LIVING and LEARNING in a Rural School

GENEVIEVE BOWEN

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BY

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Curriculum Director, County Schools
Bucks County, Pennsylvania

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EDITOR'S PREFACE

Living and Learning in a Rural School brings a refreshing point of view to the field of professional literature for teachers. It begins with the first day of school, a new teacher, and a little girl who was pushed into a mud puddle. It then takes the reader through the daily life of the school as the teacher, Miss Lee, learns to know her pupils and their individual needs, comes to understand the community in which she teaches, and strives to find better ways to help the children live and learn together. The easy, conversational style makes the book interesting. Though it suggests the aroma of chalk dust and wet overshoes, the book is not about chalk dust and wet overshoes or about other paraphernalia found in the school. It is about boys and girls working, playing, and learning together with their teacher. It shows them acquiring habits and attitudes of thinking and doing which make them good citizens now and prepare them for the duties, responsibilities, and privileges of adults later on. But, most of all, the book is about Miss Lee as she faces the daily problems of a conscientious teacher. Miss Lee gradually finds ways in which her pupils can learn the lessons of living, and finally, with the help of her county superintendent, discussions with other teachers, and the summer workshop for teachers at the teachers' college, she is able to organize a program in which the school and pupils grow together.

Teachers who daily face a room full of lively, restless young-

sters will feel a kinship to Miss Lee. They will find both help and comfort in her struggles with the problems of a teacher who wants to be of the greatest service to her charges and who seeks practical ways of guiding them as they learn. This account of Miss Lee's experiences will help school-board members, who will find in actual practice the kind of learning they want in their own school, and they will see more clearly how they can help their teacher carry on such learning. County superintendents and county supervisors will find in this book an example of how individual schools with a little of the right kind of help and encouragement can grow and develop. Teachers' colleges and normal schools will get ideas for helping groups of teachers in service who bring in their problems and, with the guidance and resources of the college, develop a curriculum that will serve the needs of rural boys and girls. The book will be useful to the many elementary school teachers who live and work in the open country and in the towns of rural America. It will help most of all the more than one hundred thousand teachers in the one- and two-room schools who live and work with the four million boys and girls on whom will depend, in a large measure, the future of our small communities and of our nation.

This book grew out of the wide experience and training of the author, who has both attended and taught in one-teacher schools, normal schools, teachers colleges, and graduate colleges of education. She has worked intimately with country teachers and their problems in at least four different regions of the United States, and the problems Miss Lee faced came from the actual experiences of rural teachers. To this are added the author's daily work with country schools as a county supervisor and her vision of what the country school should and can be when teachers, pupils, and community work and learn together.

New ways of living require new schools. Those who believe that the future of civilization depends upon intelligent citizens who have learned to solve their own problems and those who believe that in the years ahead we can have a finer kind of life than the small community has yet seen if we can learn how to meet the great changes taking place in rural America, will find in *Living and Learning in a Rural School* both inspiration and practical help.

FRANK W. CYR

AUTHOR'S PREFACE

PROBABLY fifty people have exclaimed, when told the subject of this book, "But there aren't any one-teacher schools left, are there?" There are, in fact, about 120,000 one-teacher schools in the United States, almost 9,000 in one state and more than 2,000 in each of twenty-three other states. In these states the courses of study in use are largely of the subject-matter-set-out-to-be-learned type, with minimums to be covered by each grade. Little recognition is given to the distinctive organization of the one-teacher school, which makes such coverage well-nigh impossible; and the rural teacher—the least adequately trained, experienced, and supervised teacher in our schools—is left to make what adjustment she can to this ill-fitting guide for her instructional program.

The story of Riverside School told in this book is an account of one teacher's efforts to reconcile her growing understanding of the needs, experiences, interests, and capacities of her children with the cramping routine imposed by such a course of study. Riverside School is no one school; Miss Lee is no one teacher. They are composites representing a struggle which intelligent, conscientious teachers in rural schools are making in every part of our country. Some helps have been offered them by alternation plans, by the combining of grades and of subjects in various ways, and by wise, sympathetic supervision. But none of these helps are widely available, and the problem

remains one of the most common, yet unnoticed, difficulties in our educational system.

