

III

SOME NEEDS AND PROBLEMS OF
RURAL SUPERVISION IN VIRGINIA

At present the system of rural supervision in Virginia is very inadequate. The division superintendent is the chief supervisory officer of his county, and in many cases is the only one.

The division superintendent is principally an administrative and executive officer, and the numerous duties to which he must attend as such leave very little time for the supervision of his schools. The Education Commission's *Survey and Report* (1918-9) gives the following statement in regard to the disposition of Virginia superintendents' time:

"Of the 86 superintendents of rural divisions in the state, 57 report that their entire time is devoted to school duties. Of the others 15 report that they spend almost all of their time in school work, while 14 report that they devote from one-third to five-sixths of their time to the schools. This does not mean that they devote their time to the supervision of instruction, or even to school visitation. By far the greatest part is devoted to administrative, executive, or business matters."

There is a great deal of correspondence and other clerical work connected with the office. Besides the amount of office work other factors enter in which make efficient supervision by the superintendent impossible.

The territory to be covered is too large. For example, the area of Augusta county is 960 square miles and the number of rural teachers is 253, including 29 colored. The conditions in Augusta county are typical of those all over the state, and may be used as concrete examples. Therefore, the superintendent of Augusta county can not visit many of his schools more than once each session, and those in the outlying districts he is certainly able to visit only once a session. There are not many of these schools, but it is in them that so much help is needed. Even in the schools that are visited more than once a session, what does it amount to? The superintendent sees only a few classes taught, and if he makes suggestions he is not often able to see that they are carried out. He can not spend more time at each school because they are so scattered that a great deal of time is

taken up in traveling over bad roads from one to the other.

In addition to the large number of teachers in the county the superintendent's work is made harder by the "migration" of the teachers. They constantly change from year to year, and he has largely a new set to deal with each time. For this reason he is unable to know his force as well as he might, even in his infrequent visits.

It is important to realize that some of the division superintendents "are not qualified to supervise classroom instruction." The Education Commission's Report shows that there were twelve superintendents in 1918-19 who had had no teaching experience, and twenty-one who had had less than three years' experience. Although some had teaching experience they had no special training for their work.

There are two ways by which the present system of rural supervision may be improved. First, give the superintendent an assistant or assistants to attend to the office work while he spends almost all of his time visiting the schools. Second, have a trained supervisor for each magisterial district or combination of districts in the county. These supervisors should work with the superintendent and under his direction.

The chief difficulty with the first is that no assistance is thought necessary. Generally the trustees can not be made to see that even one assistant is needed. Some invariably meet the request with, "The superintendent has never had any help before, why should he have it now?"

Even if the superintendent did have an assistant in his office and did not have disputes to settle, meetings to attend, together with numerous other duties, one man could not do the necessary amount of supervision. Turning again to the Education Commission's *Report*, we find the following:

"On the average the non-city divisions embrace an area of between 400 and 500 square miles, contain from 3500 to 4000 pupils, and engage the services of between 120 and 130 teachers."

If this is the average, how can the superintendents of such divisions as Augusta or Rockingham counties, having an approximate area of 900 square miles, and employing from 280 or 300 teachers, adequately supervise instruction?

The second means of improving the supervision is by far the better. Each supervisor is responsible only for the schools in his district, and as a result of the comparatively small area and ample time much more efficient work can be done. The supervisor learns to know not only his teachers but also the people of the different communities. With his special training he is able to help both the schools and the communities.

The first effort for more adequate supervision in Augusta county was made several years ago. Two supervisors were provided to assist with the supervision of the county as a unit. The results of this plan were not so satisfactory, for even with the two additional supervisors the area to be covered was too great, and the numbers of teachers too large, to do thorough work with some without neglecting others.

