how "change affects the rural community." This might be phrased as a question or as a statement. The question, however, should be eliminated because evidence shows that change does drastically affect the rural community. Our population studies and our census releases show clearly that our population is each day becoming more urban and less rural. We know that the dwindling of the broad rural community has come about and is continuing due to changes in the areas of technology, science and agriculture. These factors, as previously discussed, cause farm size changes, type of production changes, concentration of population changes, type of school changes, and size of school changes. A major change evident in the period of transition is the emerging of a new rural community.

The small isolated rural centers are rapidly giving way to the development of one larger rural community serving a large rural area. This new rural community is the economic, social and cultural center of the large rural area. The trend is to have this large rural area served by a central rural school. The major problem affecting rural community life is the achieving of an understanding of its new role. The major task affecting the new rural community is to keep the tidal wave of urbanization from completely destroying its traditional values.

The changes affecting the rural community have had tremendous impact on the role of the school. As discussed here, the schools must assume a role of leadership in taking these changes and harness-

ing them, educationally speaking, so that the new rural community will be a strong, prosperous and stable part of our American life.

True, we may say that change has affected the rural community to such an extent, that the whole concept of living

in the rural area must undergo a re-evaluation. From such a study new standards, new aims and concepts will be drawn. Under such able leadership, tomorrow will see a new and stronger rural life with a more abundant living for all.

### School's Responsibility

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right and wrong are sharply distinguishable does not, they contend, "square with the facts." One cannot point to any ethical proposition which has always been or always shall be the same, for as times and circumstances change all normative statements shall change.

The goal of the school, in this relativistic view, is to develop in students a critical attitude toward all moral codes. Students should be encouraged to criticize and discuss existing laws and customs involving moral conduct and participate in changing them so that they jibe with "social reality." Social acceptability is the criterion of good and evil, and the school must develop in students the means of determining what is socially acceptable. Such a goal cannot be achieved unless the school first eliminates the notion that there are changeless norms of moral conduct.<sup>3</sup>

In general opposition to the relativists are those who maintain that there are at least some ethical propositions which are never subject to change and should never be "as long as human beings are 'human.'" Among this group are those who believe that the decalogue (or similar codes)

<sup>3</sup> F. C. Neff. "Education and the Cult of Certainty." *Phi Delta Kappan* (January 1958). p. 168-70.

contains the few basic norms which are needed to guide moral conduct. Most defenders of these codes admit that critical and imaginative reinterpretation and adjustments must be made to fit the changing times (obviously, the application of the principles of justice are much more complex in modern industrial society than they were in primitive patriarchal tribes). Yet others who do not accept an "outside source" of morality, insist that there are some enduring and changeless values found in the accumulated fund of human experience, in "nature" or "society." Some such are justice and law, freedom and equality, which, they maintain, should be consciously transmitted through the agency of the school.<sup>4</sup>

Admittedly, the educational theorists of this latter group do not agree on one set of values which should be considered "changeless and enduring," for example, supernaturalists and naturalists propose a different hierarchy of values. They do agree, though, that there is a basic core of values and it is the school's responsibility to inculcate these in the youth of school age.

<sup>4</sup> For an expression of the non-relativistic view, see I. Berkson, *The Ideal and the Community*, Harper and Brothers, 1958, p. 279-82. Also, the Fifty-fourth Yearbook, National Society for the Study of Education, *Modern Philosophies and Education*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, p. 37 ff., 323 ff.

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