The Century Education Series

PROGRESSIVE TRENDS IN RURAL EDUCATION

AN INTERPRETATIVE DISCUSSION OF SOME OF THE BEST TENDENCIES IN RURAL EDUCATION

BY

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PREFACE

Some years ago when the author was a graduate student of Education at Yale University, he undertook a study of some of the best present tendencies in rural education. Stimulated by this initial research, a native interest in the field of rural education, due to years of intimate contact as pupil, teacher, and superintendent, was quickened. The result was that a more extended investigation was later undertaken and the work was expanded into this volume.

The scope and spirit of the volume can well be summarized in the words of Dr. Burnham in his presidential address to the department of Rural Education. He said. "Public inertia is the chief obstacle in rural education. Social control is slowly but surely changing this characteristic from rest or slow advance into accelerating progress. Eight million country children, from their location of national educational advantages, escaping that inertia which has caught and held back many, hail with delight a new day. new day more money, better organization, truer technique, a worthier personnel, and the invincible force of social control which unites all these resources for maximum service is saving for them their richest American birthright, the wealth of a free and an adequate education."

This volume aims to present some of the most out-

viii PREFACE

standing advances that have been made in rural education in recent years, together with an interpretive discussion of the facts and principles that must determine progress in this field of education. While considerable emphasis is laid upon the reorganization of the rural school system, particularily along the lines of consolidation, yet the practical rural situation as it actually exists in the majority of states today, as shown by the map in Figure 7, is constantly borne in mind. I refer to the one-room school situation. There are in the United States today, approximately, 168,000 one-room rural schools. Our ultimate aim is to reduce this number to the lowest practical minimum, but our immediate aim, until this can be done, must be to better the present situation in these schools. Improvement of these conditions has been my main purpose throughout this book. The various factors at present operating against the efficiency of the rural school are analyzed and each is given separate treatment in a chapter by itself.

In order to make the volume more valuable for those who may wish to use it as a basis for discussion at group teachers' meetings or as a textbook in teacher-training classes, a list of questions and topics for discussion, and a few topics for special investigation, are given at the close of each chapter.

Grateful acknowledgment is made to the many State Superintendents, Commissioners of Education, State Inspectors and Supervisors, Department Heads and Professors, and others for their generous response to the writer's request for material and information bearing on particular phases of the problem under investigation. Specific acknowledgment is made to individuals throughout the text, wherever it was possible to do so.

Acknowledgment for permission to use materials from their works is also made to Houghton Mifflin Company, The World Book Company, and the Journal of Rural Education.

I wish to take this opportunity to pay a debt of gratitude to Dean F. E. Spaulding of Yale for reading the manuscript and for the help and encouragement given the writer in this and other problems in the field of education.

Finally, I wish to express my deepest gratitude to my wife, Marie S. Mueller, for her encouragement and kindly criticism throughout the work, and for reading and typing the manuscript, assisting in reading the proof, etc.

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INTRODUCTION

Democracy and education go hand in hand. Without education democracy cannot exist, for it is dependent upon an enlightened people for its proper and continuance. Democracy implies functioning equality—equality in matters social, political, and industrial. The phrase "equality of opportunity" describes well the ideal of democracy in relation to its people. The advantages, rewards, and honors, which it offers to one of its constituents must not be withheld from another. Failure to attain these rewards must be due, not to limitations set by democracy but rather to limitations inherent in the individual. Thus, if democracy offers a free education of a certain type to some of its members, it must do so to all, or else it ceases to be democracy. Such has very nearly been the case in regard to rural education.

The educational opportunities of rural children have been but a fraction of those enjoyed by urban children. In organization and administration of schools; in supervision of instruction; in length of school term; in the quality of teaching; in the type of school and equipment enjoyed; in matters of health and sanitation; in the type of curriculum offered; in the amount of money expended per capita; in high school opportunities offered; in fact, in every factor bearing upon the efficiency of education, the rural child has been "short changed" by democracy. By "the rural child"

is meant approximately eleven million children, or about half of the children enrolled in the public schools of the United States.

