FOXFIRE VISIT
Background Information
FOXFIRE VISIT: BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

3 DESCRIPTIONS:
4 Introduction/Philosophy/Pertinent Facts
   Foxfire Magazine
5 Magazine - Language Arts
6 Music/Storytelling
7 Student Services: Summer Job Program
8 Radio/Video
9 Foxfire Centre
10 Eliot Wigginton: A Profile

11 INTERVIEWS:
   Foxfire
15 Collaborating to Write
17 On 25 Years of Foxfire

22 PRINCIPLES:
   Touchstones
26 Empowerment Through Education
31 But I Teach in the City; What Can I Do?
32 Foxfire Grows Up (extract)

34 NETWORKS:
   Educational Outreach
35 Teacher Networks
36 The Fellows Program

37 RESOURCES:
   How You Can Help/Resources
38 Foxfire Book Series

39 MATERIALS AVAILABLE; Friends of Connect
40 MATERIALS AND SUBSCRIPTION ORDER FORMS

This issue of Connect provides background information for the visit to Australia of Eliot Wigginton and two students from Foxfire. The information is taken from current brochures and reports and from interviews and published articles over the last twelve years.

Thanks go to Foxfire for supplying the material for publication in this issue: the current Foxfire brochure, the 1988 Annual Report, Harvard Education Letter, Educational Leadership and Harvard Educational Review. Other material is drawn from The Secondary Teacher and Hands On.

Wig is brought to Australia by the Society for the Provision of Education in Rural Australia (SPERA) and the Victorian Country Education Project. These organizations will be featuring Wig in workshops and a conference in Victoria in early July. For details of the CEP workshops, contact John Stafford on (03) 329 5677; for details of and registration for the SPERA Conference in Albury/Wodonga, contact Dr Don Reeves on (057) 62 3366.

Details of the public seminar and workshop in Melbourne are included with this issue. Please note that places may be limited: register NOW with Connect on (03) 489 9052 or the Youth Research Centre on (03) 344 8251.

Production of this issue of Connect is supported by the Victorian Government through the Small Grants Program of the Victorian Consultative Committee for International Literacy Year (ILY).

Roger Holdsworth
"Most of us think of Foxfire as a series of books...featuring folklore recounted by people in rural Appalachia.... Such was the case for myself prior to a recent visit to Rabun Gap, Georgia, the home of Foxfire. It did not take long for me to realize, however, that pedagogy, not culture, is the real issue here."
-George Wood, Ohio U.

In 1966, during his first year of teaching ninth and tenth-grade English in a 250-pupil high school in the Appalachian Mountains of Northeast Georgia, Eliot Wigginton helped his students found a quarterly magazine that they named Foxfire. The magazine struggled for years to stay afloat. In 1972, a selection of articles from the magazine was published in book form by Doubleday. The Foxfire Book has long since passed three million copies in print. The following years saw publication of eight additional volumes from Doubleday and four from E.P. Dutton. All royalties from the sale of these books go to The Foxfire Fund, Inc. to fund other activities it now sponsors within the public high school and the surrounding county. Now the numerous educational activities that take place under the sponsorship of the Fund are generally acknowledged to constitute one of the most dramatically successful public high school projects in this nation, having been featured in every major national newspaper and magazine, as well as NBC's "Today" and ABC's "Good Morning America."

Because of this visibility, Foxfire staff members receive hundreds of invitations a year to speak at conferences from Maine to Alaska. Though most have to be declined, some fifty a year are accepted when the sponsoring organization also agrees to pay all expenses for at least one student to accompany the staff member and be a part of the presentation. Through this requirement, every year students who have never flown, never stayed in a hotel and never given a speech in public add these events to their educational experience.

The specific work of Foxfire, begun before any of our current students was born, is based on philosophical theories that are as old as education itself. What makes Foxfire so triumphantly unique, however, is that rather than being a proposal for a program that might exist in a public school, Foxfire does exist. Honed and refined through twenty-three years of trial and error within the system, and having survived scrutiny and evaluation of every description, it now stands as one example of a style of education that has the power to change students' lives.
**Introduction**

The Foxfire Fund, Inc., of Rabun County, Georgia, is a non-profit educational organization founded in 1968 as a result of the successful Foxfire high school magazine project which had begun in 1966. The fund was established to support the efforts of the magazine and ultimately to promote the educational philosophy that was an outgrowth of that experience.

**Philosophy**

The conviction that underpins every aspect of Foxfire’s work is that exciting, positive and genuinely productive learning environments can be created within all public schools.

The educational philosophy that Foxfire has come to symbolize, and through which this conviction finds its daily expression, affirms:

- the academic agenda of the schools is most powerfully and naturally served, not by drill and rote memorization of disconnected bits and pieces of information, but through its utilization and application in the real world;
- the activities and end products that result have special force and power when they are perceived by both the students and the surrounding community as having integrity and value, for then the possibility exists for the school and community to bond in true partnership, each in the service of the other for the ongoing benefit of both;
- the positive, charged classroom atmosphere that is generated as teachers and students work in collegialship to accomplish these higher ends has dramatic impact upon the motivation and the sense of self-esteem and self-worth of all involved.

**Pertinent Facts**

Foxfire demonstrates and refines its philosophy inside a 900-pupil, rural Appalachian public school. In Georgia’s Rabun County High School, Foxfire sponsors sixteen classes per semester that range across the curriculum from literature and grammar/composition to social studies, music and media sciences. Since we have insisted, from the beginning, on the absolute best from our students, and because they give it, there is an unprecedented audience for their work. Out of these experiential, community-centered and academically rigorous classes flow such end products as a quarterly magazine, radio shows, record albums and cassette tapes, and the internationally acclaimed Foxfire books—all produced by high school students.

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**Foxfire Magazine**

Foxfire is a lichen that grows in the dark. It is also the quarterly magazine that remains the cornerstone of our project.

The contents of the magazine are drawn from the indigenous Appalachian culture from which the students who edit it come. Tape recorders and cameras in hand, these high school students fan out into their surrounding communities in an effort to document the once self-sufficient culture that is their roots. Many of the resulting articles are vehicles through which grandparents who remember demonstrate once again, step by step, such nearly forgotten skills as blacksmithing, planting by the signs of the Zodiac, log cabin building, cooking on a fireplace, hide tanning, spinning and weaving, and the making of such once-essential items as coffins, shoes, banjos, flintlock rifles, fiddles, soap, and home remedies. Other articles are simple monologues in which fascinating mountain elders recount, through tape-recording transcripts, their lives, experiences and philosophies. Still others are in-depth studies dealing with modern day issues affecting their community and region. The students use those same skills of interviewing, photography, and research to present their findings.

In the process of preparing the results of their interviews for publication, the students involved learn not only the language arts skills they must master, but they also become engaged in a personal, vital confrontation with their own heritage.
Language Arts

Foxfire is now well into its twenty-third year of publication, reaching some 3,500 subscribers across the U.S. One major change has been that students now use word processing equipment to edit and produce the text, and desktop publishing equipment to design the final pages. This has changed the look of the magazine considerably and given it a more professional, cleaner appearance, at the same time broadening the educational experience for the students.

A second change has been the introduction of a new series of articles unlike any we’ve ever tried before. Each features an issue confronting our community that students have become both fascinated by and concerned about. One article, for example, was a study of changing land ownership patterns in Rabun County and the implications for our community and others like ours. A second concerned the Mountain Protection Act, a piece of legislation which, had it passed the State House of Representatives this year, would have restricted certain kinds of development activities throughout the North Georgia mountains. For this, a group of some fifty students conducted a major interview with Lt. Governor Zell Miller, author of the legislation, who helped them understand the bill’s genesis, its defeat, and his plans to reintroduce it in 1989’s first legislative session.

A new series of articles now under development will feature Appalachian authors. The first of these, the Fall 1988 issue, features James Still, the 84-year-old Kentucky writer best known for his novel, River of Earth.

Though the range of the articles in Foxfire has expanded, the central focus still remains the customs, traditions and history of the region. For the students, these remain compelling topics of inquiry and research. A portion of the introduction to one such article published this year tells it all. Written by ninth graders John Crane and Chad Bedingfield, who interviewed their grandfather and documented the process he once used in hewing crosses for the Tallulah Falls railroad, the conclusion reads:

"The second reason John and I wanted to interview Dan is because he is our grandfather. He has about every issue of the Foxfire magazine, and he knows many of the people who have been interviewed, but he has never been interviewed himself, so John and I decided to get him in one of the magazines. We thought this might make his life a little brighter, so this is our gift to him."

Foxfire 1

Foxfire’s year-long ninth and tenth-grade grammar/composition/literature course provides a compelling alternative to the standard English option at this grade level. Always, more students sign up for this course than we can accommodate, drawn by the array of student-centered activities that take place, most of which are described in Book III of Sometimes a Shining Moment. This year, for example, writing produced by teams of students culminated in articles for Foxfire (Chad and John’s article about the hewing of a crossie described in the Foxfire section of this report was one of them), radio shows, video segments, analyses of the work of, and interviews with, Appalachian authors like James Still, and materials for one of a series of course guides for teachers.

As students say, “One thing we like about this course is that in here, our work doesn’t wind up in the trash.”
College English

For college-bound seniors, a semester-long course that builds on and expands research skills learned in the ninth- and tenth-grade grammar/composition course and the magazine production course has been created and added by Foxfire to the curriculum. Students choose a topic of real interest, conduct at least four interviews, draw information from at least a dozen copyrighted books and primary source documents, and produce a well-organized paper of at least twenty pages in length, all according to MLA format—the format required at the University of Georgia. Nearly any choice of topic is acceptable (those chosen so far range from the recent stock market crash to the controversy surrounding the proposed Rabun County Airport to AIDS to breast cancer to the Ku Klux Klan to the history of the Georgia Power Company), but regardless of the topic, another requirement is that students explore its implications for our community. Copies of all the completed papers and their research data are held in an archive in our classroom, and those with an appropriate content focus may form the basis of future articles in Foxfire and special projects. For example, the producer of an ABC Barbara Walters television special on the dropout problem in America used as a consultant one student who had researched that issue in our region.

A second semester-long college course, added to the Foxfire curriculum at the urging of former students, is modeled after the 101 courses students must pass in order to graduate from college. Using writing process methods, students draft compositions consistent with the various rhetorical modes, and these are graded according to college standards.

The success of both of these courses has been dramatic. Over 95% of the students who have taken the 101 option and gone on to college have passed College English 101 on the first attempt. Papers produced in our research class meet or exceed the requirements of undergraduate college papers, and so our students find themselves completely capable of at least meeting the expectations of their professors. In fact, at several Georgia colleges, professors acquainted with Wig ask him to provide names of any new Foxfire students on their campuses in order to recruit them into their courses.

For these reasons and more, over half the senior class at Rabun County High routinely signs up for these two Foxfire-sponsored options. This year, seventy-eight students (from a class of just over a hundred) asked to be enrolled.

Music/Storytelling

The Foxfire music program offers young people the opportunity to explore themselves by exploring the artistic riches of their own community. Beginning music courses are offered to all students, grades eight through twelve. Experience is the key to all learning activities in the program. Students learn to sing and play traditional musical instruments, and even those with the most rudimentary skills are expected to perform regularly at local elementary schools. We have found that they quickly develop performing skills, poise and confidence in the most difficult of situations. They are also expected to share their knowledge through peer tutoring, thereby still further increasing their confidence and making it possible to add to the number of students we can involve.

Advanced musical training is offered to older students both in and out of high school. The Foxfire String Band, made up of high school upperclassmen, performs regularly at community benefits and area festivals. The Foxfire Boys, made up primarily of recent graduates, plays throughout the region. The group has also performed at the Knoxville World's Fair, and on the Grand Ole Opry and The Nashville Network.

Foxfire Annual Report 1988
Music

Because of Foxfire’s philosophy, the primary function of the music program has been to reinforce literacy skills through music and folklore. Under George’s guidance, students generate music-related writing ideas in the newly developed Foxfire I course. They achieve some measure of success by building, in part, on skills they have already learned about radio script writing and by creating original song lyrics.

Students spent last summer scrutinizing and evaluating their previous experiences in writing music-related radio scripts. As a result, new radio scripts and guidelines for teachers were developed which, along with some existing material included in the course guides, will illustrate various types of activities and research designs.

The music performance classes continued on their usual course, with a dozen or more small ensembles emerging. Not surprisingly, they reflected a broad range of student interest from old-time string band music to punk rock. The advanced music course was beefed up with a music theory unit George developed. The classes serve as a popular supplement to standard band and choral programs by teaching kids to play and sing “by ear” and providing the opportunity for them to pursue creative projects. One group, for example, has written and produced a music video this year in connection with some of Mike’s students. They won the school talent competition and will be competing in the regional event in Spring ’89.

The String Band and the Foxfire Boys bluegrass band both continue to perform locally and regionally and remain a visible, audible credit to the organization. This year the Boys were the featured band at the Fiddler’s Convention at the Georgia Mountain Fairgrounds, Hiawassee, Georgia. They played for private parties, barbecues, weddings, funerals, local churches, and still found time to perform for at least a dozen benefits to help raise money for local families. In addition, the Foxfire Boys have recorded their third tape, and it will be distributed Summer ‘89.

Storytelling

The course guide in storytelling for seventh graders was further tested and refined, and copies were ready for distribution in September. The classes produced a considerable amount of raw video footage which is presently being edited together as an adjunct to the printed course guide by eighth-grade veterans of the course. Two groups of eighth graders traveled to Rockdale County, Georgia, this fall to perform for a whole school and were instrumental in spreading the concept of storytelling as a means of impacting literacy.

Summer Jobs Program

Our summer jobs program serves three important purposes: It provides paychecks for some fifteen to twenty local high schoolers, gives them a chance to develop employable skills, and ensures we meet organizational goals through the help of extra hands and minds. In many ways, it is an application of Foxfire’s educational philosophy—outside the classroom. For example, the summer issue of Foxfire magazine is produced as well as video and radio course guides. In addition, students archive the hundreds of new magazine photos or lend support in the Sales/Administrative Office. This past summer, two of our buildings were re-roofed (one of which serves as a residence for our Teacher Fellow, the other as storage for our museum artifacts which are being catalogued), and the former red cottage was repainted, refurbished and connected to the Center’s water supply.

Throughout the summer, all students are encouraged to interact with visitors, giving guided tours of the Center or sharing the Foxfire story. They also work with visiting teachers to help them understand the application of our philosophy in a typical classroom.

From its inception in 1969 through the summer of 1988, the program has employed 270 students, paying wages totaling $259,434.
Radio

In the Foxfire Radio course, students are required to research, write, and record one five- to ten-minute segment per week. The shows are then broadcast by WGHC Radio, Clayton. One recent show featured a seventy-year-old woman telling the story of getting a minor operation as a child. In the telling, we got a glimpse of life in Clayton, Georgia, around 1930. Other segments in that thirty-minute show featured stories from an old moonshiner, a local ballad singer and a research piece about the late country singer, Patsy Cline. Students in the class rotate through weekly duties as show hosts. Host duties include responsibility for production of the final show tape and making sure all scheduled segments are ready on time.

