

A PROGRAM TO MEET THE IMMEDIATE SHORTAGE OF RURAL TEACHERS

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THE PRESENT EMERGENCY

Our rural schools are confronted with an emergency that may bring even greater disaster to them in the immediate future than they have suffered in the past. The war has proved itself a catalytic agency in breaking down the supply of rural teachers. Many teachers either directly or indirectly entered war service. Various activities closely associated with the prosecution of the war attracted others. Clerkships have proved more remunerative. New lines of service teeming with possibilities and promising less monotony than the humdrum life of a country teacher have appealed to the more ambitious. The country schools have sustained an indirect loss of their teaching force as well, for no doubt the towns and cities have drawn the best teachers from the rural schools to supply their depleted teaching forces. In all these cases the rural schools have lost the more experienced, the better trained, and the more ambitious teachers in them.

That the war is over does not assure the return of these teachers to the country schools. Many of them will retain their newly acquired positions. Others will find new opportunities open to them. Just what the actual shortage of teachers is is impossible to determine accurately. There are no reliable figures to be obtained. The United States Bureau of Education has placed estimates well up in the thousands. Even were the number of rural schools without teachers available, the actual shortage would not be indicated, for in many cases untrained and unprepared persons have been put into the vacant positions. Many of these are, no doubt, capable of rendering efficient service if permitted additional training.

Before the war rural schools were not provided dependable sources from which teachers might be drawn. Prospective teachers have been told about the disadvantages, not the possibilities, of country life. The normal schools have been taxed to the utmost in supplying elementary teachers for city schools. Few have dared to put courses for rural teachers on a par with those offered teachers of town and city schools. In most instances where such bold steps have been taken carefully paved avenues with glaring guideposts lead frightened members of the rural pilgrimage back to the smoother highway of safety with least possible loss of time and energy when they have stumbled over the slightest obstacles in the rugged pathway of pioneers. Others without a blush of shame offer inferior courses to inferior students who are sent into the country schools. Others are content with offering a few courses to such rural teachers as may be induced to attend a short summer session. The greater number still contend there is no need for specialized courses and give the most desultory attention to, or benignly ignore, any conscious responsibility in the training of rural teachers. In recent years the teacher-training departments in the high schools and the county training schools have supplied the larger number of country teachers having professional training. The total output from all these agencies has not met the demand. Every study and investigation of rural schools has pointed out the striking lack of preparation on the part of rural teachers. A study completed recently by Dr. H. W. Foght of the Bureau of Education shows that in the period immediately preceding the war one out of three had had no professional training whatever. Attendance at a summer session or the completion of short courses in reputable institutions were rated as constituting professional training. Less than half have completed a four-year course in a standardized high school. Almost 5 per cent had less than eight years of training in an elementary school. On the average, according to his findings, the rural teacher teaches for about forty-five months, or 6.5 school years of seven months each, which is the prevailing standard of our rural schools. As is pointed out in the study, the majority teach a much shorter time, for the average was materially raised by a comparatively small number

reporting from fifteen to thirty-seven years of experience. Approximately 350,000 teachers are needed to supply our rural schools. Under pre-war conditions 50,000 new recruits each year is a conservative estimate.

The demand last September was much more urgent. The effects of the war demand a mobilization of rural educational forces in the period of construction which is upon us. Those engaged in the field are challenged to renewed, redirected, and highly concentrated efforts. Just before the war we had begun to turn our attention upon the rural schools. Our country-life program, if we may lay claim to such, was largely that of propaganda. Pupils not absent for twenty days were given colored certificates of attendance. Brass plates above the doors of certain schools labeled them as standardized. School sites were enlarged and made more sanitary. School buildings were remodeled and in many cases new ones erected. Local district, township, county, and even a state-wide interest was awakened in rural-school problems. More comfortable living conditions have been provided for teachers. Many have been invited to participate in community affairs as permanent citizens. Long walks to and from schools on cold winter days have been eliminated. New equipment has been purchased. Hot lunches have been prepared. Old stoves have been jacketed and furnaces put in. Artificial lighting systems have been installed. Bubbling water fountains have replaced the public but unsanitary old water pail. Surveys have been made and much talked about. Successful health campaigns have been waged and school nurses introduced. The salaries of teachers have been increased. The social life of communities has been fired with a new zeal. Consolidation has been advocated and in many cases put into effect. The advantage of the larger and more effective county unit of organization has been championed. Rural conferences have been held at which workers fresh from the field have described most remarkable projects. Agitators overintoxicated with the spirit of rural reformation have in most glowing terms pictured a new day. Conscientious, hard-working rural teachers have left these "feasts of inspiration" in a bewildered state of mind. They have been depressed that others should do so much as compared with