This year another plan was decided on and much better results are being secured. Instead of having the whole county divided among the supervisors and the superintendent, the supervisors have one magisterial district each. Both of these districts are in the northern end of the county. The supervisor in North River district has forty-five teachers and is able to visit each teacher at least once a month. When it is necessary she spends several days at one school. This was impossible with the three supervisors trying to cover the entire county. It now remains for each district to have its own supervisor. At first, however, there was some opposition to supervision in Augusta county. It is growing less everyday, and next year two districts are planning to combine and employ a supervisor.

The main cause for the conditions in the rural schools to-day is that the teachers themselves are deficient in the education and training necessary to fit them for their tasks. It has been said that the country school is the "training ground for young, inexperienced, and relatively unprepared teachers." When they do get a little experience in the rural schools they give them up for positions in or near the city, thus leaving the county to another set of their poorly prepared sisters. Those who have received training will not consider positions in the rural schools if they can possibly avoid it. In the Education Commission's *Report* we find these facts in regard to the training of rural teachers:

"Between one-fifth and one-quarter of the teachers in the rural white schools had had no teaching experience before this year, (1918-1919) and one-sixth had had only one year of previous experience."

Many of these teachers had not even had a high school education. Yet the task of making future citizens of the state is entrusted to large numbers of these unskilled teachers. No oversight of their efforts is made by anyone except a brief visit, possibly once, during the session, by the division superintendent. The consequence is that the teaching in an average rural school is "a dreary round of inefficiency."

"In a school system where a large percentage of the teachers are inexperienced each year, and where another large percentage are also untrained each year, the only reasonable means of securing the necessary economy and directness of time and effort is through the provision of careful supervision of the instruction."

The effects of this lack of training are manifold, and they could be avoided in most instances by the help and advice of the supervisor; for example, out in the strictly rural schools of Augusta county—and it is true in other counties—teachers are found conducting their work without a course of study, without a daily program, having their pupils poorly classified, and using improper methods of instruction. In their methods of instruction they either follow those of the teachers they themselves have had or those of their own devising. Poor discipline and attendance are also found in their schools.

In order that a supervisor may help these conditions and make a success of his work, it is essential for him to have had special training together with previous teaching experience, preferably in rural schools; broad, liberal ideas; knowledge of the country people, their life and customs; judgment, tact, and ability to meet people. This threefold purpose as stated by C. R. Maxwell in *School and Society*, February, 1919, is as follows:

"Have an ideal of the end which he wishes to accomplish."

As a means of accomplishing this end he should have a definite plan of work for himself each day. It is wrong for him to insist on his teachers' having careful plans without using them himself.

"Have an ideal of the method by which the goal will be best attained, and the idea of obstacles which must be overcome in adjusting means to reach the end."

"The supervisor's problem is to develop teachers."

He becomes the training agency for many of his teachers, because the majority have not had the opportunity to attend a school which prepares them for their profession.

One of the first things a supervisor should do in his work is to call a meeting of his teachers on the day before the opening of the session. At this meeting he can put into their hands the number of children enrolled in the different schools the previous session, the average daily attendance and the promotion cards of the children. It may not be too much to say that the organization of each school could be effected to a great extent at this meeting, so that it would be possible for the school work to be in running order the first day. In addition to this he can distribute all blank forms and give specific directions as to keeping records and making reports. As the work now is in the state, all these details are left to the district boards. The men on these boards, being business men, do not have time to attend to these duties, and consequently know very little about them. The result is that much time is lost at the beginning of each session. In the case of many inexperienced teachers little is done during the session until the school is visited by the superintendent. He may not reach it until the middle or near the end of the term, and then the work will have gone so far as to be beyond remedy.

The supervision of the first week of the session should be done rapidly, all the schools being visited. In this way the supervisor finds his weak teachers and knows where he is needed. He will spend a great deal of his time with the young and inexperienced teachers until they get their work well started.