This year, for the first time, Foxfire I students produced segments for the weekly Foxfire radio show. Jim Metzner, a nationally-known radio producer interested in our work, was given several of our student-produced interview tapes for consideration. He purchased one for $100 to use in his Almanac series, and has asked to see more.

Video

In the video course, the work leads to responsibility for writing the scripts for, and producing, video tapes needed by the Foxfire organization. Students recently completed work on the first of those tapes. It is an overview of the organization centered around the Foxfire I class as it was taught in the 1987-88 school year. Other tapes being developed to accompany various course guides include overviews of the video and music programs and an update of the Foxfire I tape mentioned above. In addition, a group of eighth graders is putting a tape together about the storytelling course they took last year under George.

It is worth noting that the work on the Foxfire I video was completed by Robbie Bailey, Julie Hayman, Keri Gagg and Cathy Thompson over the summer. They were hired for that purpose. Their effort was outstanding and so impressed the owner of the Atlanta video post-production house (where they were helped with some technical fine tuning) that he suggested these ninth- and tenth-graders consider interning with his facility in the Summer of 1989.

There is also a Foxfire Video course guide available. It is being mailed out to teachers so they can try the projects described and let us know how they work. Their feedback will help us polish the guide into a truly useful document.

Foxfire Annual Report 1988

Mike and students producing a video that's an overview of Foxfire centered around the Foxfire I class taught in the 1987-88 school year.
The Foxfire Center is a collection of historic log cabins and replications of traditional log construction designs which together form the base of operations for the various Foxfire programs. Many of the cabins were endangered prior to being relocated at the center, and it was through the efforts of Foxfire students, staff and community members that these historic log buildings were saved from destruction.

As the base of operations for Foxfire, many of the log buildings have been restored and adapted for office spaces, artifact storage, archives, staff residences and workshop spaces for public school teachers. Thus, rather than being a static accumulation of relics, the Center has been brought to life to serve a variety of critical needs.

Recognizing the responsibility to preserve for the future what has been left by the past, in 1984, Foxfire initiated a project to further protect its extensive collection of wagons, looms, furniture, tools and folk art. Under this program, the collection is being catalogued, cleaned, repaired and provided with proper storage.

The Center's landscape has been enhanced by the addition of a wildflower collection as well as a trail along which is displayed local flora. Our Traditional Garden, in which we grow old and regional strains of vegetables, continues to expand as we receive donations of seed and cuttings. Both the trail and garden exist through the dedication and hard work of volunteers.
ELIOT WIGGINTON: A PROFILE

Born in 1942 in Wheeling, West Virginia; reared in Athens, Georgia. Received AB in English and MA in Teaching from Cornell University, and MA in English from John Hopkins.

Career: With the exception of two sabbaticals, he has taught school in Rabun County, Georgia, since graduation from college. Foxfire magazine, which he started with his ninth and tenth-graders in 1966, is still produced quarterly by the students in two of his five English classes at Rabun County High School. Articles from the magazine make up the contents of the nine-volume Foxfire book series, published by Doubleday, the royalties income from which undergirds the work of the Foxfire Fund, Inc., a nonprofit educational corporation he founded in 1968 and continues to direct today. The organization's ten staff members operate both out of the high school and twenty-four historic log buildings that have been moved and reconstructed to form a year-round base of operations. Their work has been featured in every major newspaper and magazine in the USA.

Wigginton has served, or is serving, on some two dozen boards and advisory councils including the National Endowment for the Humanities, the National Trust for Historic Preservation, the Smithsonian Institution's Advisory Council on Education, the Georgia Council for the Arts, Reading is Fundamental, the Southern Regional Council and several task forces appointed by the State Superintendent of Schools. He is a member of The National Faculty of Humanities, Arts and Sciences.

He has acted as a consultant to public schools from Maine to Alaska, often as a member of the National Faculty; and he has conducted workshops for teachers on college campuses from Alabama to Oregon to Alaska. He is also visiting or adjunct professor at a number of institutions, conducting graduate-level courses for practicing teachers in the summers at Bread Loaf, Cornell, the University of Washington, Berea, and North Georgia College, and during the school year at Georgia State University. Nearly always accompanied by at least one of his high school students, he has also spoken at hundreds of conferences including those of the Education Commission of the States, the Southeastern Council of Foundations and the Council of State Governments; and he has appeared with his students on numerous radio and television programs, including three separate appearances on NBC's Today, and one appearance on ABC's Good Morning America.

Aside from scores of book reviews and articles for such publications as the Washington Post and the Harvard Education Review, he has also written or edited a dozen published books. They include the Foxfire books, written with his students. Five of the nine volumes have appeared on the New York Times bestseller lists, several have been selections of the Book of the Month Club and Literary Guild, and total sales approach eight million copies. The Broadway play, 'Foxfire', which starred Hume Cronyn and Jessica Tandy (and for which Jessica won a Tony in 1983), was based on the contents of these books. Broadcast in 1987 as a Hallmark Hall of Fame special, the television presentation of the play won Jessica an Emmy. He also edited two collections of interviews that were published by Doubleday, all royalties from which he donated to Reading is Fundamental and the Highlander Centre, both organizations on whose boards he serves; and he edited Aunt Arie: A Foxfire Portrait, which was published by Dutton and which won a Christopher Award in 1983. Sometimes a Shining Moment, a book he wrote for public school teachers, was published by Doubleday in October 1985 and was judged the best book on education for that year by Kappa Delta Pi. In May of 1986, it won the W. D. Weatherford Award for outstanding writing about Appalachia.

He has received many other awards including the $10,000 John D. Rockefeller III Youth Award for his work with young people. He has received honorary PhDs from Columbia College, Bethany College, Georgia College, Duquesne University, and Maryville College. In 1979, he was one of fifty people cited by Time as emerging national leaders in a cover story entitled, 'Fifty Faces for America's Future'. In 1984, he was awarded both the Kurt Hahn Award of the Association for Experiential Education, and the outstanding alumnus award of Cornell University's School of Education. In 1985, he was the subject of one of CBS's American Portraits. He was Georgia's Teacher of the Year for 1986. In 1989, he was awarded a MacArthur Foundation Fellowship.

He lives in Rabun County, on the side of Black Rock Mountain, in a two-storey log house that he designed and built himself over a four-year period with the help of some of his students.
Wig settled back on the couch, and prepared to go over the story yet again — this time for the Australian visitor. He bent forward for a moment to light up the first of a series of cigarettes.

"OK, Foxfire started in 1966, so this is its twelfth year. I was a first-year teacher assigned to this 220-pupil high school to teach all the 9th and 10th grade students English — language arts. I had six classes a day, about 150 students and a set of lesson ideas that I'd worked up.

I tried a couple of those ideas on the kids and things didn't work very well... I tried some other things, and they didn't work very well... none of the stuff I tried worked very well. I did a lot of floundering around, stalling, stopping, starting and trying to figure out whether or not I really wanted to be a teacher after all.

So Foxfire really started out of a kind of frustration. The kids were bored and restless — the whole thing that all teachers face from time to time, with paper aeroplanes and discipline problems and all that.

If I was to continue teaching then there was going to have to be a way discovered or found or divined or something to make language arts make some sense, to make it somehow real, somehow more valuable, somehow more useful, somehow more important, than the things that I had tried with the kids previously, had done. And the thought struck me that maybe a magazine would be one way of getting at that, because it would show the kids that, first of all, language arts — English skills — writing skills — really do have a function or a place — they really do have a use in the world. And people share ideas through the magazines and the things that the students might write for a magazine would probably be seen not only by the teacher, but also by peers and by people in the community — parents, aunts and uncles, neighbours. If you're only doing it for a teacher and for a grade the degree of commitment isn't as strong as if you're also aware of the fact that 500 other people are going to see it too.

I pieced that together with what I knew about Foxfire. I'd seen the books on the shelves in Melbourne, bought one or two, read the introduction by Wig — Elliot Wigginton — and gathered that there must be an active magazine devoted to collecting the folk-lore, the people's history the reminiscences of this part of Georgia, USA.

Someone had said to me, "You want to have a look at Foxfire, it's a bit like Ascolta."

So I'd thumbed through copies and read of log cabins, blacksmithing, folk remedies and the like. And now, here I was, chatting with Wig about the origins. So far I didn't feel I'd got to the guts of the project. Where did Foxfire leap off from the sort of paper any school might produce? Why did it start with a specific orientation to folk-lore?

"It didn't at the beginning. No it didn't... in fact exactly the opposite was true. The first issue was a combination of student poetry and short stories and essays — things like "The Rights of Teenagers" and essays defending the teaching of a couple of books that I'd done in the literature component of language arts. There was also some art work and a little bit of photography and some jokes and some Haiku poetry — and it was just a real odd, crazy combination of all kinds of stuff.

But there were also some articles about things that happened in the community itself. I don't know to this day why we tape-recorded this damn article. I never had any courses in oral history or folklore or any of those sorts of fields before, and I had never done an interview with somebody before. I had never tape-recorded before, but somehow it seemed like the right thing to do. I guess it was a feeling that if we taped it, the students could go back and check basic facts and not bother the guy that we had interviewed for those details.

It was an interview about the time that the local banker in town was robbed, back in 1936, and the man that we were talking to, was the retired sheriff and he told us the story and it was a great story. It's really interesting, funny, crazy. The men robbed the hardware store first to get the guns they needed to go next door and rob the bank, and that crazy sort of... almost comedic kind of routine. The story was so good that we decided to transcribe the thing off word for word the way it was told to us instead of tinkering with it very much.

And one of the kids wrote an article about the time he had stumbled across a liquor still back in the woods, and the kids brought in some home remedies and some things their grandparents told and we stuck them in.

But after the magazine came out, the reaction that we got from the public was that the magazine was nice but the thing they really liked was the story of the bank robbery and if we could do another issue and have more of that kind of stuff in it then they would be really inclined to buy it and would really enjoy. So when the issue of the magazine came out and was almost entirely that kind of material, because that's what people wanted.

I'd flown in to Atlanta, then taken a Greyhound bus up-state for about 150 miles, through country that became increasingly mountainous. Through Gainesville, Cornelia, Clarkesville, Tiger, with that strange fatalistic tryst involved in being taken 'blind' through unfamiliar country. And finally I was deposited at the garage in Clayton, in the southern Appalachians, Rabun County, Rabun Gap.

Later that night, I'd admitted my preconception about Foxfire. I'd expected a moderately successful magazine in a small high school.

"Well, you would have found that if you'd come a couple of years ago — that's what you probably would've found."

But from the Rabun County High School, we'd driven up to Foxfire's village on some 108 acres of mountain land above Clayton.

I guess the easiest way to explain it is that the school where Foxfire spent 11 years was a combination public and private school. Half the students were from the community; half came from cities throughout the southeast. And those kids were really hungry to get off-campus and have their own places to go to. Every weekend there'd be a big pile of kids jump in the back of my pick-up truck and say 'Just take us outta here...' and I don't care where we go, let's just go anywhere, let's just get off campus.' Essentially they weren't allowed to do that — they weren't allowed to leave the campus unless they were in the company of a faculty member. So part of the impetus for creating a separate place, a sanctuary, an oasis, came from that kind of energy. You know, we want a place that's ours."

Another part of it came from the realisation that we just simply didn't have enough space at the school. If you'd come two years ago, you'd have found in one small room that measures I guess ten by ten, myself, Margie, Paul and George, all working together, and in the room next door measuring about six by eight you would..."
have found three more staff members and across the hall in what used to be the dentist's office, you would have found two more — and there wasn't any room.

The whole operation took place out of those three little rooms. A dark room the size of the tiniest closet you can imagine.

A third ingredient was the fact that we had amassed and were amassing a collection of artifacts. We had looms, we had spinning wheels, we had wagons, we had things people had given us, things that people had made for us in the course of demonstrations. We had no place to keep 'em. I had stuff stacked in my living room. We had stuff stacked in those offices at the school that reduced the space we had to work in even more. We had stuff stored in peoples' barns. They said 'Look, we're not using this barn right now, if you want to keep your stuff in here, it's OK' — and the collection was scattered all over the county.

We also, as a fourth part of that, had people sayin': 'Look, there's a log grist-mill right up the road and it's buried underneath kudzu vines and the roof is about to come off and it's gonna fall into disrepair and ruin — you gotta collection of looms and wagons and stuff like that — you might think about getting a couple of buildings also.' Like a mill, for example, which in its own way is another part of machinery that's part of the culture, and there wasn't any place to put something like that. I was really leary about putting a building on a private school campus that we might not stay at forever and we'd have to turn around and move all over again.

And so for those four basic reasons, we began to look around for a piece of land where we could make a place that was ours.

And we found this piece and moved that grist-mill here. At the same time I was building my own house and that provided an escape for the kids that were in the dorm and they could come up with me at weekends and help me raise walls and build cabinets and that. And while we moved that
grist-mill, a man in the community found out about it and said 'Well, I got a log-house here too, and it's about to fall in and how about — you know — do you want this one too?' We went to look at it and it was nice — it was about 150 years old and we said 'Yeah, sure, we'll take that one too.' And so we moved that one and put it up and then the word began to spread and people began to call us on the phone and say 'Hey, we got one also.' And now, 25 buildings later, that's what we've got. It was a sort of willy-nilly hodge-podge of serendipitous accidents. As the thing began to develop and grow and we moved more buildings in, we were also hiring additional staff members and some of them expressed an interest in living up here at the Centre instead of finding a place to rent somewhere in the community. And so we turned a couple of the buildings into staff homes and people moved in and this sort of grew organically."

It was also stunning to discover the sideways growth of Foxfire. The five books now published (with a sixth on the way) have established the whole project on a firm financial footing.

"Well, the magazine itself still exists primarily as a vehicle for teaching language arts skills — giving accurate descriptions, writing grammatically correct prose, giving accurate descriptions, giving solid sets of directions for doing a certain kind of skill, that are so exact and precise that anybody who reads the material could duplicate those skills. Wrestling with words. But a lot of other components have been added on that we would never have been able to afford financially until the books came out."

I knew, for example, that videotape was one of the things that was going to have to be put into use somewhere down the line because a lot of the skills that people were demonstrating were things that we just couldn't capture on still photographs and in words. When somebody shows you how to card wool, for example, it's almost imposs-
ible to describe that process in words and photographs. So we started using videotape way back, seven or eight years ago, primarily as an archival kind of thing. But it's recently been expanded into television programming in which students provide the program for the local TV network.

There have been a lot of other changes. The biggest I guess is that instead of myself teaching along with all those kids, there are now 11 staff members — like George and Sherrod and Suzie and Margie. There are lots of other options that go beyond print journalism. George, for example, with his music classes and turning out a series of record albums, and Paul with his photography classes, Michael with his television classes producing actual television programs, Bob with the environmental classes actually laying out nature trails and doing experimentation with endangered species and doing water testing and studies of clear cutting on forest lands and what that causes.

They're all part of the school curriculum and they're all the things that are funded by Foxfire and they're all under our umbrella, but the students who produce the programs get academic credit for doing that. They can't fulfill all the requirements for graduation through our offerings but they can fulfill a percentage of them. In the environmental courses they get a credit in biology and in Foxfire courses they get a credit in language arts, and in George's folklorie course they get a credit in history.