I have suggested, in the reorganization of Riverside School, the use of a three-group organization with a corresponding three-cycle rotation of integrated content, such as that developed by Dr. Fannie W. Dunn, Dr. Effie Bathurst, and Miss Marcia Everett in experimental schools in New Jersey and Connecticut. I have interpreted this plan in terms of a typical one-teacher school in an agricultural community and have indicated how it might be adapted to the specific resources and needs of that school. I have tried by a simple narrative account to show rural teachers that the transition from their traditional procedures to a more flexible type of program can take place naturally and with little disruption. It is my hope that this book may encourage rural teachers and superintendents to attack this prevalent, but not insuperable, problem in their own schools.

I wish to express my appreciation to Dr. Fannie W. Dunn and Dr. Effie Bathurst for permission to use their curriculum materials, and to the many teachers whose concern for their children's welfare and persistent efforts to serve it, in the face of disheartening obstacles, have encouraged me to prepare this book.

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LIVING AND LEARNING IN A RURAL SCHOOL

CHARACTERS

First Graders:
Frank Anderson
Norma Carlson
Helen Foster
Donny Johanson

Second Grader:
Edith Foster

Third Graders:
Arthur Carlson
Rose Deutsch
Christine Gunderson
Elmer Helsel

Fourth Graders:
Elsie Bergen
Rudolph Deutsch
Freddie Iverson

Fifth Graders:
Ellen Anderson
Jim Bergen
June Eddy

Sixth Graders:
Ernest Carlson
Vera Foster
Ruby Helsel

Seventh Graders:
Alfred Bergen
Louis Bergen
Alice Eddy
John Foster

Eighth Graders:
Alvin Anderson
Anna Carlson
Tom Karp

Children in each family:

Anderson	3	Eddy	2	Iverson	1
Bergen	4	Foster	4	Johanson	1
Carlson	4	Gunderson	1	Karp	1
Deutsch	2	Helsel	2	*Total*	25

Teacher: Miss Gertrude Lee.
School Board: Mr. Anderson, Mr. Leidel, Mr. Sandin.
County Superintendent: Mr. Gray.
Workshop Leader: Miss Hazel Elden.

DAILY PROGRAM FOR RIVERSIDE SCHOOL

Time	*Subject*	*Grade*
9:00	Opening Exercises and Music	All
9:10	Reading	I
9:20	Reading	II
9:30	Reading	III
9:40	History	IV
9:50	History	V
10:00	History	VI
10:10	History	VII
10:20	History	VIII
10:30	Recess	
10:45	General period	I–II
10:55	Arithmetic	III–IV
11:05	Arithmetic	V
11:15	Arithmetic	VI
11:25	Arithmetic	VII
11:35	Arithmetic	VIII
11:50	Noon period	
12:50	Reading	I
1:00	Reading	II
1:10	Reading	III
1:20	Geography	IV
1:30	Geography	V
1:40	Geography	VI
1:50	Geography	VII
2:00	Science	VIII
2:10	Penmanship and Spelling	All I
2:30	Recess	
2:45	Language	I–II
2:55	Language	III
3:05	English (M, W)	IV
	Reading (T, Th)	
3:15	Same	V
3:25	Same	VI
3:35	Same	VII
3:45	Same	VIII
4:00	Dismissal	

Friday afternoon: 2:45–3:55—Art, handwork, or literature.

1 · STUDYING THE CHILDREN

"Miss Lee, Freddie pushed me down and got mud on my good dress!"

"Oh, Christine! This is the third time today that you've come in to tell me things the other children have done. Why do you do that?"

Christine's tight little lips whisper, "I don't know," her face quivers, and her eyes fill with tears.

"Well, don't cry. Run out and play, and tell Freddie to come in."

"Freddie, you're a big boy and Christine is a little girl. You know it isn't right to push her. Why do you do that?"

His shabby toe kicks at a crack in the floor, and his face flushes. "Aw, I dunno," he mumbles.

"You'd better take your coat off and stay in now. This afternoon, play with the other boys. You'll try not to have any more trouble, won't you?"