their own humble efforts. They have been imbued with the idea that each of the successes reported was a part of a nation-wide scheme rather than the sporadic attempt of many individual schools. Much of this constructive work was considered by its instigators in the light of temporary expedients rather than permanent policies. Suddenly these, and many other movements which might be enumerated, were arrested by the demands of the terrific struggle from which we are just emerging. Inadequate as our rural program has been, it was almost completely demoralized by the war. Teachers were left without encouragement to continue their work. Schools were forced to close because of the scarcity of teachers. Many incompetent persons were put in other schools. Institutions turned their attention to other lines and left the rural schools to shift for themselves.

As the din of battle is hushed, the pitiful murmuring of our weakened and depreciated rural teaching force is heard. The rural movements in which we were interested before the war have been unceremoniously swept away from the center of the stage. The most constructive ones occupy only subordinate positions. All spot-lights are focused on our enfeebled and depleted force of rural teachers huddled together in the center of the stage. Relative values are being determined. Our experiences before the war convince us that much activity may radiate from a school system in which there are a few well-trained teachers. The confusion resulting from the demoralization of our rural forces during the war is even more convincing that we dare not depend on a *laissez faire* policy. The immediate emergency facing us at the close of the war demands a rural teaching force trained to cope with the problems involved in the organization, management, and operation of a one-room country school and leaves us firmly convinced that such a teaching force is indispensable.

THE SERIOUSNESS OF THE PRESENT EMERGENCY

This is an inopportune time to be confronted with this shortage of teachers. The mass of information collected concerning our soldiers confirms our former suspicions that our rural educational program has not been accomplishing all that might be desired.

Quoting from one of the investigators on the psychological staff in one of the larger training camps,

Educationally speaking I think this war is a wonderful thing. The mental lethargy of the whole world is being overcome. Back in the farthest recesses where man lives new ideas are going. Men are having to come out and the interest of home folks goes with them, and they begin to feel the need of the ability to write and to read, so as to keep in touch with things.

I have talked with many boys—I do individual examining entirely—and I have found scores of them who come from families, none of whom can read or write. They have never been away from home in their lives. They never rode on a train before coming to camp, and in many cases they never saw a train either.

Here is a sample case which is fairly typical: John ——, the thirteenth child in a family of twenty-two children, none of whom can read or write, has done nothing but farm work. Says that Uncle Sam is president. Knows that he lives in —— (state) but does not know where he is now. (He was in a training camp in an adjoining state.) He can name the days in the week but not the months in the year. Doesn't know the present day, month, nor year. Cannot make change and cannot count. Is married and has three children. —— children have fits—epilepsy—mother having same kind of spells.

Other investigators verify these conditions. There are millions of native-born adult citizens in this country who can neither read nor write. Many of our foreign-born citizens are unable to read or write in our language. Unless our rural schools are supplied with trained teachers, ten years hence we shall have a larger number of illiterates than we now have. It seems a travesty that while we have a bill in Congress designed to repair the wrongs of the past by wiping out adult illiteracy we should permit so many rural schools to be without teachers and so many more with unprepared teachers.

The war has had a depressive effect on teacher-training institutions. Many young persons who under normal conditions would have entered these institutions have been attracted to other lines of preparation. This applies especially to those in the rural field, for many of the newer fields are rated as higher types of civic and social services than “merely teaching a country school.” Many normal schools have been compelled to retrench in their expenditures. Budgets, meager in times of peace, have proved inadequate to meet the increased demands of the war. Rural departments

have been the first to be hampered by war economy. Increased responsibilities find them with shrinking budgets. Some have been discontinued. Others have reduced the number of instructors. High-salaried specialists have been replaced by those not so well prepared but willing to accept a lower salary. Other institutions have postponed the organization of departments until more prosperous times. Since we have not had dependable sources from which trained rural teachers might be obtained, our problem is intensified by being one of construction rather than of reconstruction.