Earlier that day, I wandered around the school, talked to a few kids for an interview or two of a couple of classes. In many ways, it was a very 'normal' school, in a new building, but with the semi-present loudspeaker announcements. Only the 'rebel whoops' that echoed through the school at the end of each class reminded me clearly that I wasn't in a Victorian high school. Wig explained that Foxfire had recently switched with all the county's high school students were consolidated into this new building.

"They're all now community students. By and large their backgrounds are rural, agricultural, small farms, maybe from families where one parent works in one of the local factories, but the per capita income in the county is somewhere in the mid-$4000 a year. There are lower and lower-middle class families — but agrarian farm families by and large."

And we went on to talk that night and the next day about the high youth unemployment rates in the county. The kids talked about having to go to Atlanta for jobs, and others talked about the hopelessness that led to a high teenage mortality rate through car smashes in the hills.

In a couple of ways, Foxfire attempts to influence the economic future of the students directly. It plans to open a handcrafted furniture factory — though there is
still some dispute in the community over the wisdom of this move. But there are other benefits.

"For example, it definitely makes a difference in terms of whether or not a student gets admitted to college. It can make a real difference in terms of a job application that may be made some time in the future.

And we do have certain kinds of advantages built in for students who spend some time with Foxfire. The summer jobs we have available for kids are available only to students that have taken the Foxfire courses. And the summer jobs are good ones. They might turn out a record album; they might turn out some TV shows; they might do some environmental projects; they might edit one of the Foxfire books and get it ready for Doubleday; they might do construction work, build a chimney, put up a log house; any number of things depending on their interest and the training they've had.

For example, if they had spent two semesters working with George in his music classes, chances are they'd probably do an independent project in music, like a record album, during the summer. And they'd get paid $100 a week for that. It's good pay and good experiences, and the only thing accomplished that's the equivalent, I guess, of what you'd call a portfolio—you want to go to college, you have a sampling of your work to present to an Admissions Director.

We have a scholarship program set up for kids that go through the Foxfire program, who want to go to college and can't afford it. At this point it's only available for kids who have worked with us on the project."

Earlier that evening, I'd talked to Sherrod and Suzie about the other similar projects throughout the United States. They'd let me loose to ramble through one room packed with copies of Bittersweet, Salt, Lagniappe, and so on. And I'd just come from a couple of days talking with Margaret Stevenson of Cityscape in Washington, D.C.

Even though these projects started independently and have developed their own emphasis in response to their communities, they are bound by particular views of the capabilities of kids and of their relation to their community. They all acknowledge a debt to Foxfire for inspiration and drive.

Wig pointed out that there was nothing really new about folklore and oral history — rather the application of this in high schools and elementary schools characterised what was new about this approach.

"I think a project has to be attentive to three basic instructional objectives. One is that it pays particular attention to whatever basic skills you're mandated by the school system to teach, 'cause at its basic level, what it is is another vehicle for getting the skills which we've been mandated to teach, into a kid's head. It's another way of doing the same old job.

The second one is that it pays real attention to whether or not the student is developing a consciousness about the concept of community — what a community is, what kinds of people live there, what kinds of services a community has to provide in order to survive, what kinds of human interactions are necessary to keep everybody moving in sort of a positive direction instead of the opposite happening — which is where everybody in the community becomes so paranoid and so afraid of each other that they fly apart at the centre and wind up being lots of little tiny isolated islands, each afraid of the other.

And the third one is the whole idea of whether or not the project pays sufficient attention to a child developing a true, solid, positive concept of self, self-worth, self-image, competence — I can do, I can perform, I can act, I can make a contribution, I'm of value as a human being...you know...I am, I have worth.

Now, those are the three main instructional objectives.

The product is one of the means of accomplishing all those objectives, but it's secondary in importance to the project as a whole. The one place where lots of projects jump the tracks and sort of run away is that they put so much attention on emphasis on the end product itself and are so determined to create a quality piece of work that they exclude a certain number of kids.

They say 'Look, this work, this magazine, has got to be special and so we will only use students from the upper 10% in terms of ability and interest, and the rest of the students can go to hell.' The product is itself more important than those 90% of the kids. When that happens, you've got the whole thing backwards. And that's usually what happens when a group of local history buffs get a hold of it. Their focus is so sharp and clear on the importance of gathering oral history of the community, that they leave the kids out of the process. I'd rather they did it themselves.

It's that fine line that separates what I'd call a Foxfire-type project from, say, an oral history project. It's gotta understand that as a project it has the power to serve the needs of kids whose needs are not presently being served inside the public school system. It has that power and that potential and the extent to which it uses that potential is the extent to which I think it becomes a successful Foxfire-type project.

It often happens that a large percentage of the students who take our courses are the ones who are not currently being served by the public school system. They're not having a good time — they hate English, they hate History and they hate Math, and they see the Foxfire project at the beginning at least as a way of maybe having some fun and being able to prove to somebody that they can do something anyway. For some kids that we work with, it's a last gasp. That's not universally true, we also have some very bright kids — we have the whole spectrum.

We also make an attempt to involve kids from a number of grade levels. George, for example, who just went on a trip this afternoon, has an eighth grader and an eleventh grader and a tenth grader. And he who just went on a trip to Canada — just got back — had a senior, no, a tenth grader and a ninth grader. The last trip I went on, I had a 7th grader and an 11th grader.

And that's great, it's really great. The older kids take a real interest in the younger ones. They enjoy being cast in the role of protector and teacher. And they pull it off beautifully and they really do it well.

We were in Washington, for example. I had Stanley Masters, who's an 11th grader, working with this kid Cotton who's an 8th grader. I had to go to a series of meetings myself and was tied up, and Stanley and Cotton went by themselves down into the city and took the subway over to the Patent Office and rounded up a couple of patents that had been filed by one of the mountain men they were doing a series of interviews with, and then took the subway back into town by themselves to go and see the Smithsonian International Air and Space Museum and then they had dinner at one of the art galleries and came back and met me at the airport at 1.15 in time to catch a flight to Syracuse. I think Stanley really enjoyed it..."
being Cotton’s protector, you know, even though Stanley himself is as ignorant of the town of Washington as Cotton was. There’s a magical sort of chemistry that goes on.

It was now late night, dark, silent. And it had been a long day for all of us. Wig had been up early to drive down state for a court case, and I’d seen him working with a couple of kids in the garden near his log cabin.

Foxfire was obviously a project that drew energy and inspiration from him. As with many such cases, there was contradiction between the overt egalitarianism of the staff-student collective (all decisions are made at a weekly meeting of staff and community) and the covert reliance upon the initiator.

Thus it seems natural that our conversation finished that night with a discussion of the energy and commitment necessary to get such projects off the ground.

‘I think it all depends on what kind of end product you want, what your vehicle’s gonna be. If you decide to do a magazine, for example, you’re gonna have to be willing. I think, to give more than the normal or average amount of time to the job. I think that’s a sine qua non. The best example is the fact that teachers ordinarily expect to work a 9 month year. You start a magazine and subscribers aren’t gonna respect the fact that you’ve got three months off in the summer. They’re gonna continue to write. They’re gonna continue to call. People are gonna continue to want to be involved and what you do when you start a magazine is essentially you give up a summer vacation, and say I now have a 12-month a year job, like it or not.

That’s not to say that everybody that does one of these things ought to start a magazine. There are lots of other ways to do it. The simplest and the farthest end of the scale would be the language arts teacher who decides to adopt a theme in her English class, like ‘say, Triumph Over Adversity. OK, they’re gonna read a book like ‘Of Human Bondage’ and they’re gonna read some poems about overcoming adversity or handicap and they’re gonna write a couple of compositions and that’s gonna be their unit and hopefully at the end of that unit, the students will have a better understanding of how to deal with deficiencies of one kind or another or handicaps or whatever.

Well, at the simplest end of the scale, a teacher doing a unit of that sort might also, as a way of bringing that unit to life, find some people in the community who have actually overcome some handicaps and bring them to class and let them sit around and talk to the kids about what it’s like to have dealt with blindness or no legs, and that might happen twice in the school year, and that would be the use of this philosophy at its simplest level. No extra commitment per se, and it’s valid too.

You know, you sit down and talk to people, adults, about the kinds of things they remember most vividly from their elementary and high school years, and by and large, (and I’ve tried this a thousand times over the last 12 years), they remember either: times when they went out of the classroom into the community, one; or times when they themselves as students did something that other people could see — there was an audience for them — a senior played a basketball game, a football game, a demonstration of a certain kind of skill; or fourth, a combination of any of the other three.

And those are the things that stick, and so a teacher who simply brought in some people from the outside to come into class and sit around and talk to the kids for a while would be fittin’ in there somewhere and fillin’ a part of that need that kids have for memorable experiences.”

Wig strolled across to the window and peered out across the hillside. If he was looking at the physical aspects of what Foxfire had achieved in this part of Georgia, and, for that matter, throughout the United States, he was also viewing the past and talking of the future.

“What we wanna do, if we can, is somehow integrate into every division of the curriculum, a good solid experiential component that addresses the three things I was just talkin’ about. Hopefully all three, a combination of all three in each division of the curriculum. And then we’ll see.”
Collaborating to Write:
An Interview with Eliot Wigginton

Since 1966, Eliot Wigginton’s students at Rabun County High School in Georgia have published Foxfire, a magazine featuring their own writings about local history, folklore, and crafts. Anthologized in a series of nine books, Foxfire has inspired many similar projects across the country. In his book Sometime a Shining Moment: The Foxfire Experience (Doubleday, 1985), Wigginton described the philosophy behind his efforts. Recently, Wigginton became a MacArthur Prize Fellow in recognition of his outstanding contributions to education. In addition to teaching, he is involved in developing courses and support networks for teachers.

HEL: What was the impetus for becoming involved in teacher education?

EW: When the first Foxfire book came out, teachers from all over the country wrote to us, asking how to make something similar happen in their own communities. We sent them information about how to help the kids conduct and transcribe interviews, how to build a darkroom, how to publish and copyright a magazine. In other words, we transferred the mechanics and ignored the fact that there was a philosophy at work that made the projects successful in Rabun County.

Consequently, teachers would decide that their class would produce a magazine, and teachers would decide on the contents, negotiate with the principal, find the money for it, choose the name, and assign the articles to students who in fact did not want to do that work. This, of course, misses the whole point, which is that a magazine is only one of thousands of things that can result from the pedagogy that Foxfire stands for.

HEL: How would you characterize your pedagogy?

EW: What I’m striving for is a classroom that functions as a learning laboratory, instead of a place where students get walked through the pages of a textbook; a classroom where every year all of us are involved in some new enterprises, and where all of us together are constantly evaluating where we are. “Is this working or not,” or “How are we going to get the three students in the back of the room involved who haven’t caught fire yet? How can we make sure that everybody crosses the finish line at the same time and that everybody is being stretched?”

Inside this room, we will not embarrass each other or compete. Inside this room, the kinds of things that students don’t quite understand yet are the things that we celebrate. That’s one of the beauties of these projects—kids constantly get baffled or stuck. As students watch how you treat their missteps, they’ll understand very quickly that the agenda here is not to isolate those who know from those who don’t.

HEL: What if you have a group that can’t come up with a project idea?

EW: Normally that happens only in situations where the teacher says, “What would you like to do?” and the kids don’t know the options and don’t have a clue as to what to suggest. What’s required is a different kind of questioning process, which always starts with a set of givens. “OK, folks, what we are about in this room is writing, literature, and grammar. We can’t get away with cooking pizzas for the rest of the year.”

The questions flow from that agenda. You say something like: “Let’s take a look at writing. List all the places where you see writing or the results of writing in the real world.” Before you know it, you have a list of a hundred items; they might say trinyliners at McDonald’s, movies, soap operas, or magazines. And then the next question is, “Of all the items on that list, which do you think you might be interested in trying to do—pick one.”

Take trinyliners for an example. The next question is “what kinds of trinyliners could we design—let’s brainstorm a list of possibilities.” Maybe you’re in a town where there are lots of tourists. One small group might design a trinyliner with a walking tour of historical sights; another might focus on a unique feature of the local culture. “As long as you’re spending twenty minutes here eating one of these hamburgers you should know that you’re sitting in a place where . . . “

In other words, each group does a quick, tight research project that culminates in a piece of polished writing that could be used in a real-world context. Then you can ask: “What do we know now that we didn’t know a week ago? Which items on the state basic skills agenda did we begin to hit?” There will be writing items, grammar, research—things like that. “Where could we take this process next?”

Sometimes we go back to the original list and come up with another bite-sized project, or maybe something that takes two weeks. In the beginning stages, you usually do mini-projects, to get the kids warmed up. The whole idea at each stage along the way is to have students get more sophisticated about using more of those skills.

HEL: Have you seen this work beyond high school English classes?

EW: The process works equally well, no matter what the age group or subject matter. For example, there is a kindergarten project in Seattle where the teacher, Marie Bond, went through the questioning process I described, and uncovered that her students wanted to talk about all the fears they had about the first day of kindergarten.

As the kids would say one, Marie would write it on the board. They started with the school bus: “The big kids might beat us up when we get on the bus.” “There might be a lot of noise and the driver will get into a wreck.” “The driver will forget where we live and won’t be able to get us home!” Then she wrote each one on a sheet of poster paper, and handed them out for the kids to read and illustrate. They made a series of six poster books—including ones about recess, school lunch, and the classroom.

The kids decided they wanted to make a videotape. A group would read two or three of their fears and then reenact those situations. An adult filmed and edited the final version. The result was a tape that is now being shown to incoming kindergarteners and their parents in 14 school districts in the Puget Sound area. This project hit most of the state objectives for language arts at that grade level.

It helps to have a very specific audience that applauds what the kids have done as being "truly useful"—not marginal or vaguely interesting.
Kids want to be active, helpful participants in the bigger world.

I get the sense that although the whole language approach to teaching reading and writing is pretty well accepted, lots of what teachers and students are doing tends to be superficial, or formulaic. If each kid publishes a “little book” and it goes on a shelf in the back of the classroom—is that what we’re talking about? Or does it look more like Marie Bond and her kindergarteners? The question is how to help kids do work of substance.

HEI: Is there always a tangible end product?

EW: The keystones of the process is teachers and students collaborating about the environment they are going to create inside that room. They decide together what their relationship is going to be to the subject matter and how they can use that subject matter to generate understanding of what goes on out there beyond the walls.

In many classrooms that use this kind of process, an end product is part of the picture. For a lot of kids it can be important, especially if they have never experienced the act of authorship, or have never seen anything tangible result from their efforts, anything they can be proud of, and show other people. But it isn’t essential.

HEI: What are the difficulties of running this kind of classroom?

EW: Dewey cautioned us, in books like Experience and Education, that, by God, it really is harder! You think about the work constantly, and you’re always criticizing your

self, asking “Why was I that stupid?” You’re always looking for new information, and you find yourself going outside the classroom, getting involved with students, parents, or community groups, and things get a good bit more intense.

Plus you find yourself in a situation where suddenly most of the things you’re doing are open-ended and ambiguous. You have enough confidence in your abilities to make sure that students are going to be right on the money in terms of the academic agenda, but you may not be able to codify everything that you’re going to do for the next two weeks in the form of detailed lesson plans. Lots of people aren’t comfortable with that.

You find yourself going outside the classroom, getting involved with students or parents or community groups, and things get a good bit more intense.

HEI: How do you help teachers deal with that kind of ambiguity?