But, why is democracy to be blamed for these inequalities in educational opportunity? Has she withheld these opportunities from some of her children consciously, while freely offering them to others? That the opportunities have not been equal for rural and urban children is true beyond a doubt, but that they have been consciously withheld would not be maintained by any one. It has been rather a question of public inertia that has caused nearly half of the children of the United States to lose at least a good share of their American birthright, a good public school education. Nor is this inactivity to be laid entirely at the door of the rural citizen. Too often he has not been enlightened as to what to aim for and how to proceed to make improvements. Then again, rural sections have often been exploited by the city in that the taxable property was made to fall within the boundaries of the city, and thus contribute to its treasury at the expense of the rural treasury. Moreover, the concentration of business and wealth—which was created to a large extent by the rural sections—in the city produced financial inequality between city and country. With the foundation unequal it is inevitable that the superstructure be unequal. In education this superstructure includes all the factors enumerated above.

The so-called "rural school problem" was brought about by the industrial revolution. Before people began to congregate in cities all schools were more or

less alike. But, with the growth of cities and the decline of the rural population new factors in education made themselves manifest. The cities progressed, and in so doing demanded progress in their schools also. The country either actually declined, or remained at a standstill in all matters, including the school. In many rural sections, the away-from-the-farm movement has caused great alarm. In general this decline of the rural population, and the increase in tenantry constitutes what we call the rural problem. There are numerous factors entering into this problem and the rural school is not an insignificant one of these.

Stated in general terms, the rural school problem is one of providing as adequate instruction, in both the elementary and high school subjects, for rural children as we now provide for urban children. course, implies providing just as good a school environment, just as well qualified a teacher, just as good supervision of instruction, the same medical care, and the same provision for play and physical development for the country child as we now offer to the city This is by no means a small problem. Various attempts, and in many instances very successful attempts, at solving certain parts of the problem have been made in different parts of the country. In others the problem as a whole has been attacked and a complete reorganization of the schools has been brought about.

Each chapter in this book may be considered as a separate aspect of the rural school problem, or at least as a factor in the ultimate solution of that problem.

CONTENTS

and the second s	PAGE
CHAPTER I THE LARGER UNIT OF ORGANIZATION AND ADMIN-	3
The district system—outlived its usefulness—objections to small unit—other objections to the small unit—what can be done to remedy the situation?—the township—the county unit—the strong county unit form—the weak county unit form—feeble beginnings in county unit organization—what are the advantages of the county unit?—economics resulting from the county unit—does the county unit mean the abolition of the old district?—are these fears real?—patrons' participation in the management of larger district—the county unit in Montana (weak form)—what has the county unit accomplished in Montana?—the county unit in Maryland (strong form)—danger of over-centralization—recommendations based on state surveys—the Kentucky Survey—the Virginia Survey—New York State Survey—conclusions regarding the larger unit—questions and topics for discussion—topics for special investigation and report—selected references	
The community unit—the community unit idea not new—what is a neighborhood or a rural primary group?—what are the factors creating a neighborhood and holding it together?—significance of these facts for rural organization—relation of primary group—lines to other lines—"sufficient volume of business"—importance of the village—what about the unorganized territory?—intercommunity organization necessary—community unit and high school development—Illinois community high schools—the consolidated school district an example of the community unit—the community unit in Washington—the New York State Survey and the community unit—rec-	30