One of the most important phases of the supervisor's work is his ability to recommend teachers. He is in a position to become acquainted with the teachers in his district by personal contact and can, therefore, recommend them for appointment to positions where their abilities can count for the most. This will be a vast improvement over the haphazard plan that is practiced in the state at present. It has been stated before that the

trustees are business men, and beside are very poorly paid as trustees; so they give little attention to the teachers and their work. They are in no way qualified to judge whether a teacher is able to fill a certain position or not. The superintendent is not much more capable of determining a teacher's ability from a few hours' observation of her work. He might come on one of the days when everything seems to go wrong. He would get a poor impression of her and her work, and perhaps do a good teacher an injustice. In Augusta county the supervisors keep a record of their visits to the schools, and take notes on what they observe, either favorable or unfavorable to the teachers. At the end of the term they will tabulate all these observations concerning each teacher, and from such data the district boards will have a good idea of what each teacher can do.

One of the first things the supervisor notices when he enters the schoolroom is whether the teacher is following the course of study. In a few instances in Augusta teachers have been found with only the vaguest idea as to the amount of text to be covered in their grades. They had planned to go as far in the texts as their predecessor had gone. She may have covered the required amount of subject matter, but very likely she did not. The supervisor also sees whether the teacher is using the proper text books, and whether the classes are making the required progress in them. He can suggest which parts of the texts should be stressed, and which may be either passed over lightly or omitted entirely. He may help in the selection and use of supplementary material in connection with certain texts.

The fact that many teachers attempt to conduct their work without a daily program is almost beyond belief. It is true, nevertheless, and the reason seems to be largely that they either do not know how to make one or are too negligent to take the trouble. Without a daily program the teacher has no definite line of procedure. The following is a sample of her school day. She asks a reading class, for instance, whether it is ready to recite. Some one says "no." Then she calls for another class. If the time allows, all the classes recite, if not, school is dismissed at the regular hour anyway. There is no system—a hit-or-miss style of doing things.

In the making of the daily program the supervisor can be of especial benefit, for he

can show the teacher how to economize her time by correlation and alternation of certain studies. This is particularly true in the one-teacher schools, where the many different classes call for correlation and alteration because every moment of time must be used in order to secure effective work. At the beginning of the school session last fall in Augusta county practically the whole of the first month was spent by the supervisors in helping the teachers plan their weekly schedules of classes. Both found that it was mainly in one-teacher schools that the teacher was unable to complete the required number of classes daily, because she did not know how to combine and alternate them. In almost every case the teachers were glad for any aid the supervisors could give them.

The supervisor notices the classification of the pupils. If a teacher happens to classify a pupil either a grade above or a grade below his proper one, that pupil will be wasting his time. Unless the school is properly classified, the teacher will fail to secure economy of her time and energy. Discouragement is likely to follow both on the part of the teacher and the pupils. The supervisor is in a position to correct any irregularity immediately.

The most important phase of the supervisor's work deals with methods of instruction. It has been previously stated that the majority of Virginia's rural teachers have had no professional training, and use the methods of instruction of the teachers under whom they studied. The supervisor first observes the teacher's method of conducting the recitation, notes her strong and weak points; then he shows the teacher wherein her methods are wrong by teaching the class or classes for her. Where no supervisors are employed none of these helpful measures may be used. If the teacher makes blunders she continues to make them, and struggles along the best way she can. In regard to the supervisor's teaching the class, the supervisor of North River District says that she finds it "the only way to show the teachers their mistakes." Right here the supervisor must use all his tact and judgment, for if the teacher becomes hurt or offended it will be difficult to give her any real assistance. One case where a teacher saw her mistake and took her criticism good-naturedly occurred during a first-reader recitation. She was allowing the children to point to each word as they read, thus encouraging them to read

in a disconnected, jerky fashion. After the recitation was over the supervisor asked the teacher if she would read some for him. He took the reader and began pointing to each word as she read. She saw the object at once and those children are being taught to read correctly.

The supervisor can be of great help with the discipline. He is able to make suggestions in specific cases and suggest busy work for the lower grades. So many of the little children in the country school sit all day with scarcely anything to do, yet are expected to keep quiet.