EW: You wrestle together with all the dilemmas that keep those practices and insights from being used—the “yes, buts.” “Yes, but my kids are awfully little,” or “Yes, but in my school, I only have the kids for 45 minutes a day, and every time I get started the intercom comes on,” or “Yes, but you really can’t do it when the district mandates a long list of skills and concepts that you can never finish,” or “Yes, but when I get evaluated, my principal expects to see me standing in the front of the room lecturing.” The list is endless!

The biggest dilemma is that if teachers are trying it for the first time, they inevitably hit all kinds of places where they just don’t know what to do next. The refrain of 90 percent of the teachers we work with is “We know it’s a better style of education, we know instinctively that it’s what we ought to be doing, but until you can help us get past the point of being scared to death of launching into the unknown, we’ll never try it.”

So clearly one of the answers for schools of education is that there’d better be some modeling going on and it’d better happen more than as a little practice exercise in a school, and the modeling should be in association with studying philosophy and pedagogy. We have to figure out strategies for ensuring that no teacher can ever say “I just never have seen it done.”

Wherever we offer one of our courses for teachers, we also try to build a network so that there is a support system left behind. Thanks to a five-year grant from the Bingham Trust, we can leave a full-time person in the networks we’ve created to keep the work going. We can also give teachers, like Marie Bond, small grants to do projects. The only stipulation is that they have to let us know what happened, so we can share that information with other teachers. Starting in May of 1991, people will be able to read about these projects in a series of five books from Heinemann.

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Wig, with two present Foxfire students and two former students attending the University of GA, speaking at the UGA Lilly Dey, one of many out of town presentations.

Photograph: Walker Montgomery, UGA

Amy Trammell talks about typhoid in the 30’s in Auraria, a gold-mining town.
On 25 Years of Foxfire: A Conversation with Eliot Wigginton

Named a MacArthur Fellow in 1989, Eliot Wigginton began in 1966 to lead his Rabun County, Georgia, students to collect oral history for their magazine, *Foxfire*, and later to publish the *Foxfire* books. As other teachers replicated his work, "Wig" began to discover that the central issue was not making magazines but a process of instruction with a long history. Now he and his staff members have set up nine regional networks for teachers who want to test this pedagogy in a variety of K-12 settings. Here "Wig" and the students who did the initial work for a book to celebrate *Foxfire's* birthday in 1991 describe their work together.
As a new teacher, you thought the kids were really resistant to learning. But you kept finding ways to reach them. Why were they resistant?

The majority of students going into the 9th grade—and I think most English teachers would agree—have decided that English is not something they’re going to enjoy very much. It’s typical to find kids—who have already been taken through the old system of reading a story and answering the questions in the back, writing compositions about assigned topics, and having their work cut up and criticized constantly—who feel English isn’t something for them.

So why did you keep trying until you found something that worked?
You must have been determined.

Well, I wasn’t. If you’re a first-year teacher, you want to at least survive, because you have a resume to think about. And you want to be able to finish up with some honor. I didn’t have any particular mission—it was a question of survival, I think, more than anything.

But there was a process that I put the students through—a process that, until recently, I didn’t realize was transferable and, in fact, philosophically critical, but it was—and I did it badly the first year.

How would you describe it?

In the beginning, it was a series of discussions we had, each of which hinged on a different question that was intended to focus the work. Question No. 1 is “What are we writing for?” You make a list of all the places you see it in the real world—brainstorming. And sometimes that list is hundreds of items long. When the students see the array of stuff that’s possible, they make a connection between writing and the real world.

The next step is “Okay, pick one, what do you want to do?” When they pick one, then it’s their choice. In this case they picked magazines, and I said, “All right, let’s brainstorm all the possibilities for what could be in it.” A lot of the ideas about having local material in there, superstitions and all that kind of thing, were student suggestions. If I had laid the idea on the students, the table of contents would have been what I have already seen in school literary magazines: haiku poems and some short stories—that would be it.

This piece of the process is critical because quite frequently the students’ ideas will be fresh, lively, unencumbered, no baggage. If the students hadn’t suggested that kind of material, there wouldn’t be a Foxfire program today, and I’d be selling shoes somewhere in Atlanta or something.

The next piece of the process is a set of questions like “How are we going to do it? How much is it going to cost? Where are we going to get the money? How are we going to get permission? How do we divide up the duties?”

Do you make some sort of formal plan?
The plan emerges, and all the while you’re relating the content and the plan to state objectives. The objectives are used to design the work so that what the students do is actually put those objectives to work in a real way, instead of endless practice against the day when they might be able to do something useful with them.

And the next step is execution and then evaluation, not only to see how the teams worked, and what revisions ought to be made, but also an evaluation of the extent to which we hit the objectives head on. And if we’ve left some out, how do we pick them up?

And I’m monitoring what’s happening to their skills in grammar and mechanics, organization, clarity, creativity, and use of the language. The goal is not to pass some kids and fail others but to identify those for whom some of this stuff is still a dilemma and make the mission of the class to get everybody across the finish line at the same time. Leigh Ann, for example, will go through the whole process, then do a little article about her grandparents and their Christmas traditions. Then I ask, “What do you now know how to do? What are you still fuzzy on? How do we build that dilemma into the next thing you do to give you more practice in that area?”

And we add six or eight more objectives to the next project, just keep adding to it. Dewey says to help the experiences that the kids have get “thicker,” so that when they get older, after college, their experiences play out into something that resembles wisdom, judgment, sophistication.

The key ingredient is hooking those experiences each to the other. Working through that process, you can get students to the point where they can, in fact, write a book that’s going to be published. They don’t have to wait until they get out of college, after years and years of practice, to do something like that. What they’re involved in is not practice but doing things for real consumption by the outside world. Their projects are just smaller in scale in the beginning stages, and then you build on and thicken those.
When the students see the array of stuff that's possible, they make a connection between writing and the real world.

And you've found out this process can work outside Rabun Gap?

When the first book came out in '72, teachers from all over the country began to ask how they could do something similar. I didn't really know what I was doing, so I sent them a book by a teacher I had been working with in Maine who had done a similar project with her kids in Kennebunkport. It takes you all the way through the business of putting a magazine together step by step: how to do an interview, how to use a tape recorder, how to create questions, how to build a darkroom, how to use the darkroom.

The teachers began using this book as a manual and putting out magazines. But the students weren't enjoying the work, so teachers were coming to me, saying, "I thought this would work, and it didn't work for me at all." And I kept saying, "What did you do?" What had happened was that the teachers had made the decision there was going to be a magazine. The teachers had decided it was going to look like Foxfire, the teachers had selected the names, the teachers had selected what the contents of the first issue were going to be. And they handed the articles out as assignments on the first day of class, and it was just like homework.

That wasn't exactly the idea.

Not exactly! So I quit working with teachers. But I got a little bit more thoughtful. The reason they had gotten off the track wasn't their fault but mine, because the only information I'd given them was not good enough. I began to think about doing a book for teachers and took a sabbatical for six months, went down to Athens, and wrote the book [Sometimes A Shining Moment], which was an attempt to wrestle with the philosophy and the process that had led to the creation of Foxfire instead of a book about how to create thousands more of the same.

After the book came out, we were offered a grant from the Bingham Trust, where the trustees were interested in literacy development. I laid out to them a whole different system, a whole different way of working with teachers, and they liked the idea. The results were the networks, and the courses, and now the examples that we use in those courses by and large are not Foxfire Magazine examples.

One of the key ingredients in our work with students is the collaboration we create instead of the teacher-directed, teacher-dominated, traditional talk-down situation, which doesn't resemble the way people learn in the real world. Learning is basically a social enterprise, and all the great educational philosophers have reiterated that point over and over again. All the evidence is there. But most teachers just don't know how to do it...

Never having experienced it...

Or never having analyzed it, never having thought about how they might bring specifically what was happening in that learning situation to their own teaching or, or, or, there's a thousand "yes, but's."

In Sometimes A Shining Moment, I felt your determination—it's not too strong a word—you had to go in there, the kids were going to be there, you wanted to teach. You had some faith that what you were doing was important. And if you could reach the students, they could share that feeling with you.

But see, that's the opposite direction—that's like the wrong way around. It's really they themselves, through your questions, who identify for themselves why the work is important. When they look at a list on a chalkboard of 200 ways writing is used in the real world, everything from the tray liners at McDonald's all the way through...

So it reorients them, you think?

It makes them understand what the real world connection is to what's going on in the classroom. Teachers can talk till they're hoarse, and nobody will hear what they're saying. The point is to have students themselves identify why all this stuff exists, and why it's in school curriculums, and what they might be able to do with it, and out of that process reorient them.

Could there have been any other outcome except a magazine?

Sure. In fact, a magazine was only one of the things we did. Another one of the votes the kids made was to create satirical television commercials, like take a Volkswagen ad and make a new one. I was taking kids all over the county filming commercials.

Radio shows, videos...?

We didn't do a video show the first few years, but we did not long afterward. Radio shows were another choice. And the kids put out a record album, too.

And some of the other projects in the networks, are they taking a shape other than magazine, videotape?

Oh, yes! One group of 6th graders made a child safety booklet. It's a perfect illustration of what I'm talking about—a one-time pamphlet by kids, for kids—their choice, their vote, their decisions. What the English teacher does is just keep riding herd on the structure, the management: what's going on in the classroom, how is it working, and on the skills.

When you say management, what you mean is keeping it actively going?

Right, and troubleshooting, and at appropriate moments calling the whole class back together and saying, "Something has happened here that I think you ought to take a look at." You turn to one of the kids and say, "Would you explain this?" And one student in that group will say, "We just tried this, it didn't work at all, and here's what happened." And the class tells them possible solutions. Or students go out on an interview, and they come back, and we talk about what happened.

In this process students can't hide their intelligence. You treat them as if they're intelligent.

Yes. Well, they are. They just may not be very experienced.

The objectives are used to design the work so that what the students do is actually put those objectives to work in a real way.
But you really expect more use of their intelligence?

Because I know it's possible for kids to do more. That's the one big complaint I have about whole-language instruction right now at this stage of its evolution. Those teachers are engaging in all these high-powered techniques, and the end result is what, in some cases, are trivial end products.

Such as?

Such as another version of a school literary magazine that looks just like the ones they've done before. Such as a whole series of little booklets that are bound, each with its own cover, and put on the shelf in the classroom library for the other kids to read. I'm not saying that it's bad—it's not bad—but if you arrange things along a scale of involvement and sophistication, and of substance, they would be at the low end of the scale.

The child safety booklet is an example of something that's probably halfway up the scale. And students creating a book that's going to be published by Doubleday—that two million people are going to read—those students, as 9th and 10th graders, taking that manuscript up to New York and delivering it to Doubleday in person and sitting down with the art department about the design—that's pretty far up the scale.

I don't know how much farther up it goes. I'm sure it does; it's just that I haven't been able to take it past that. Yet.

But what about very young students?

Two summers ago I did a workshop in Seattle where I helped teachers understand this process so they could do projects with their students. That would give me five project illustrations, by Seattle teachers, for the course I taught at the University of Washington last summer. During that course, which Ann Lieberman set up, one of the teachers brought two of her kindergarten students, and they stood up and talked to the group about what they had done that year. Then they showed the 10-minute videotape they had made—which was shown all over Puget Sound that summer to upcoming kindergarten kids to alleviate their fears about what was going to happen to them in school.

These kids wrote six books. They picked the themes—all the fears they had when they first came to school. They circled the themes they wanted to explore: school bus, recess, lunch, like that. Each of the kids would tell the teacher one of her fears, and she'd write it on the board. She'd say "Is this right? Is this the one?" And then she would transfer that statement to a big sheet of poster paper, and the kid who contributed it would illustrate that page.

Then they moved from the creation of those books, each with its own theme, into a situation where each kid reads his or her line on camera. First you see the kid, and then you see that situation re-enacted. Then back to a different kid, and the kid reads, and then you see his re-enactment—back and forth between them. And, in our course, the little girl, Stacy, stood up and read the whole book about school buses while we listened. Then we saw the videotape.

I would put that project up the scale from two sentences created on a "Writing to Read" program, for example. It's real work for a real purpose, for a real audience, for a real world. And kindergartners can do it. They just don't get many chances.

Do you involve administrators in these courses you teach?

Yes, we hold a session for the principals and instructional leaders of the teachers in the course, and the agenda is not confrontation. The vast majority of these teachers have never really sat down and talked to their principals about anything other than their own personal evaluations, never really talked about instruction and what we stand for and the mission and goals.

They're convinced that—it's another
Part of a Milestone
Anne Meek

You were telling me what you were doing last summer... Robbie: We’re the 25th anniversary book crew. So far we went through the process of getting ideas, deciding what the chapters are, and just collecting information. So after we collect the information, next year in school, we’ll have a special 25th anniversary book class, and it’ll be dedicated to finishing and putting the book out.

And what have you been doing on the “book crew”?
Scott: We’ve been doing interviews, transcription, and photography. We’ve been interviewing former students. Last year I was in Foxfire 1, Foxfire 1 gets you ready for Foxfire 2. It shows you how to use camera, tape recorders, the darkroom, and things like that. And then when you get into Foxfire 2, you put out the magazine.

Robbie: I feel like I’m part of a milestone, we’re sort of like the steppingstone to 25 more years. I feel real good about it because, you know, this book’s going to get us into college.

So how are you going to draw on that experience in college?
Keri: Once we get there, we’re going to be more ready from Wig’s way of teaching us, more ready to write papers and compositions. By giving speeches, we’re going to have to know how to stand up and give speeches to our college professors. It’s going to help our confidence because we’ve already made speeches to lots of groups.

Robbie: We’ve learned, too, because we go out and interview these other people. At least we are helping them and the way they live. We’re preserving what their experiences have been.

Keri: It makes you feel good because it means a lot to these older people, too. A lot of students interviewed their grandparents. You know, they want to keep their grandparents alive even though they may die literally. It’s a way to keep them around and to keep what they say and do around. If my grandparents died, I’d still have them, sort of, or I’d have a piece of them in what they say.

Robbie: I think Foxfire sort of makes you more mature, you know. I still act like a kid, but when you do this, it’s making you into a young adult, sort of. Like when you go to college, you’re going to be sort of professional, because you’ve been doing a book and because—I’ve learned more in the last two years than I’ve learned in 10 years of school.

Scott: In your regular English classes, you learn what’s in the book and that’s it. We go beyond that.

What are you doing doesn’t show up on a test, does it?
Leigh Ann: The magazine is actually the test. It’s not a test per se. But that’s our test.

Robbie: I look at the whole year as a test and the magazine is like...

Leigh Ann: A whole year of learning.

How does your research for the magazine or the book lead you to other books?
Keri: Last week I went to see a play called “The Reach of Song.” It’s about this man Byron Herbert Reece. He wrote three or four books of poetry, and he was a teacher at Young Harris College. He killed himself. Mama drove me off to the play, and I thought, “I really don’t want to see this,” but when I got there, it was so much related to Foxfire that it was just unbelievable to me, and I just really got into the play.

Because I did take Foxfire, it made me think about a lot of things that they were saying.

Robbie: I just took out Wig’s Sometimes A Shining Moment and, I took it home, and I read it. And, after reading that book, I mean, Wig, I know he’s a teacher, but he’s sort of like a kid.