THE RESPONSIBILITY OF MEETING THE EMERGENCY

The most hasty survey of the facts involved lead to the conclusion that some immediate means must be taken to meet the critical situation. Just where the obligations for supplying the teachers and through what agency or agencies such training can be best given are more perplexing problems. In the past we have shunted all educational responsibilities which might be so shifted on local communities. We have consoled ourselves by a more or less fatuous faith in local initiative. Not until we were compelled to act as a national unit did we realize that local initiative might be just as irrevocably set against educational progress as in its cordial support. The data gathered about our soldiers indicate that certain communities have not provided their children with elementary schools offering training in such common essentials as reading and writing. Large areas, including whole counties, states, and even wider areas, appear almost destitute of the most commonplace educational advantages.

When we first began to train elementary teachers for city schools, the matter was left to such cities as were willing to bear the expense. City normal schools were once earmarks of school systems keenly awake to educational progress. Such is not the case now, for city normal schools have been superseded by state institutions. Only a few of the larger cities can afford such a luxury. The teacher-training departments in the high schools and the county training schools are the only remaining teacher-training agencies organized on the theory that the local community should train its own teachers. They have gone a long way toward

working out a technique for the training of rural teachers. No doubt the instructors in the more efficient institutions of each state supporting them possess a keener professional insight toward and are more highly skilled in meeting the problems of the rural schools than any other equally large group in the respective states. In spite of their efficiency it is unlikely that such a large number of institutions organized in separate local school systems, many of which have adopted "educational retrenchment" as their watchword during the period of the war, is able to meet the present emergency.

State normal schools have assumed the responsibility of training elementary teachers for the city schools. As has been stated, few have accepted the task of training teachers for rural schools. In the period preceding the war it is doubtful whether any normal school in the country was able to supply its territory with an adequate number of trained rural teachers. Few have a sufficient number of members on their faculties with the training and rural contacts necessary to offer the specialized training. None are prepared to train their full quota of rural teachers to meet the emergency with their present teaching staffs. This means an added expense that their meager budgets will not meet. In many respects they are prepared to meet the situation. The training demanded has much in common with that offered other elementary teachers. They have the plants, equipment, library facilities, opportunities for observation of good teaching, and facilities for participation; and much of the practice teaching may be supplied by expanding the present facilities. Practically all are accessible to a sufficient number of rural schools to provide actual rural-school practice. During the period of the war technical schools and colleges were used in training war workers. Schools of chemistry were mobilized for similar purposes. Colleges were freely opened to the Students Army Training Corps. The normal schools may be used just as effectively in meeting the present emergency caused by the shortage of rural teachers.

In the past the federal government has not concerned itself with elementary education. Many phases in the present situation

demand federal action. The shortage is the result of a call for national, not local, services. The need is generally distributed throughout the country. Teachers must be trained on a large scale. The urgency calls for immediate action. Climatic conditions and the kind of crops produced call for a mobile teaching force. For example, in the southern states attendance of the older children during May, June, and July is all but impossible, while in North Dakota and other northern states these are much more favorable months for school attendance than the severely cold winter ones. The expenses of organization, administration, and supervision are much less when organized on a national basis than if the states were to take up the matter individually. There is opportunity for standardization. State normal schools train elementary teachers for the city schools; state universities through their colleges of education supply trained teachers for the high schools; state agricultural colleges subsidized by federal aid under the Smith-Hughes Act prepare teachers of the vocational subjects; the War Department has provided for the training of convalescent soldiers in hospitals and of soldiers during the period of demobilization; the Smith-Sears Act makes provision for the re-education of soldiers incapacitated for service in their former vocations; pending legislation plans to wipe out illiteracy among the adults; through the Ordnance Department children congregated on munition reservations were promised the best type of elementary education at the expense of the federal government; but the children in many of our rural schools are either without teachers or have untrained ones, and no means has been taken for supplying them with adequately prepared teachers. It is quite evident that the national government is under obligations to assume leadership and bear much of the expense incurred in supplying these schools with teachers of the best training present conditions will permit.