	ommendations of joint committee of rural schools of New York—advantages of the community unit—commun- ity unit versus county unit—questions and topics for discussion—topics for special investigation and report— references	'AGE
Снарт	TER III CONSOLIDATION OF RURAL SCHOOLS	48
	Meaning of consolidation—types of consolidation—early beginnings in consolidation—fields for consolidation—transportation of pupils—transportations must be logically planned—open country versus village consolidation—size of consolidated district—cost of the consolidated school—the consolidation program of Weld County, Colorado—buildings—transportation—teachers—enrollment and attendance—courses of study—consolidation in Randolph County, Indiana—educational conditions—buildings and grounds—community activities—high schools—transportation—advantages of consolidation—questions and topics for discussion—topics for special investigation and report—references	
Снарт	TER IV SUPERVISION OF RURAL SCHOOLS	78
	What is rural school supervision?—administrative supervision—instructional supervision—qualifications of supervisors—the supervisory unit—supervisory plans—Connecticut—New Jersey—Wisconsin—qualifications of supervising teachers—work of supervising teachers—supervision in consolidated districts—Utah and Maryland—supervisory methods in Baltimore County—difficulties of supervision—what are the values of supervision?—questions and topics for discussion—special topics for investigation and report—references	
Снарт	TER V THE RURAL SCHOOL TEACHER	98
	Importance of education in social development—the rural teacher situation in the United States—Pennsylvania—New York—Nebraska—conditions in the South—need for supervision—what happens to the output of professional schools—normal schools criticized for neglecting rural service—what can the normal schools do	

The Part House

to render more efficient rural school service?—the place of the high school training course—what qualifications and training should the rural teacher have?—rural teacher training in Michigan—the Iowa Plan of Observation and Practice Teaching—questions and topics for discussion—topics for investigation and report—references

CHAPTER VI THE RURAL SCHOOL CURRICULUM 123

Increasing complexity of the curriculum—rural schools last to make curriculum changes—relative importance of subjects now being taught in rural elementary schools—aim of the rural elementary school—the importance of the various subjects in meeting the aim of the rural school—arithmetic—reading—language and composition—geography, history, and civics—elementary science—the practical arts—the fine arts—possible reorganization of the curriculum to meet the aim of the rural elementary school—questions and topics for discussion—topics for special investigation and report—references

CHAPTER VII TESTS AND MEASUREMENTS IN RURAL SCHOOLS 141

Present status—remedy for this situation—purpose of this chapter-mental tests, also called intelligence tests -kinds of mental tests—the group test—interpreting the results of group tests—uses and values of mental tests -standard educational tests, or achievement tests-what makes a test a standard test?—in which subjects are standardized tests available?-is a knowledge of statistical methods necessary in giving and scoring standard tests?—recording the results of tests—advantages of individual graph—the values of standard tests—using standard tests in supervision—can teachers be trusted to do their own testing?—a testing program in Wisconsin how standard tests are used in Winchester County, New Hampshire—the situation—method of attack—the results -surveying rural schools by means of standard testspurposes of the Black Hawk County Survey-procedure followed-material used-conclusions of this surveyconclusion—questions and topics for discussion—special topics for investigation and report—references

XVIII	CONTENTS	
Сплот	ER VIII ORGANIZATION OF THE ONE-TEACHER SCHOOL.	P≜G1 179
g F g i s t	A perplexing problem—methods of solution—grade grouping—alternation of grades—alternation of subjects—correlation of subject matter—putting principles into practice—a balanced schedule for the one-teacher school—individual instruction and directed study—value of group instruction—organization for directed study and individual instruction—advantages of directed study—silent reading and supervised study—conclusion—questions and topics for discussion—topics for special investigation and report—references	
Снарте	ER IX THE HEALTH OF RURAL SCHOOL CHILDREN	195
o t a - f r q	The health of rural children, present status—some causes of these defects—conditions in New York State—how can these physical conditions be improved?—what should a health program include?—applying remedial measures—the North Carolina Plan—preventive measures—an effective rural school health service—other examples of rural health service—summary of recommendations—questions and topics for discussion—topics for special investigation and report—references	
Снарте	ER X MODEL RURAL SCHOOLS	217
a n N 	Need for modern rural school—not all one-teacher schools are bad—changing conceptions of education bring new needs—demonstration rural school, North Dakota State Normal and Industrial School—the building—basement—floor plan—cost—model school at Kirksville, Missouri—rural model schools in Connecticut—the "group center schools" of Durham County, North Carolina—demonstration teaching in Maine—a bright day ahead for the rural school—questions and topics for discussion—topics for special investigation and report—references	
CHAPTE	ER XI STANDARDIZATION OF RURAL SCHOOLS	234
	The problem stated—consolidation not always possible—other obstacles to consolidation—what is standardiza-	