Leigh Ann: He’s a friend. Well, he’s demanding, he intimidates you because you know he’s so smart, but then in a way it doesn’t matter because he’s so nice.

Scott: That’s good, that’s pretty good.

Robbie: When I graduate, I just want to look back at my high school years and look at them as joyful, but I don’t know if I would have without Foxfire. I’ve got to go on now, how he taught me, and see if I’ve done my part.

Keri Cragg is a senior, Robbie Bailey is a junior, and Scott Cannon and Leigh Ann Smith are sophomores, all at Rabun County High School, Tiger, Georgia. Anne Meek is Managing Editor, Educational Leadership.

one of the “Yes, buts”—if they try something, the principals are going to tell them it’s not going to work, it’s going to be too expensive, someone’s going to get hurt, and so on.

The principals don’t admit that, though, right?
The teachers are convinced that’s what’s going to happen. So the purpose of the meeting is to say, “We’re not going to have a confrontation here, folks; what we want is to learn how to work with our principals when we want to get permission and enthusiasm for something we want to try with our kids.

And the principals will say, “Fine, let us help you understand what it’s like from our side of the desks. We want to make sure you’ve thought it through so that the instructional objectives will, in fact, be met. We want to make sure your evaluation strategies are going to reveal your progress. And it would help if you could bring us something in writing two or three days before, and then we’d set up a meeting to gather and just talk it through. And give me an opportunity to question the thinking behind it a little bit in the same way you question your own kids.”

For some reason or another, there’s this level of paranoia between the two groups in some schools. But the principals will say, “Look at what we gain: we gain parental enthusiasm because the parents are excited about what the kids are doing. The kids are coming home every day, talking about what’s going on in your class.” Or they say, “The newspapers are going to cover the students’ projects. It’s going to be just as good for me—for my reputation, on my resume—as it’s going to be for you.” Or “What’s the problem? You’re responsible teachers. You’re not going to jump off the edge of a cliff and have everything crash in around you. You’re going to take it one step at a time.”

Teachers just breathe a sigh of relief and respond, “I had no idea that we could even talk like this, that we could even have this conversation.”

How else are administrators serving to move us toward this kind of collaboration?

One of the most promising signs is the principal center idea that Roland Barth started at Harvard. The more principals go through the process that teachers take their kids through, the more able they’re going to be the kinds of instructional leaders they really ought to be.

We’ve somehow got to figure out how to get all that paper off those principals’ desks. We cannot expect that kind of leadership from people who are bedeviled and distracted. If a principal isn’t of a mind to do that and would rather have all the paper, then we’d better have somebody in our schools who constantly puts teachers in situations where they analyze what’s happening on a day to day basis.

We’d better learn from what we’re doing?

It’s one of the biggest dilemmas we face in this profession—and what’s got to be the ultimate irony of all times: education itself, as a profession, doesn’t have any collective memory. Education ought to be the profession that builds on its own past experiences and incorporates all that into the work at hand. Education ought to be thoughtful, but it’s not.

People are making all this noise, for example, about the writing process, this new contribution we’re making to the field, this breakthrough. But I have a book written by John Dewey in 1917 that outlines all the writing processes methodology: collaborative and collaborative writing strategies as part of a community of learners. ☞ p 31
3. PRINCIPLES

In 1979, a National Workshop for Cultural Journalism was held in St Louis, Missouri. Eliot Wigginton gave the opening address: 'Touchstones' and conducted a workshop on 'Empowerment Through Education'. These articles are reprinted from Hands On Vol 3 No 2, Winter 1980 and have previously appeared in Connect Nos 4 and 49 respectively.

TOUCHSTONES

Eliot Wigginton

I am, needless to say, delighted to be here. I go to conferences around the country constantly, but this one is unique in my experience. It is unique not only because of the subject matter that will be discussed, but also because it is absolutely unusual to find a working blend of students and teachers and professionals in the field at a single gathering.

I want to talk primarily to the teachers and students that are here, and I stress students, because the very fact that you are here indicates to me that you are either now, or someday will be in positions of responsibility, able to give to other young people some of the same energy and love that was given to you.

When I first started teaching school, and this is an old story, I knew it wasn’t working. It’s not too hard to tell, when you look at high schools around the country, that the traditional methods of teaching young people aren’t working very well anywhere. If English teachers knew what they were doing, then there would be no reason for a college freshman to take a freshman English course after having had 12 years of English. It didn’t take me long to figure out that my 9th and 10th grade English classes weren’t working either, largely because I was teaching the same way that I had been taught. So, what I did at that point was to look back over my own elementary and high school career and try to pick out those kinds of things that have stuck with me over the years, those kinds of things that have made a difference. I found that there were some general classifications of things that had remained with me.

One kind of experience which remained with me was times when visitors from the community came into the classroom, and suddenly the real world intruded. Those people became a part of a room where somehow they didn’t belong; and because they didn’t belong there for some warped reason, those experiences became memorable ones.

Another type of experience were the times when we, as a class, were allowed to visit into the community, leave the classroom. Then, we found ourselves intruding into the real world in a school-related context. It was unique, totally different. You never went into the real world as a part of school, so on the occasions when we did venture out, the experience was memorable.

A third kind of experience which remained with me were the times when we, as students, were given responsibility. Usually, most of the responsibility gets doled out to those young people who have already assumed that role, and the rest of us sit in the classroom and wait for somebody sometime to make something happen in our lives. A good example of that is the high school newspaper advisor who goes into a class of 25 and asks, “Who in here knows how to take pictures?” And one kid raises his or her hand, and the teacher says, “Fine, you’re the photographer.” And the other 24 kids sit and wait and wonder what it’s like to take pictures and to get into a darkroom.

The last kind of experience which stuck with me were the times when something we did had an audience beyond the teacher. Having an audience seemed to elevate the activity onto a totally different plane. The importance of having an audience is obvious. Ask yourself how many young people would try out for the high school football team if nobody ever came out to watch the games. How many people would put months of effort into learning their lines for a school play if nobody was going to hear them? When we know there’s going to be an audience there, we know that somebody may walk up to us on the street and say, “Hey, I saw you catch that pass,” or

Photo By: John Shore
"I saw the play you were in." It somehow makes a difference. Those experiences become memorable. We keep them.

I began to try and figure out some way of combining all four of these ingredients into a project that might engage my 9th and 10th grade English students in a way that they hadn’t been engaged before. The "Foxfire" magazine, which does all four of those things, was the result. And then, later, as students began to tell me, "Look, we’ve been doing this for a couple of years, and we’d like to do something a little different. What else can we do?" I began a process of examination again.

I began to ask students who had formerly been in the project, "What kinds of things did you do in association with this magazine that you carried with you? What kinds of things made a difference?" I did the same thing with students I was working with at that point. "What do you see happening to yourself inside this project? What do you think’s going on? What do you think you are doing now that’s going to be useful to you later." I recommend this process to you, if you’re not doing it already. It’s healthy and informative.

Just for fun—I sprang this on a couple of people that are associated with our operation today, literally just a few hours before this talk—I thought it would be sort of fun to ask them to come up and talk to you about what’s going on in their lives. One of them is a student who is currently involved in our operation, and I’ve asked him to talk to you about his experiences with Foxfire. His name is Wesley Taylor, and as Wesley talks, you might listen and ask yourself what he’s saying in terms of the classification of experience I’ve just mentioned. The second person is one of our staff members, Mike Cook, who is a former student of mine. Mike was associated with the project for a couple of years as a high school student. He’s going to talk a little about what he took away with him, and how he views the kind of work we’re all doing from a perspective of having been a Foxfire student six or seven years ago.

Wesley Taylor: I’ve taken just about all the Foxfire courses that are offered—seven different types of courses—and I’ve taken all but one of them. I’ve learned lots of stuff that I find useful. One of the courses I’ve taken is video tape. In video, we put on the cable once a week. I did a show on quilt ing for video, and we put it on the cable. We made some mistakes and goofed around, but we got it done. That’s the way you learn stuff. We also tape ball games and music concerts and stuff like that. But, the thing that I learned was—maybe I won’t go into a field like that, and maybe I won’t use it in any job that I take, but I learned stuff. I can look at TV and see what’s going on. Most people just look at TV without thinking, but I can see it and say, "There’s a good edit," or "There’s a good commercial." I know what goes on behind the lines, and to me, that’s important. I learned something.

I’ve taken photography and learned how to use a camera and the procedure for developing film. And again, it may not be a career, but I can have it as a hobby. I can look at a picture and know how it got there, how the process works. I’ll always have that.

In the magazine class, everyone does an article. I did one of Leonard Webb. He showed us how to take a long neck gourd and make a banjo out of it that he can play on. You learn a lot of stuff working on the magazine. You learn grammar because you have to edit and write your introduction; you learn math when you reduce pictures for layout; you learn history by talking to people about how things were in your area, and that’s real important.

I’ve also had record production, and we’re now working on an album. We recorded four men who are each about 70 years old, who live in western North Carolina. They make banjos and dulcimers and play the old-timey way. We’re learning a lot about grammar because we had to transcribe the interviews then edit them for the record insert. But what’s more important is that we’re creating a document—that is, something that’s historical, and that’s never been done before. I get a good sense of satisfaction out of that. We worked on that all summer.

I’ve also taken the environmental class. There is a class on biology, but I took the solar class. It was an experimental class, and we made a solar collector. We didn’t go by plans. We just saw one and tried to make one like it. We made a lot of mistakes and had to change things around a couple of times. We learned a lot making that. We learned wood-working and math and science.
In all these things I've done with Foxfire, I've learned stuff that I think is useful. I may not choose a career in them at all, but I've enjoyed doing them. I've had a good time. And that's the reason I take Foxfire courses, and I'll continue to take them.

Mike Cook: One of the things that I think was most important in looking back on my experiences with the project, and something Wesley mentioned several times, was the freedom to make mistakes. Having been on both sides of the desk now, I know that one of the hardest things for a teacher to do is give students that freedom; but as a student, one of the things I got the most out of was the fact that we were allowed to do things on our own, and if we screwed up, then we screwed up, and we had to cover for it.

Once when I was in high school, we were trying to put a magazine issue together, and Wig, in his usual manner, had run off and left us to do it. We were going from Wig's place down to Paul Gillespie's house and had all the stuff stacked up in the back of the jeep. Somewhere in about a mile and a half stretch of the road, one of the pictures fell out, and we had to go back and find it. In the dead of night, hanging out of the side of the jeep and using a flashlight, we finally found it and finished the layout.

Another time I was supposed to go into a church to record some music. I checked out the equipment, got everything together, got the microphone set up. That person that was supposed to meet me didn't show up, which was not unusual. So I got all the way down to the church and all set up and discovered that I didn't have any tape.

Another unforgettable experience happened while Wig was away at school getting his Master's. He had left us behind to continue producing the magazine, and one of the stories we did during that time involved moonshining. David Wilson and Paul Gillespie, who were both on the staff, went out to take pictures of the still. They had worked several weeks to get this man to take them back to see the still, and he blindfolded them and swore them to secrecy. David started taking pictures and, after going through what should have been a roll of film, he discovered that he didn't have any film in the camera. So, they had to go back and start all over again. We made a lot of mistakes, and we had to cover for them. That was important.

Another thing that stuck with me was the decision making process. When you're a high school student, one of the hardest things you can do is convince yourself that you can make all kinds of decisions, at least it was for me. When we worked on the magazine, we were responsible for all the facets of it—layout, photography, everything. I would continually find myself asking, "Is this right? Can we do it this way?" And usually, Wig would respond with, "Well, try it that way and see." So gradually you learn that you can make decisions and do things the way you want to, if you think them through. That stuck.

We made decisions in class a lot of times. People would want something from us, want to use something from the magazine, and we would interview them to find out whether we wanted to work with them or not. This still goes on in our classes, and it really makes you feel like you have some say so about what happens.

Eliot: When I began receiving that kind of information from my students, it became fairly easy to distill out what kinds of components that should be the core of anything further we tried. I took all of the information that I could gather and boiled it down into four touchstones, four basic rules of operation, four things that would have to be a part of any project that we did. I'm going to run through these, even though some of you have heard them before, because I think it's useful to be reminded of this kind of thing. And there are a lot of young people here today that are going to be working with younger students, or may perhaps become teachers themselves someday, and they may find this information useful.

One of the things that becomes a core ingredient is the realization of the absolute necessity of personal experience. Students are, to a large extent, experience poor. Most of the information that they receive is secondhand, it has already been processed, it's in the form of a textbook or a television show. We all know that most of what we learn, we learn through personal experience. You don't learn how to ride a bicycle by reading about it; you learn how to ride a bicycle by getting on it and falling off and skinning your knees eight times and finally mastering the damn thing. This belief is buttressed by the realization that once students...
have had some of the experiences that we are able to provide through our projects, they are never again the same human beings. The first time a student prints a photograph that he or she has taken and comes out of that darkroom with that dripping wet print, you know that you’ve got a different human being on your hands. You know that something has happened inside that kid’s head.

A second touchstone is, knowing the need for experience, and being convinced of that, to give students every opportunity to have those experiences. Kids can do far more than they are given credit for, if they are given the opportunity to do things. As teachers, you have to step back and let them do, and beyond that, you have to constantly put them in situations where they are challenged, where they can have experiences. Realizing the paucity of experience at the high school level, before you start to do anything related to your project, stop and ask yourself why a student can’t do it instead. If you can’t come up with a good reason, then go and find a student. Teachers are constantly making assumptions about what our kids are and are not capable of doing. In the early days of “Foxfire” magazine, many teachers tried to discourage me from trying anything. They kept reminding me of the fact that I was a hot shot from Cornell University and that I didn’t know anything about the Southern Appalachian Region. They said that the pupils in my 9th and 10th grade classes were reading and writing at way below the national average and would not be nearly as competent as I seemed to think they were. They proceeded that the more I would be an embarrassment to me and the students. Well, I’m delighted to be able to report that last November the Foxfire Book passed Billy Graham’s Angels in sales, and in so doing became the largest best selling volume in Doubleday’s 75-year publishing history. It was written by 9th and 10th grade students who, according to those other teachers, couldn’t read or write. Teachers all over this country make kids cripples on a daily basis with the assumptions they make about what they can and can’t do.

A third touchstone is that it’s vital for the work we do with our students to be rooted in the community that surrounds our schools. The immediate community is the most logical experience base from which to work. It is the place where kids are wrestling the hardest to try to make some sense out of their lives. It is the place where students have to live and work and survive on a day to day basis. There is an astounding level of ignorance about the communities that surround our schools, a level of ignorance that we, as teachers, are supposed to be addressing. Young people should know how things get done in their communities, how the political system works, where the power structure lies. If they don’t walk out of the doors of a high school knowing those things, then the stated goal of “training tomorrow’s leaders” becomes a mockery.

I have a sort of perverse notion in the back of my head that one of the best things that could happen to the public school system would be for all the textbooks to just dry up and evaporate and go away. Then we would have to fend for ourselves, create our own texts, reprocess all that information ourselves, and every year have the kids do it all over again. Then we could make the information relevant to our communities and useful to our students.

Now heirs is somewhat like the gold. You have to know what you’re looking for, and it’s hard to find.” — from the Summer 1978 edition of Foxfire.