PROGRAM FOR MEETING THE EMERGENCY

The success of any plan inaugurated depends to a very large degree on the proper co-ordination and utilization of the resources belonging to teacher-training departments and county training

schools, to normal schools, and to the federal government. The shortage of teachers calls on each of these agencies to render valuable assistance. The technique for the training must be sought in the experiences of the teacher-training departments and county training schools. The services of their most efficient instructors will be demanded. Immediate action to meet a temporary shortage is urgent. Neither the state nor the federal government can afford to waste time and money by investing in sites and buildings. These should be freely shared by the normal schools and other teacher-training agencies with the federal government. Dormitory accommodations and meals should be provided on the same basis as for the training of war workers. The federal government should provide the leadership needed in organization, operation, and supervision of the training.

The plan here presented provides for three months of intensive training. Prospective teachers should be pledged to a term of service which will tide us through the present shortage of teachers. The candidates should possess physical fitness and at least have completed a four-year course in an accredited high school or its equivalent. No person should be received whose general average for the two years of school attendance preceding induction falls below C. They should be required to put in five and a half days per week during the course of training. The training should be offered at such institutions as the government may designate. If at any time after a candidate has completed the course of training it is deemed advisable for her to continue the training, she shall proceed to do so. During the period spent in training the federal government should provide transportation, food, and living quarters, and pay each the salary drawn by a private in the United States Army.

Approximately one half of the time spent in training should be given to professional courses and the other half to schoolroom practice. The standards of admission should insure adequate preparation in subject-matter. In all courses the work should be closely associated with actual school practice. The term of training is short, hence the prospective teachers should be kept submerged in schoolroom activities.

THE COURSE OF STUDY
PROFESSIONAL COURSES

	Weeks	Periods
1 <i>a</i> Principles of teaching	10	50
2 <i>a</i> Rural-school management	10	50
3 <i>a</i> Teaching reading	6	30
Teaching language	2	10
Teaching music and drawing	2	10
1 <i>b</i> Teaching geography	6	6
2 <i>b</i> Teaching history and civics	6	6
3 <i>b</i> Teaching hygiene and sanitation	6	6
4 <i>b</i> Teaching nature-study	6	6
5 <i>b</i> Teaching gardening	6	6
6 <i>b</i> Teaching arithmetic	3	3
7 <i>b</i> Teaching penmanship	3	3

SCHOOLROOM PRACTICE

	Weeks	Half-Days
1 <i>c</i> Observation of, demonstration of, and participation in, teaching	2	10
2 <i>c</i> Group teaching	3	15
3 <i>c</i> Room teaching	2	10
4 <i>c</i> Teaching in primary and intermediate grades	3	15
5 <i>c</i> Teaching in rural schools	2	20

The professional courses—1*a*, 2*a*, and 3*a*—make up the program for one half-day five days of the week. Each should be carefully worked out under the personal direction of the national supervisor by experts in methods of teaching and management of rural schools. A syllabus of each course should be at the disposal of those offering the courses. The work in 3*a* should include the presentation of principles and concrete demonstrations of how to put them into actual practice. At least half of the time should be spent in observing and appreciating the work of skilled teachers.

Schoolroom practice completes the work of the five days. Full half-day sessions should be devoted to this activity. Instead of making these periods opportunities to recuperate from the more severe strain of the classroom work, they should be the most searching and exacting tests of the prospective teachers' mettle. Definite and fixed responsibilities should be assigned. A carefully prepared syllabus should be in the possession of each practice supervisor.

The five types of schoolroom practice follow closely the scheme that has proved so successful in the teacher-training departments. All the resources of each emergency training school should be concentrated on the rural practice provided during the last two weeks of each term.