The supervisor can increase the attendance of the schools by forming Patrons' Leagues and in other ways coming in contact with the people. In his talks with the patrons he can show how detrimental it is for a child to lose time, not only on his own account but also on account of his classmates. Many people do not realize the significance of an education. They think it is more important to keep their children at work either in the home or on the farm than to send them to school.

In most of the rural schools there is practically no domestic science, gymnastics, or manual training. Until recently no effort had been made to get these subjects in the schools, and the people do not believe they are necessary. Many a mother has said, "My daughter does not have to go to school to learn to cook; she can learn that at home." If the people are made to see the great benefits of these subjects it will be possible to have them in the schools much sooner. Here lies a great opportunity for the supervisor. He would have more influence with the people than the average teacher because they know his ideas and opinions are based on wider training and experience.

The supervisor may be of great assistance in securing libraries for the schools. Teachers and pupils are handicapped by the lack of a sufficient number of good reference books.

The supervisor can help the teacher by his constructive criticisms, but these criticisms require all of his tact. He should not tell her that some of her methods of instruction are wrong, but why they are wrong. It is necessary that he be fair in his judgment of her work, be careful that he does not judge her by what he thinks she ought to do but by what she does. In his private conferences

with the teacher he gives her his criticisms and suggestions. Mr. E. E. Worrell, the State Supervisor of Rural Schools, advocates the use of a special notebook by the supervisor in which he records the suggestions given each of his teachers at his first visit. When he comes again he consults the notebook to see whether the teacher has carried out his instructions. In this way he is able to check the work of his teachers. One other means of helping the teachers in supervised districts that is proving very successful in Augusta county is the group meetings. These meetings are held once a month, and in them the teachers discuss their problems with one another and the supervisor. Through these discussions they find practical solutions of their difficulties from the experiences of each other.

Both the educators and the people of Virginia are beginning to realize more and more the need of adequate rural supervision. Without it our schools will be poor and unprogressive, and a great injustice will be done to the rural child and to the rural school. The prospect is now more promising and in the near future it will become an important factor in our educational system.

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IV

THE SUBNORMAL CHILD AND THE SCHOOL

WHAT TO DO WITH THE DEFECTIVE CHILD IN SCHOOL

The defective child is one of the most trying problems of the public school today. The old way, which is not so old after all, of reteaching children year after year has been and is a draining expense on the community. The promotion of children mentally incapacitated for advancement has been worse. The drilling of children in the fundamentals which they can not grasp is a constant discouragement to both the child and the teacher, and a waste of time and money. Forcing or trying to force all children into the same mold is an educational crime. What to do with the

defective child in the public schools is a big question, out of which has grown the forming of the ungraded rooms, the special schools and classes for backward children in some communities and by some school systems.

INDIVIDUAL DIFFERENCES

Textbooks written by college professors, usually from an adult point of view, customs and traditions, and the standard requirements of colleges have been largely the basis for curriculum making. In order to standardize the schools of the country, something had to be done and these curricula answered that need. They considered all children of equal mental ability; all must study the same things and all were expected to accomplish the same results. But this didn't happen. Then they sought to make better curricula. Still some children went "way ahead" and some fell far behind. The cry of individual differences broke upon the educational horizon. All men, all children of man, are not created equal. Some were meant to be the great leaders of civilization, some to fit into the ordinary walks of life; and some were meant for the obscure places, such as unskilled labor or even street-sweeping. Each should fit into his own sphere where he could serve better than anywhere else. So it is the business of education to help the individual to find his place.

MENTAL MEASURING-RODS

The tests, the mental measuring-rods, came into use to help place the individual where he belonged. Standard tests of reading, of arithmetic, of spelling, and of other subjects are now being used. Group intelligence tests, to aid in placing the child where he belongs in school, are now used in many cities or towns. The Binet-Simon tests, the most widely known of any individual general intelligence tests, have been of vast utility not only in schools, but in the army, in large businesses, and in the courts. By these tests the grade of mentality of the individual can be judged. Only an expert should give and diagnose these tests. A vast amount of harm can be done by a layman's recording as final his judgment of the mentality of another individual. This does not mean that it is not