The fourth touchstone concerns some basic facts about adolescent psychology. During early adolescence, the needs which exert the greatest influence on the day to day life of the young person are affection, esteem, security, recognition and belonging. The single most important thing that can happen in their lives at that time is that they get an unshakable conviction of their own self-worth. It is only after that need is fulfilled, and that sense is acquired, that a young person can begin to think about extending himself or herself to other people. It’s hard to believe that you have anything valuable to give to others when you don’t believe you have any value or self-worth yourself. We have to help young people achieve a sense of self-worth first, or everything we throw at them about comma splices or quotation marks is doomed to be shuffled off someplace and forgotten.

The second phase of adolescence is called, logically enough, late adolescence. During this phase the most important thing that has to happen to a young person is that they be involved in real work in the real world. It is only through having the opportunity to do real work at this point that young people know they are capable of operating in the real world as adults. High schools, by and large, don’t provide this opportunity, and that’s the reason many young people would rather be washing dishes at the local Pizza Hut than sitting inside a classroom. Students are constantly giving us little verbal messages, “Why are you making us sit here? Let’s do something. What are we going to do today?” They stand up and their parents ask, “What did you do in school today?” And they say, “Nothing.” The students probably did something, but the fact that they perceive it as nothing is a pretty telling damnation.

An experience I had in high school gives a good example of how this fourth touchstone works. I wasn’t a very good high school student. I failed the 9th grade and had to repeat it, and my father, who was a professor at the University of Georgia, was not amused. He sent me away to a special school. In the 10th grade, I had an English teacher named Jack T. He saw a composition I had written and took it by the office of the school literary magazine and said, “Here, I thought you might be interested in seeing this. I thought it was pretty good.” They thought it was pretty good too, and they printed it. I got copies of the magazine and all the words I had written were there, just the way I wrote them, and they had my name spelled right, and I could take that magazine home to Mom and Dad and say, “See, this proves that I’m not as stupid as you’ve been led to believe.” I went on to college and spent two years in pre-med, a year in archaeology, and a lot of time fumbling around trying to figure out what it was that I wanted to do and become in the world, and I eventually wound up doing what I’m doing now. I’m convinced that the reason I became a teacher of English with 9th and 10th grade students who started a little magazine called “Foxfire” was because of that single act of generosity on the part of that 10th grade English teacher a long time ago.

That’s the scary thing about our jobs, the fact that we have that kind of power. It’s a little frightening.
You students have that kind of power too, because you work with younger kids, you teach them how to do things that you've already mastered. You can make that kind of difference in someone's life.

I have a dream that someday I'm going to walk into a public high school and find everything right. I want to believe that in this country there is one public high school that works. In every division of the curriculum and every class, I want to see students doing things that they perceive as being valuable and useful and important, engaged in a real life wrestling with the content and material of those courses, extending themselves into the community to participate in real work. I want someday to see students walking out of the doors of that high school being self-confident and competent and curious and sensitive and eager and willing to make a difference and able to take their own futures and their own destinies into their own hands.

Teaching is hard work. I know it is and you know it is. Every member of my staff puts in more than an eight hour day; none of us have summer vacations, we work straight through. We get to know our kids, we spend time with them. If they need a place to stay, we share our homes with them. Being the kind of teachers you are, you will also find yourselves in the role of nurturing other teachers. Teachers who are just beginning to take the first kinds of steps and need your help and encouragement. And sometimes, students will find themselves doing something that is an extraordinary thing for a high school student to do, and that is going up to a teacher who has just made a step and tried to do something a little different and saying, "Thanks, that was fun. Let's do more of that."

Teaching involves a lot of energy above and beyond and apart from "read Chapter 26 and answer the questions at the back for homework." Sometimes we get discouraged. Sometimes we get tired, students and teachers alike. But we find strength in the knowledge that our lives are full in magical ways. I draw strength from that, and from seeing things happen in sort of a whirlwind around me. And while I put out a lot of energy, I can draw strength from the fact that often my students are giving me back more energy than I'm giving them. You students will find the same kinds of things happening to you as you share what you've learned and as you watch younger kids grow, thanks to your generosity and your attention and your love. All of you draw strength from knowing that you're making a difference, and that's important.

A lot of times when I get discouraged, I think of a man I have a lot of respect for, a mentor, named Miles Horton. One day when I was discouraged, Miles said to me, "You just can't worry about problems on the national scale that you don't have any control over. Don't burn up your energy thinking about stuff like that. Spend your time trying to create islands of decency around yourself. Try to create sanctuaries around yourselves where kids don't feel threatened and you don't play power games and you don't punish kids with grades, where mistakes are welcome and kids don't feel like they're wasting time and being wasted, where the world is our classroom and where we celebrate together the job of learning and discovering and our common humanity. Create those things around yourself, and then begin to get to know other people that are doing the same thing and find them and draw strength for the fight from knowing that they're out there fighting the same battle. And when possible, get together with them and fight together.

You're doing that, right? That's what you're about the business of doing every day--putting around yourselves islands of decency where people feel that good things are happening to them. Sometimes you feel lonely. Sometimes you feel frustrated. Sometimes you're tired. So draw strength for what's coming from the people that are here, and draw strength from the fact that you are making a difference. You know you're making a difference, and I know you're making a difference, and I salute you for that and I wish you well.

Thank you.

EMPOWERMENT THROUGH EDUCATION

Eliot Wigginton

This is going to follow directly on the heels of what Mary Kohler was talking about this morning. I think you'll recognize some of the same themes. There are a lot of things that over the last few years I've been wrestling with. The bulk of the wrestling began, I guess, when I and the students came to the realization that there had to be something more than a magazine. And I and the students came to the realization that it was awfully easy to devote all of our energy to the production of the magazine and lose sight of the fact that there was another agenda. And that's when we began experimenting with other vehicles and other forms of action--other ways of getting young people involved, either in the community or in school, in other kinds of projects that would broaden them as individuals and make them more sensitive to the needs of others.

This is hard to get ahold of because there are about eight threads running parallel here, and we'll just have to grab ahold of each one and see what happens to us; but in the Southern Appalachian Region, for example, there are a number of problems. The problem which is most severe is that, by and large, the majority of young people that I educate in our public high school are not going to be able to stay in Rabun County. They're going to have to go someplace else to work. The Appalachian Region is owned, bag and baggage, by other folks. In Rabun County, 66 percent of the land is owned by the United States Forest Service, and 18 percent of the land is owned by the Georgia Power Company. Five to six percent of the land in Rabun County is owned by various industries and non-profit corporations. Less than 10 percent of the land in Rabun County is available for private use, bought and sold on the open market for a house, a farm, a dairy. The bulk of that land is being grabbed as fast as it can be grabbed by people from Tallahassee and West Palm Beach and Miami and Fort Lauderdale and Savannah and all those places who want a place to build a summer home. They're going
to go up there and stay perhaps three months out of the year, three weeks out of the year, three days out of the year, and go back home. And, what's left for the local kids is very little; and what little is left is so inflated in price that they cannot afford to buy it. Why? Because the only jobs that are available in Rabun County (except for a few professional developers) are industrial jobs. ALL the industries of Rabun County are non-union industries. People get paid minimum wage. That means that they earn about $58 hundred a year before taxes. Land is now $4 thousand an acre. You can't buy a lot of land if you take home less than $5 thousand a year.

So on the one hand, you've got a project inside a school system that is devoted to building a commitment on the part of those kids to a culture and a heritage and the place they come from and a sensitivity to people from their own backgrounds and other people around the country. And you've got that project operating inside the school and doing well and building that commitment. But on the other hand, you've got an impossible situation where the kids come out of that school and want to exercise that commitment, and they've got no place to go. Problem number one.

Problem number two is that you see an amazing amount of ignorance on the part of young people about the way things get done in the world. They don't have any realization of the way the political process works. None of them knows, even though their families have lived in places like Mountain City, Georgia, forever, that the mayor of Mountain City has been mayor for 30 years; that they never had a town meeting in the history of that town, although it was incorporated in 1907; though they've only got 450 people in the whole town, they never got together to talk about what they wanted the town to look like ten years from now, or what they were going to do for their kids. And, if some of the students—and I hope this is going to happen—I pray that it's going to happen—want to run for political office or want to begin to make a difference, they got no notion of how that happens and how to go about it, or what kinds of things they ought to propose or suggest. They don't even know how to hold meetings. They don't know how to make decisions. They don't know how things get discussed and how answers get arrived at. This is one of the reasons, by the way, why it's so important that every decision that gets made in connection with one of these projects gets made with students participating fully. Because until they have that opportunity, they don't even know how to call a meeting and get an agenda out on the table for discussion. We forget that, you know, but we have to remember that a lot of kids that we work with don't even know how to make long distance phone calls, much less call a meeting of strangers or citizens to plan and take some kind of action. They don't know what options are open to them for community action on a broad scale, community action that's really going to make a difference.

In the Southern Appalachian Region yet another problem we have is the influx of outside influence. There are almost no parts of the country that have been so heavily visited and impacted by well-meaning people from the outside who were going to save the Appalachian people from themselves. You've got the early movement back in the late 1800s with the Episcopal missionaries setting up mission schools and bringing in train loads of used clothes from the north to clothe the poor ignorant savages and educate the poor ignorant children. You've got all the government intervention during the Depression days, which is when much of the land in Rabun County got taken from the Appalachian people by the government. You've got the tremendous influx of people during the days of Peace Corps and Vista coming in and working for two or three years and starting programs that collapsed behind them leaving this residue of bitterness. And more recently, of course, you've got the Appalachian Regional Commission where all of the federal money that goes into the Appalachian Region, by and large, for social services (schools, hospitals, roads, sewer, and water system) is channelled through the ARC. I was in Washington several years ago and was asked to go over to the office of the ARC to show some slides of the

* Mary Kohler's address is in Connect 49
region. I went over to do that, and asked Amy Hardy, who had invited me, why I had been asked to do that. And she said, "What you've got to realize is that most of the people in the Appalachian Regional Commission have never been to the mountains." They're the ones that are making the decisions about how much of the federal money that goes into the Appalachian region is being spent, and they've never been there. They've decided that the future of the Southern Appalachian Region is tourism. The Southern Appalachian people don't want tourism to be their future. That's just second home development and the further erosion of their power and their land and their home base. The ARC says tourism is the only thing that's going to save you, so all over the Southern Appalachian region today they're widening and building highways and buying up more recreation areas and putting in dams and making lakes and selling off summer homes around the perimeters of the lakes, and chain link fences are going up every day. And local people are increasingly getting moved into smaller and smaller areas so that now, many of the students that I teach live in mobile homes on quarter-of-an-acre lots of land rather than on 100 to 200-acre farms, which used to be the norm.

One of the big reasons that this kind of thing is going on, and one of the big reasons why Vista and ARC and all those agencies have been able to operate with impunity in the Southern Appalachian Region, is that there's a vacuum of local leadership. Nobody else down there is leading the people and organizing the people and creating the options for the future. So the government's got to come in, and in the existence of that vacuum, fill that vacuum with programs and policies and decisions of their own, which the local people have very little say about at all.

Another problem that exists in the area is the fact that the school system itself doesn't begin to serve the needs of the communities that the students are drawn from. The school system is riddled with holes, as we all know. The student council's a joke. You know, the only thing the student council gets to do at Rabun County High School is plan the Junior-Senior dance, and they aren't even awfully involved in that. There are not students in any positions of decision making power in the school itself. There are no students at all involved in curriculum, involved with the design of schedules, involved with meals, involved with rules and regulations, discipline, nothing.

right? Click. That's another problem that exists.

The thing that I'm getting at is that in the face of problems like these, it's almost criminal in projects like the ones we guide to focus exclusively on the production of a magazine. Because although, as an activity, that has value in and of itself, it is a ready-made vehicle (as are the other applications like video tape or record production or environmental education) for teaching kids, not only how to print pictures and how to make a record album and how to market a magazine, but also for teaching kids how businesses work and survive, how communities work, where the power lies, who's got the power in the community, and how they either use it or abuse it, how decisions get made, how polity gets implemented. All our projects are ready-made vehicles for teaching students how, as adults, they can have some control over their own futures and not constantly be the victims of other people and other agencies.

Most of the kids in our county know that something's wrong; none of the kids, by and large, in our county, except the ones that have been really actively involved in our program, know why. I don't know what kind of a difference our work is going to make. It may be too late for our county. Our county may, in fact, just have to be written off at this point because there's almost no way to get it back. It's gone just about too far. But at least, perhaps, in other places where students settle or in other communities where they decide to live, they can, first of all, know how to get into a community and discover what resources lie there and what kinds of people live there and what their needs are, not what the government perceives their needs to be; and secondly, have enough savvy and enough knowledge to know where to find answers to questions they've got; and third, have enough savvy and knowledge to know how to get into positions of leadership and how to exercise some leadership, and how to exercise some decision making power and take control of their own futures instead of having to sit by, helplessly, moaning and groaning and complaining while the rest of the world takes everything from them.

We've been experimenting with a lot of different kinds of vehicles for getting at this problem. One of the things we tried was to experiment with a course about Mountain City, Georgia. Sherrod Reynolds and I got four students, and we tried it totally on an experimental basis. The students started with all the various kinds of skills that they had gotten already from the magazine and took them eight steps further. They knew the people from the community because they had worked with them in a magazine-type situation. So what happened was that each of the four students adopted a small town, and by themselves, each went to that town, and each by himself or herself set up the interviews inside that town with the mayor, members of the City Council or Chamber of Commerce--any leaders they could get hold of. They chose the towns because they were roughly the same size as Mountain City, and they chose them because over the last ten years they had experienced rapid growth. They asked, "How did you deal with this growth? Did you do anything about zoning? If you put in zoning restrictions, exactly how did you do it? How was that implemented? How come all the business in Toccoa moved out to Big A Road instead of staying in the downtown area (Big A Road being your every-oloty-street with five lanes and 18 hundred Pizza Huts and

Interview with Pearl Martin on soap-making.
Burger Chefs? And how come that happened," right?

And they got all these guys on tape explaining the problems of running a small town, explaining how decisions that govern that town are made. They're using all the skills that they've already learned, right? They're taping interviews, they're taking color photographs for a slide show, they're asking all the right questions, they're setting up their own interviews, they're going by themselves, and they're bringing the information back. They're transcribing it, they're working it up just like they might do for the magazine. And they're taking that material and pulling out powerful sections and revealing stories like, "If I had been smarter, I would never have let this happen in our town," those kinds of stories, and they're keying those with a series of color slides that they themselves have taken and they're creating a slide show.

Then they go to Mountain City and they split up in groups, each kid takes one quadrant, and you have four kids, OK? So in each quadrant, each has a city map, in cooperation with the mayor who provides the map. And they mark every single building in their quadrant, almost like doing a census. Right? There're only 312 homes in Mountain City, so that's not a real big deal, but it's an interesting exercise.

Then they draw a similar kind of map, but all it has on it is the old streets. They go to the residents of the town and say, "I want you to show us what this town used to look like thirty years ago. What buildings were here thirty years ago that are no longer here?" They found that there was a railroad that came through there, there was a railroad depot, there was a factory that produced shuttles, there was an apple packing warehouse, there were huge orchards all over the place, there were four hotels, there was a barber shop, there was a tavern, there was a cafe--a whole series of things that no longer exist there now. There was even a little newspaper in Mountain City. There are only five businesses in the town now. There are two gas stations, two grocery stores, and a post office, which I guess you count as a business. And Mountain City, although it is ready-made for a period of rapid growth, has been experiencing a gradual decline that few people had noticed.