The afternoon classes go by one by one. You talk and write and listen, but in the back of your mind those two "whys" keep tapping. Christine is quiet and busy, writing her spelling words over and over in neat columns, studying her reading lesson painstakingly—the picture of a good little girl. Why does she tattle on the other children? She rarely smiles, and, come to think of it, you've never heard her laugh aloud. *Why?* Freddie, too, is quiet, but he works only in spurts, and gazes

out the window or absently watches the other classes between times. He gets the first few spelling words right, and all the rest wrong. He doesn't seem to know any of his geography lesson—yet he's been doing good work in arithmetic, except for the story-problems. He is no trouble in school, but so boisterous on the playground. *Why?*

At the end of the day, as you put assignments on the boards and straighten the room, you think of those two children. They aren't really problem cases, but you want to help them learn to get along with others and to get the most out of school. They couldn't answer your whys—perhaps you can. How much do you really *know* about them? You write "Christine" at the top of a page in your notebook, and make a list of the things you have observed about her:

Works hard, never whispers, pays close attention in class.
Reads very well aloud, often volunteers to read.
Has 100 in spelling almost every day.
Gets 100 on her arithmetic papers, but sometimes does not seem to understand the problems.
Is worried when she fails to get 100.
Talks in class when called upon, rarely volunteers to talk, never tells incidents which happen out of school.
Writes carefully and neatly but very slowly.
Likes to tidy bookcases and tables, and looks after the first graders at lunch time.
Brought flowers one day and smiled happily when I thanked her.
Stays in and reads at noon and recess or copies pictures from her books, often has to be told to go outdoors.
Stands around watching on the playground, plays when I start a game.

What more can you add to your list, from last year's records? Not much to help you, but you write it down:

Age: 7 years, 6 months, at present—the youngest in third grade.
Perfect attendance last year for every month but one.
Had A's in almost every subject for the year's average—the best record in her grade.
Health record: very good.

You try to analyze your notes for an explanation of Christine's habit of tattling:

On the positive side you have: She is healthy; she has good habits of work; she likes to succeed in school; she likes order and regularity; she is helpful.

On the negative side you have: She is less mature, physically, than others in her grade; she doesn't seem to know how to get along with other children; she is timid about volunteering in any informal activity; she does not seem to be a very happy child.

Does she tell on others because they do not do as she thinks they should, because she has higher standards than theirs? Does she do it because she feels she is an outsider? Perhaps both explanations are right. You will watch her some more, especially on the playground, and keep notes on what you see. What is she like at home? She doesn't live far way. Why not walk over there after supper?

The neat house and farmyard remind you of Christine's clean starched dresses and firmly tied braids. She is picking seed pods off the flower stalks beside the porch, and runs to the gate with a little shout of delight, "Oh, Miss Lee, come in and visit us a little while!" Her mother comes out of the kitchen with a sleepy baby in her arms and a four-year-old peeping from behind her. Christine capably takes them in charge, and you sit down in the little living room where the sharp white lights illuminate the bare walls and spotless corners. "How nice to have electric lights!"

"Yes, we put them in this summer. They help so much in

the yard and barn, too. Next year we hope we can put in running water. It is hard to carry it for the washing and cleaning. Is Christine good in school? She is good to help at home. There is so much to do, with the little ones. I have to help the mister with the milking. It costs so much to hire a man. No, I don't get to school very often. We don't go much, except to church. No, there isn't any Sunday School; the children go to church with us. Here comes the mister."

He is a big man, older than his wife, with a stern face. "Does Christine do her work in school? Yes, she does get good report cards. Just let us know if she plays in school. Yes, it's good weather for threshing; good crop this year, too. Another year like this and we can buy that next forty and have a bigger herd. Can milk later now, with the new lights. Yes, it's good to have them in the house, too, but we get to bed pretty early."

Walking home in the autumn starlight, you remember: "Just let us know if she plays in school." That's it! Christine *needs* more play, more just being a child and romping and laughing. She needs to learn to play games and to enjoy other children, to be one of them.

But Freddie plays—that seems to be all that he really cares about. Does he have to work too hard at home, too? You need to know more about him. Tomorrow you will make a sheet for him in your notebook and try to find out what he needs.

The air is chilly this morning so you start a fire in the big jacketed stove. Some of the children come in and gather around it, while you work at your desk. How they chatter! You catch phrases about the threshing, about going to the fair, about the flocks of ducks gathering in the sloughs. They seem to have plenty to talk about, now. Why are they so tongue-tied in class?

Donny comes in with a little wooden train. "My daddy bought it in Chicago when he went down with a carload of