-second year club—hot lunch without club—conclusion—questions and topics for discussion—topics for special

investigation and report-references

CHAPTER XV PLAY AND PLAYGROUND EQUIPMENT	293
Importance of play—old and new notion of play—early conditions did not require so much play—rural school playground facilities—playground equipment and apparatus—kinds of apparatus and equipment—what constitutes a good game—games for rural schools—thirty selected games—questions and topics for discussion—topics for special investigation and report—references	
CHAPTER XVI THE RURAL COMMUNITY CENTER	313
Definition, aim, and scope of the community center—community center idea essential to democracy—early self-governing communities—the meeting place—the school the community center—the one-room school as a community center—activities of the community center—organization of the community center—financial support—examples of community center work—report of community center activities at Synarep, Washington, 1920–1921—the consolidated school as a community center—community activities—conclusion—questions and topics for discussion—special topics for investigation and report—references	
CHAPTER XVII BOYS' AND GIRLS' CLUBS	334
Meaning and purposes of boys' and girls' clubs—early beginnings of club work—club work and the school—principles of organization—county organization—how to organize a club—advantages to be derived from clubwork—noteworthy examples of boys' and girls' clubs—conclusion—questions and topics for discussion—special topics for investigation and report—references—appendices	
Appendix	351
Index	359

FIGURES

FIG	URE	PAGE
1	Showing the evolution of the district system in Massachusetts	4
2	School tax rates in Isabella County	6
3	Extremes of valuation per child in eight counties of Montana	7
4	Map showing the tendency to the larger unit of school administration and support	10
5	Final boundaries of primary groups in West Dane County, Wisconsin	32
6	The natural community unit	36
7	Distribution, by states, of one-room schools in the United	
	States	53
8	The location of the consolidated schools of Colorado	63
9	Randolph County, Indiana, showing progress of consolidation	68
10	Individual pupil graph	155
11	Individual pupil graph, showing accomplishment of retarded pupil	157
12	Individual pupil graph, showing accomplishment of acceler-	
	ated pupil	159
13	How the median in reading is being raised	164
14	Sample of individual record data the same as in Table 10.	167
15	Graph showing scores of 62 normal seventh-grade pupils	169
16	Proportion that glass area is of floor space in one- and two-teacher schools	202
17	Window placement in one- and two-teacher schools	203
18	Types of heating apparatus in one- and two-teacher schools	204
19	Percentage of one- and two-teacher schools having proper adjustment of seats, desks, and distance between seats and desks	205
		

xxii	FIGURES
== :	

.

xxi	i FIGURES	
	Kinds of toilets in one- and two-teacher schools	206
21	Demonstration rural school, State Normal and Industrial School, Ellendale, North Dakota	
22	Demonstration rural school, State Normal and Industrial School, Ellendale, North Dakota	
23	Floor plans of a model one-room rural school	227
24	Five-acre playing field as suggested by the Bureau of Education	
	Classroom Weight Record	3 51

.

TABLES

TAB	L _B	Page
1	Factors creating and holding the group together	33
2	Tax levy in mills for school purposes	62
3	Rural teacher situation in New York	102
4	Professional training of teachers in small and large schools	103
5	Teacher experience and tenure in small and larger schools .	103
6	The evolution of our elementary school curriculum and of methods of teaching	123
7	Subjects of the rural elementary school curriculum	124
8	Classification of types of problems in arithmetic	130
9	Distribution of population in various occupational activities	130
10	Record of L. D	168
11	Subjects and grades represented in each subject, state course of study for Wisconsin	180
12	Distribution of combinations in twenty-six state "model" programs	182
1 3	Combinations most frequently made	184
14	Proposed balanced schedule of class periods for one-teacher schools with eight grades represented	186
1 5	Daily program for individual instruction and directed study	189
16	Showing the percentage of defects found in the school children of seven counties of Virginia	198
17	Showing the percentage of non-city school buildings receiving various ratings for different characteristics.	199
18	Showing the percentage of one-room school buildings receiving various ratings for different characteristics.	200
19	Hot lunch situation in United States in 1921	277
20	Summary of club projects	343

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XXV

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