They got all those patterns established. Then the kids went door to door. Using their journalism skills, they had worked up and had printed announcements of a public meeting. They said, "We're all going to get together, and we're going to talk about Mountain City." They had coordinated it with the mayor and the City Council so that those guys would be there. They said, "What we're going to talk about is where this town is going. We're also going to talk about the fact that the mayor is in the middle of implementing a sewer and water system for this town, and we're ready to give a report to you about the progress that's been made." They went door to door, to every one of those houses, with the slides they had designed, and put them in the hands of the people that were there and explained the situation. And if people weren't home, they put them in the doors.

On the appointed night 86 people turned out. The meeting was held in the auditorium of what had once been the town's elementary school. The four students that were in the class and Sherrod and myself and the mayor were in the front of the room. The students gave a presentation to the community of the maps to show how the city had changed over the last few years, and then the students ran their slide show. One of the most revealing sections came from the mayor of Helen, Georgia. Helen was a dying town ten years ago. They only had three businesses in town. The same number of people live in Helen, Georgia, as in Mountain City--same size--and they made a conscious choice to go for tourism to save their town. They took the three businesses in town and the existing public buildings--the fire station, the post office, the police station--and converted them to an Alpine decor, you know, like Swiss chalets, right? And they began to advertise the town. Got the Atlanta Journal and Constitution to write a couple of articles about it. There are now over 100 businesses in Helen, Georgia, all Alpine decor. The town has been saved completely; it's a major success story. But the same three businesses that were locally owned then years ago are the only three businesses today that are still locally owned. All the other businesses in Helen, Georgia, are owned by outside people who have candle shops and stained glass window shops, and ticky-tacky bologna shops that are opened in the summer time to serve the tourists. There are no other local businesses that exist there.

Well, that's got some very interesting things to say for Mountain City. Mountain City is in a period of decline. Tourism is an answer. Maybe it's not the answer we want, I don't know. But the students presented the option.

And then they presented three other towns through their slides and quotations from leaders. Afterwards they opened up the floor for discussion. Mountain City has absolutely no zoning. Anybody who wants to can go into Mountain City and buy a piece of land and do anything he or she wants with it, no questions asked. And that creates some problems. So that was discussed.

After the meeting was over everybody stood around and talked for about another hour. We got a great slide of the mayor and City Council huddled anxiously way back in the back corner by themselves having a little council meeting trying to figure out what it was that had just happened to them. But one of the end results of that thing was the creation of a planning committee made up of 24 local residents. There were three other meetings that followed that one. Local residents pulled themselves together then, and the first major activity they sponsored in association with the kids was a major town-wide clean-up where 125 people turned out, scoured the town, hauled numerous truck loads of garbage to the dump. Everybody turned out and mowed their lawns, trimmed their trees, and if they had old stuff they had been meaning to throw away for years but had never done it, they could haul it out to the side of the road, and when the crews came through, they'd grab it and throw it in the trucks. We took away
bed springs and a row boat, dish washers, you know, all manner of garbage. And then at the end we had a big festival, a community celebration. We had a square dance and a greased pole climb; we had kids spitting watermelon seeds, and a tobacco spitting contest. Tom McFalls, who's here with us, won first place in the tobacco spitting contest. Spat a wad 24 feet. If you want to find out what that little festival was like, just talk to Tom McFalls about it. A great experience.

Now what the people in the town are trying to do is figure out a way to do some major redesigning. My father's a landscape architect, and he's going to give them a hand to do some major redesigning with planting flowers and shrubs and that sort of thing. A gazebo over the town fountain is one idea they're playing with. That's their decision, not mine, and that's good. It's the first decision they've ever made for themselves collectively in their whole 72-year history. And as more and more people in the town become convinced of the need for it, they're hoping to lead into some zoning. All that because four high school students were astounded to find out that the town of Mountain City had never had a town meeting before, and nobody had ever gotten together to talk about what the town was going to look like and so decided to sponsor a town meeting and get everybody together. They used the skills that they had already been taught in magazine journalism and took them further.

And that's a far more valuable exercise than having students endlessly repeat the same process of turning out endless magazine articles. If you accept the fact that a magazine is supposed to be a vehicle, you have to ask yourself, "What's it supposed to be a vehicle for?" If our kids don't have power, if our kids don't have clout, it's our kids don't have the ability to make decisions for themselves and their futures, then maybe we'd better be about the business of seeing what else we can do with that magazine, and with the skills that it gives them, that we aren't doing yet. And that's what I'm talking about when I talk about empowerment. I think those four high school students found out some fascinating things about the political system. They know now why there isn't any zoning in Mountain City. It's because the same man has been mayor for 30 years, and he's not far-sighted enough to get it done. That's why there's no zoning. They know, to their amazement, that you can be elected mayor of Mountain City when you're 18 years old. I hope that's caused a couple of them to spend a few sleepless nights thinking and scratching. And they know what they've got to do to get elected. They know how the City Council works. They know how to get people together and how to have good, productive discussions. They know how to do all that sort of stuff, and so therefore, by extension, they also know how to take some control over their own futures and their own destinies that they didn't know before.

And that's what I wrestle with all the time. That's what I lie in bed thinking about. How do we turn out human beings that can walk confidently out the doors of our high schools saying, "The world is my candy store. I can do anything I want to do." How can we turn out those kinds of human beings that know how things work and how to get things done for themselves and their communities? That's what I hope all of us will wrestle with.
I am plagued by two pervasive, but completely understandable, misconceptions about the Foxfire program. The first is the conviction that if someone initiates a "Foxfire-type" project, it must, by definition, be a magazine or a book that features the customs, traditions and oral history of a rural, once self-sufficient, community. The second springs out of the first with a perversely inexorable logic: Therefore such a project is an impossibility in an urban setting. I cannot travel in this country without being confronted by teachers who state, "Yes, but I teach in a city. I can't do anything like Foxfire in an environment like that."

The source of these misconceptions is obvious: The only results of our work these folks have seen is a series of magazines and books that feature the customs, traditions and oral history of a rural, once self-sufficient, community in the mountains of northeast Georgia. Fair enough. At least the people confronting me are teachers, which means that at last - and this has been one of the longest struggles of my career - teachers are finally willing to believe that those products they've seen were, in fact, created by adolescents within a public school setting. At least that much has been accomplished.

Now, to address the second misconception: The Foxfire books and magazines are simply one expression or illustration of a core set of practices at work - practices which actually engaged students in the curriculum. Students put that curriculum to work in the service of the creation of end products the larger community sees and applauds. It is an application of the academic agenda in the real world, and within this nation's public schools. That application has an honourable tradition - albeit much abused and much misused over the years - the roots of which reach back at least as far as the "project method" popular at the turn of the century.

These core practices have been employed by teachers at all grade levels in every conceivable kind of educational setting - rural and urban, public and private - in more ways, and in the service of more kinds of projects, than I could describe in a book. Some of the projects, have been inspiring and elegant; some have been vapid and superficial; some have been philosophically clean and sound; some have been monumentally misguided, standing only as mute testimony to a teacher's misguided ego and fundamental misinterpretation of the bigger social and educational rationale the practices are meant to serve.

But in any case, the point is that the projects inspired by Foxfire are only a tic on a nearly endless list of possibilities; and the fact that most have been conducted in a rural rather than an urban setting is an accident of fate, not a consequence of design.

Elliot Wigginton

- from Hands On Issue 32, Summer 1988

The above article has previously been printed in Connect 58. Other articles from previous issues of Connect about or relevant to Foxfire are: 'Touchstones' (#4); Oral History Request (Australia) (#48); 'Youth Participation' (Kohler) and 'Empowerment Through Education' (Wigginton) (#49); 'Talking With Ken and Yetta Goodman ... Foxfire' (#51/52); 'Foxfire/Salt Revisited' (#54/55); 'Not a Bad Place, The Bay' (#57); Nine Core Practices' (#58); plus brief mentions of Hands On (#1, 35, 56, 58); You And Aunt Arie (#16); Sometimes a Shining Moment (review) (#56).

'So developing a collective memory is basic on your agenda?' It's either that or consign ourselves to continuing to make the same mistakes over and over again and hurting kids in the process, turning kids off and having them, by the time they're in the 9th grade, so sick of school they can hardly wait to leave. That's absurd. That's not the legacy we want to leave behind.


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Learning is basically a social enterprise, and all the great educational philosophers have reiterated that point over and over again.
Foxfire Grows Up

ELIOT WIGGINTON
Rabun County High School and the Foxfire Fund, Rabun Gap, Georgia

For more than twenty years, students at Rabun Gap High School, a conservative, traditionally organized public school in Appalachian Georgia, have published Foxfire books and magazines. Conceived by students in Eliot Wigginton's English classes, the project's publication of oral history grew into what was called cultural journalism. The national recognition and financial success of the Foxfire books and magazines led to the adoption of the approach by teachers throughout the country. However, many who attempted such projects did not recognize that Foxfire is not really a magazine, but a philosophy of education firmly grounded in principles of democratic, experiential education. Using the magazine as a device without the principles upon which Foxfire had been based often resulted in methods as traditional and teacher centered as those they were meant to replace. Recognizing this, Wigginton and the Foxfire staff began to carefully define the ingredients that led to the success of the Foxfire approach in Rabun County, and to look for ways to assist other teachers in adopting the philosophy and the approach in their classrooms. In this article, Wigginton describes Foxfire's core educational practices and the major aspects of the Foxfire staff's current work with teachers.

The article 'Foxfire Grows Up' appeared in Harvard Educational Review Vol 59 No 1; February 1989. The above introduction outlines its content. The full article is available from Connect as article # 340. The following excerpt outlines the 'Core Set of Practices' that undergirds Foxfire.

A Core Set of Practices

At the Rabun County High School in the mountains of northeast Georgia, the Foxfire staff and I teach a total of sixteen courses that illustrate a core set of practices at work within a traditional, conservative public school environment complete with fifty-five-minute periods, constant interruptions from the intercom, and, frequently, the sounds of kids being paddled in the halls. Foxfire is produced through two of the five classes I teach. In others they produce radio and television shows, record albums, booklets, newsletters, and materials for teachers.

The philosophy the staff and I try to exemplify is still evolving, but it has always had at its heart our attempt to answer the universal student question, "Why are you making us sit here and do this?" In response, we try to bring the academic agenda to life as students use the items on that agenda in the solution of real problems, or the creation of real products that the community values and applauds.

If someone had asked me for a statement of our philosophy during that period when we first began to admit that many similar projects around the country were failing, the previous sentence is about as close as I could have come. With the failure of those projects, however, as well as the embarrassed realization that not even all of our students were as caught up in the work here as we would have liked, we began to ask ourselves some hard questions: "Exactly what are we doing here? Why? When we say this style of education is working with our students, what do we mean? How do we know?"

Though some of the answers came through long staff and class discussions, the most intriguing ones came from former students. Gradually, over a period of several years, through long staff and class discussions and meetings with former students, a number of common ingredients emerged that more closely defined the style of education we attempt to exemplify, and gave us the shape and focus we needed to revise and sharpen our own instruction. Ten of them follow:

1. All the work teachers and students do together must flow from student desire. It must be infused from the beginning with student choice, design, revision, execution, reflection, and evaluation. Most problems that arise during the activity must be solved by students. When one asks, "Here's a situation that just came up. I don't know what to do about it. What should I do?" the teacher turns that question back to the class to wrestle with and solve rather than simply answering it. Students are trusted continuously, and all are led to the point where they embrace responsibility.
2. Connections of the work to the surrounding community and the real world outside the classroom are clear. Members of the community are frequently the resources from which the students draw; the content of all courses is connected to the world in which the students live. Whenever students research larger issues, like changing climate patterns, acid rain, prejudice, or AIDS, they must "bring them home," identifying the attitudes about, as well as illustrations and implications of, those issues in their own environments.

3. The work is characterized by student action rather than passive receipt of processed information. Rather than students doing what they already know how to do, all must be led continually into new work and unfamiliar territory. Once skills are "won," they must be reapplied to new problems in new ways. Because students are always operating at the very edge of their competence, it must also be made clear to them that the consequence of mistakes is not failure, but positive constructive scrutiny of those mistakes by the rest of the class in an atmosphere where students will never be embarrassed. Handled differently, the experiences students have may be, in John Dewey's words, "miseducative," or may "land him in a groove or rut" (1963, pp. 25-26).

4. A constant feature of the process is its emphasis on peer teaching, small-group work, and teamwork. Every student in the room is not only included, but needed, and in the end, each student can identify his or her specific stamp upon the effort. In a classroom thus structured, discipline takes care of itself and ceases to be an issue.

5. The role of the teacher is that of collaborator and team leader and guide, rather than boss or the repository of all knowledge.

6. There must be an audience beyond the teacher for student work. It may be another individual, or a small group, or the community, but it must be an audience the students want to serve or please. The audience, in turn, must affirm that the work is important, needed, worth doing—and it should, indeed, be all of those.

7. The academic integrity of the work must be absolutely clear. Rather than subverting, avoiding, or skirting around any given state-mandated skills and content list, the more appropriate response must be to accept that agenda, accomplish it, but also go far beyond its normally narrow confines. In the words of many members of the reform movement, it must be seen as a "floor," not a "ceiling."

Teachers, however, must question closely the wisdom of remaining bound to the sequential treatment of information presented by their texts (American history from 1492 to the present in an inviolable chronology, or instruction in mechanics from comma to semicolon to colon, each with its own tidy chapter, exercises, and reviews). Texts, rather, should be regarded as reference works, almost like dictionaries, to be used as needed and as appropriate. Instruction in grammar and mechanics should be blended into writing-process methodology as opposed to endless review before students are allowed to write.

8. The work must include unstintingly honest, ongoing evaluation for skills and/or content, and changes in student attitudes. A variety of strategies should be employed, in combination with pre- and post-testing, ranging from simple tests of recall of simple facts through much more complex instruments involving student participation in the creation of demonstrations that answer the teacher's challenge: "In what ways will you prove to me at the end of this program that you have mastered the objectives it has been designed to serve?" Students should be trained to monitor their own progress and devise their own remediation plans, and they should be brought to the point where they understand that the progress of each student is the concern of every student in the room. In the service of these goals, teachers and students must become researchers together, examining not only teaching methods, but learning itself, and how it happens.

9. As the year progresses, new activities should grow gracefully out of the old. Rather than a finished product being regarded as the conclusion of a series of activities, it should be regarded as the starting point for a new series. The questions that should characterize each moment of closure or completion should be, "So what? What do we know now, and know how to do now, that we didn't know when we started out together? How can we use those skills and that information in some new, more complex and interesting ways? What's next?"
10. As students become more thoughtful participants in their own education, our goal must be to help them become increasingly able and willing to guide their own learning, fearlessly, for the rest of their lives. Through constant evaluation of experience, and examination and application of the curriculum, they approach a state of independence, of responsible behavior, and even, in the best of all worlds, of something called wisdom.