Courses *1b*, *2b*, *3b*, *4b*, *5b*, *6b*, and *7b* are planned for Saturday forenoons. At least half of the periods on this half-day should be double ones. A portion of the time should be given over to a demonstration of principles as applied in the classrooms. The courses should be offered by the teachers of the special subjects in the normal schools. If they are skilled in teaching pupils of elementary schools, they may very well be relied on to give actual demonstrations of expert teaching. If they are not so skilled, the assistance of capable teachers in the practice schools should be secured. The practice supervisors of emergency training should be present and free to offer suggestions adapting the material to the specific problems of the rural schools. If the normal school employs an instructor in agriculture, he should be given charge of the courses in nature-study and agriculture. In each course there should be a carefully prepared syllabus worked out under the direction of the national supervisor.

In order to carry out this emergency training in a normal school with practice-teaching facilities at its command, a special staff of five members would be required. Such a force could train from sixty to ninety teachers each term. It is possible to have four terms during the year, giving an annual product of from two hundred and forty to three hundred and sixty teachers. A supervisor of emergency training prepared to offer courses *1a* and *2a* should have general charge of the work in each normal school. Courses *3a*, *1b*, *2b*, *3b*, *4b*, *5b*, *6b*, and *7b* should be offered by regular members of the normal-school faculties. The schoolroom practice should be placed in charge of three special emergency training practice supervisors. Three important factors should be considered in selecting these supervisors: actual rural school experience, former success in training rural teachers, and skill in grasping and imparting the principles underlying good teaching. They have a far more responsible service to perform than merely giving criti-

cisms. Their ability to give instruction in the organization and presentation of subject-matter will often be just as severely tested as that of those offering instruction in special subjects, such as geography, history, etc. Principles and actual classroom applications should never be dissociated in the course of the training. There should be a follow-up supervisor whose duty would be to look after the welfare of both teacher and public after she has entered her school. This person should place teachers, arrange for their living quarters, assist teachers in improving their instruction, check them up, and investigate and adjust all matters of complaint.

If the enrolment in an emergency training school should approximate sixty, the students should be divided into two sections; if it should reach ninety, three sections would be necessary. During the morning one section would be taking the professional courses while the other was engaged in the schoolroom practice. In the afternoon the order would be reversed. If the enrolment were but sixty, each supervisor would have twenty students under her; if there were ninety students, each would have thirty. This would not be an excessive load as compared with what some of the instructors in the teacher-training departments are now carrying. During the last two weeks of each term when the rural school practice is being given each of the five instructors would have supervision of from twelve to eighteen students.

The federal government should assume control of the overhead organization. The general control might very well be placed under the direction of a committee of experts. This committee would delegate the responsibility of executing its policies to a federal supervisor of emergency training. The duties of this person would be both administrative and supervisory. Assistants would be needed to give adequate attention to the many departments. In performing the administrative duties the national supervisor would act directly with the administration of the normal school and indirectly through the assistant supervisors and the local supervisors of emergency training. The supervisory duties would be rendered through the assistant supervisors to the local supervisors, to the practice supervisors, to the instructors in the normal schools offering the professional courses, and to the follow-up supervisors.

Those advocating federal aid to educational enterprises have been confronted by at least one valid objection. The danger is always lurking that local school systems will be relieved of duties in which they should be interested and for which they should make sacrifices. In this case certain districts might greet the measure as an opportunity to employ a good teacher at a meager salary. To overcome this objection, no teacher should be permitted to complete the course of training and enter a school on a salary less than that received by the lowest-paid teacher in the group, including the one-fourth of the rural teachers drawing the highest salaries in the county.

It is not contended that the course of training here outlined is sufficient to produce the type of teacher which is demanded for the rural schools. This is another problem which needs most careful consideration. The program here proposed will produce a teacher very much more efficient than many who have entered the rural schools during the war. It will afford an opportunity for those who are unprepared but have the promise of becoming good teachers to secure the training without additional expense on their part. If pursued extensively and long enough, it will make it possible for every rural school to have a teacher with some professional training. The scheme will help to repair the educational waste that many rural districts have suffered during the period of the war. Moreover, it recognizes the problem of training rural teachers as a state and national, not a local, one. It offers an inducement to young women to enter the profession, as the training will not cost them any financial outlay. If the federal government can afford to pay disabled soldiers sixty-five dollars per month while taking vocational training, it will surely receive far richer dividends by providing trained teachers for its rural schools.