4. NETWORKS

Educational Outreach

Foxfire's success as an approach to classroom instruction attracts teachers and educationists interested in implementing similar programs. In the past, we responded by conducting cultural journalism workshops that resulted in over 200 spin-off programs around the nation.

We now also provide graduate level instruction in that pedagogy for teachers of all grades and all subjects—at eight institutions of higher learning: Berea College (Berea, Kentucky), North Georgia College (Dahlonega, Georgia), SUNY-Cortland (New York state), Georgia State University (Atlanta, Georgia), University of Idaho, (Moscow, Idaho), Carson-Newman College (Jefferson City, Tennessee), University of Washington (Seattle, Washington), and West Virginia University (Morgantown, West Virginia).

Teachers participating in those courses develop hands-on units of instruction to implement in their classrooms. Small grants are available from Foxfire to help implement their projects and the results of those projects are captured in the teachers' narrative case studies published in Hands On, our journal for teachers. We also provide grants for teachers to conduct research, primarily classroom-based, that adds to the body of knowledge about this approach to education and the pedagogical principles on which this approach is based.

Teachers in those eight regions formed networks as a means of working together to enhance their successes and to deal with problems as they arise. Each network now has a coordinator responsible for managing the network's development. The Teacher Outreach Office at Foxfire coordinates the networks' ventures and evaluates the overall efficacy of our outreach initiatives.

For additional information about Foxfire's Teacher Outreach initiatives, contact

Foxfire Teacher Outreach
Box B
Rabun Gap, GA 30568
(404) 746-5319

"... the failures of conventional education make the innovations of Wigginton even more refreshing. ... Happily, the Rabun Gap experiment has spread to all parts of the country. All that is needed now is for all parts of the educational establishment to see that this spreading is to the good."


Educational Outreach

In public education, effective, longlasting, positive change happens horizontally: teacher to teacher. It is at this level that teachers can collaborate to design, implement, evaluate, and revise solutions to the daily problems with which they grapple. From nearly every state, as well as from England, Ireland, Costa Rica, Australia, Japan, Bangladesh and Pakistan, teachers have come, on their own, to visit Foxfire classrooms, learn from our students, and transplant pieces of our work to their own environments. In response to this interest and the obvious needs of the professional teacher, Foxfire established the Teacher Outreach program, an educational initiative that is run exclusively by public school teachers. A five-year, $1,500,000 grant from the Bingham Trust currently supports this work, which includes teaching workshops and graduate-level courses, producing course guides, publishing a journal of classroom case studies, and establishing formal teacher networks that have full-time, salaried coordinators.

Through this effort, our work with public schools has expanded dramatically. By the end of the second year of the outreach program (June 1988), we had:

(a) refined the course/workshop so that it provides an effective, motivating encounter with the pedagogy;

(b) completed the collection and analysis of evaluation data about courses and workshops;
(c) established five networks of teachers with a coordinator for each in Georgia (2), New York, Kentucky and Idaho;
(d) completed and disseminated four draft course guides; and,
(e) initiated a well-received series of Hands On, each issue featuring case studies by teachers in one of the networks.

Some of the priorities for the third year of the teacher outreach program reflect the stages of development of our initiatives as planned. Others reflect adjustments we have to make to respond to unanticipated consequences of those initiatives. The priorities for year three are these:

(1) Coordinate the coordinators. Apply procedures that can facilitate the work of network coordinators; provide oversight of network initiatives, and secure arrangements to insure that the networks survive and thrive, fiscally and pedagogically.
(2) Develop the North Georgia network. Help the new coordinator, Barbara Reimensnyder, work with the teachers in that region who are committed and interested; nurture a sense of membership; spend more time with this network this year.
(3) Research. Synthesize the research on programs similar to ours; begin research into education-allied fields for leads toward principles consonant with ours, or which suggest underdeveloped parts of our own.
(4) Develop a second-level course/workshop. Investigate both need and feasibility of offering additional courses or workshops for teachers who took the first course and have expressed interest in more depth; try to set up courses dedicated to writing case studies.
(5) Evaluate. Begin developing a system to assess the long-range impact of the outreach program on classroom instruction and student achievement.

By early 1989, significant progress had been made toward these priorities. Barbara Reimensnyder had the North Georgia network in considerably better condition, and the affiliation of the network with North Georgia College had made giant steps; a second-level course will be offered at North Georgia College; and, a plan for the evaluation was implemented in Spring of 1989.

Networks

Five networks have been formed around the five colleges and universities where the Foxfire graduate courses and workshops are taught. Although each network is in a different stage of development, all are impacting the lives of many teachers and their students in the areas in which the networks are located.

The Eastern Kentucky Teachers Network, with its full-time coordinator, Debbie Bays, is the most developed so far. This summer, twenty-six Kentucky teachers joined the network through the course offered at Berea College.

Wilma Clark and her students from Winder-Barrow High School, whose project to save the Kilgore Mill Covered Bridge and initiate a youth historical society was featured in the journal, Appalachia.
The New York Finger Lakes Teachers Network is the youngest of the five. A part-time acting coordinator, John Skawski, was hired. This summer, twenty-four new teachers joined through the course taught at Cornell University.

The Foxfire course has been taught for the longest length of time at North Georgia College. A full-time coordinator, Barbara Reimensnyder, was hired in the fall. This summer, thirty teachers were added to this network.

The Foxfire course is offered both Spring and Fall at Georgia State University. Last semester, fourteen teachers joined the Skyline Teacher Network, which is served by Connie Zimmerman, its full-time coordinator.

During the summer, the University of Idaho offered a refresher course for teachers already involved in Idaho’s Bitterroot Network. Reva Lvaas-Hess was hired as that network’s full-time coordinator.

A sixth network will begin in the summer of 1989, with the initiation of the level-one course at Carson-Newman College in Tennessee. This network will be “fully affiliated,” that is, totally funded and sponsored by the college. Also in the summer of 1989, the Puget Sound Education Consortium at the University of Washington will add the Foxfire course to its offerings for the first time.

Six other sites are at various stages of development, from ideas to near-completion. By the end of the five-year Bingham grant, there could be as many as twelve course-network combinations, each unique in its constituency and affiliation status.

The Fellows Program

The Fellows Program was initiated to provide an opportunity for teachers from Foxfire-affiliated teacher networks and for other committed educators to work intensively with the Foxfire staff for up to one full school year. The program is designed to enable each Fellow to deepen his or her understanding of the philosophical principles underlying the Foxfire approach to education. Ample opportunity is provided for the Fellow to apply these principles in the Rabun County High School classroom under the guidance of experienced Foxfire teachers.

The expectation for participation in the Fellows program is that the Fellow will then assume a leadership role in his or her educational community. The nature of the leadership role will evolve out of the specific situation; the Fellow may become a network coordinator, may teach the Foxfire course for teachers as an adjunct professor at a college or university, or may develop some other active role working with teachers in the network.

Fellows for the 1988-89 school year are Cynthia Powelson and Dennis Peters. Cynthia teaches emotionally disturbed, learning disabled adolescents in Upstate New York and will return to help coordinate the activities of the New York network. Dennis teaches elementary school at Montreal Lake, an Indian reservation in Saskatchewan, Canada.

"With a simple notion of learning and a commitment from some smart and daring teachers, the Eastern Kentucky Teachers network has shifted the foundation of education in dozens of schools. . . . While the governor, legislature and the education lobby fight to lead a revolution in Kentucky's schools, they might be surprised to find the revolt has already begun—in the state's classrooms."

Lexington Herald-Leader (February 26, 1989)
How You Can Help

The books, magazines, and record albums our students produce are absolutely vital educational tools, for it is through the act of laboring to create a quality end product that our students not only learn the basic academic skills, but also derive justifiable assurance of their competence, ability, and self-worth. In turn, the income from the sales of these products supports nearly all of the activities of our organization. Therefore, the simple act of purchasing a magazine subscription for yourself, your local library, or a friend brings pleasure to the recipient, and helps pay for the film, tape, and equipment the students use.

Each time you purchase one of our books, we receive a percentage of the purchase price and the ripples of that action on your part are felt throughout our organization, for it is that income that funds such things as the $25,000 we give each year in the form of college scholarships to our students, and the $20,000 we expend each year in a jobs program that puts some twenty of our students to work over the summer months.

The income from products alone, however, though critical, covers only one-third of our annual budget. Income from our endowment, foundation grants, and donations from individuals makes up the balance. You can help, therefore, by purchasing our products, or by donating to our endowment, or scholarship fund, our summer jobs program, or ongoing building restoration or grounds beautification projects.

We’ll make your donation go a long, long way. Need proof? Foxfire magazine began in 1966 with one teacher, 140 kids, and $440 in donations from businesses and residents of our little community. It has since grown, step by step, into the operation you have just read about. And we haven’t even started.

Resources for Teachers

In developing course guides, our approach is to release them first in draft form, encouraging the teachers to respond with their experiences in using the guides. In this way, we can revise them to make them richer and more broadly applicable for classroom teachers teaching in a variety of situations. Then each guide is revised into its final version and made available for purchase.

The following course guides for teachers were available in draft form in Spring 1988:

Magazine Class Course Guide — Eliot Wigginton

This is a nuts and bolts guide for starting and maintaining an educationally valid classroom project utilizing interviews with community residents. It is derived from Foxfire’s magazine classes and other similar successful projects, and is easily adapted to middle school and upper elementary grades, as well as disciplines other than language arts.

Story-telling as a Vehicle for Language Arts — George Reynolds

Derived from George’s successful use of traditional folk tales in his seventh-grade “pre-voc” classes, this is easily adapted for younger students. Presented as a sequence of lessons for a six-week unit, it is suitable either as a beginning for a language arts course or as a transitional unit between project-type approaches.

Language Arts Through Introductory Video — Mike Cook

This is a narrative outline of the main activities Mike uses to introduce students to video production, with emphasis on written and oral language skills. It includes editing, equipment use and selection, voice and microphone techniques, camera techniques and screen composition, and how to develop and organize projects with the students.

Appalachian Literature — Eliot Wigginton and George Brosi

Intended primarily for middle and high school grades, this has two parts. The first (by Brosi) contains information about the better Appalachian authors and their works, and includes some students’ reviews; Part Two (Wigginton) contains narratives of classroom projects and strategies used with Foxfire classes that substantially increase involvement of students in the literature.

In progress: Radio Course Guide, by George Reynolds and Mike Cook.

We continue to put out our teacher-oriented quarterly, Hands On, which features case studies from classrooms using the Foxfire philosophy. It is becoming a network vehicle, and coordinators find it useful for their own communications.

Sometimes a Shining Moment, Wig’s book for teachers, is available in paperback in bookstores or through us. It describes the evolution of Foxfire, the underlying pedagogy, and what it takes to get the process going in individual classrooms.
Foxfire Book Series

Learn of our heritage with instructive articles on the people and traditions of Southern Appalachia. Includes chapters on building a log cabin, home remedies, moonshining and planting-by-the-signs, "passed from generation to generation."

Softcover - $14.50

Item #FF1

House raisings, corn shuckings, candy pullings, weaving, wagon building, and midwifery—all a part of living in the Southern Appalachians. This heritage is preserved with instructive articles on the people and their traditions.

Softcover - $14.50

Item #FF2

Continue the tradition with the third successful book from Foxfire, with chapters on cattle raising, banjos and dulcimers, butter churns, wild plant foods, and interviews with the older generations of Southern Appalachia.

Softcover - $14.50

Item #FF3

Capture the glow of past generations and welcome the people of Appalachia into your life. Let them show you fiddlemaking, cheesemaking, horse trading, berry buckets and gardening.

Softcover - $14.50

Item #FF4

Let Will Zoellner entertain you with his hunting stories. Then he and others will tell you about blacksmithing and ironmaking. Follow gunsmith Hershel House through the process of making a flintlock rifle.

Softcover - $14.50

Item #FF5

Wooden locks and keys, homemade shoes, toys made from wood, corn stalks, apples and cucumbers, and other affairs of plain living are found in the sixth book of the Foxfire series.

Softcover - $14.50

Item #FF6

"The churches are not like they used to be," said E. L. Presley. These intriguing articles capture the flavor of Southern Appalachian faith healing, camp meetings, snake handling, shaped note singing, and other traditions of mountain religious heritage.

Softcover - $14.50

Item #FF7

"I believe he's gonna be goo-goo eyed!" laugh Mr. Meaders as he creates a face jug. Discover the art of Southern folk pottery, mule swapping, and cockfighting in the Southern Appalachians.

Softcover - $14.50

Item #FF8

This book completes the best-selling Foxfire series which has sold over 7,000,000 volumes. Topics include wagon-making, general stores, a Catawba Indian potter, the reconstruction of a fifty-foot long, two-story dogtrot house, and new material on quilting and home remedies.

Softcover - $14.50

Item #FF9

Sometimes a Shining Moment

This book is divided into three sections. The first section tells the story of the beginning of Foxfire. In the second, "Wig" describes his educational philosophy that has evolved as a result of the work he has done. In the final section, he gives a detailed account of what happens each day in his grammar-composition course. In doing so, he shows how his philosophy is applied to the classroom. He also gives other teachers ideas as to how to incorporate the same educational philosophy into their own work.

Since its release in November of 1985, Sometimes a Shining Moment, by Foxfire's founder Eliot Wigginton, has received two prestigious awards. In April of 1986, the book was chosen to receive the Kappa Delta Pi Education Honorary Society Book-of-the-Year Award for 1985. In May of 1986, it won the W. D. Weatherford Award for outstanding writing about Appalachia.

Softcover - $12.50

Item #FF10

Also Available from Foxfire

Magazines:

Published Quarterly. ................................................. Item #RFN .............................................. $5.00

Albums:

North Georgia Mountains. Our first Foxfire album in the contemporary series. Eight original songs by Joyce Brookshire ...................................................... Item #RF1 .............................................. $8.50

It Stills Lives. 16 selections of traditional music, stories and riddles by instrument makers ...................................................... Item #RF2 .............................................. $8.50

Play Script:

Cabbage Town: Three Women ...................................................... Item #RF5 .............................................. $3.50

Prices include postage and handling.
Local & Overseas Publications Received

Connect receives many publications directly or indirectly relevant to youth and student participation. We can’t lend or sell these, but if you want to look at or use them, contact us on (03) 489.9052:

AUSTRALIAN STUDENT PUBLICATIONS:
Rave (Winlaton, Vic) No 41; 1990.

OVERSEAS STUDENT PUBLICATIONS:
Noua (Burlington, Vermont, USA) Vol 12 No 2; Winter 1990

OTHER SOURCES:
Options (Youth Bureau, Canberra, ACT) April 1990.
Aero-Gramme (AERO, New York, USA) April 1990.

Communication Research Trends (Centre for the Study of Communication and Culture, UK) Vol 10 Nos 1, 2; 1990.


Lib Ed (Leire, UK) No 13; Spring 1990.

Collective Notes (COSHG, Melbourne, Vic) No 51; May 1990.

Articles:

The articles listed in this column are of general background value or otherwise not appropriate for reproducing in the columns of Connect. However, they are available on photocopy for research purposes. The length and cost (copying and postage) are listed. Please order by code number. (A fuller listing is available in Connect 46/47 - to October 1987.)

Code Description/Pages/Cost
339 SSICC: Workshop Sheets (including 'Student Government, You and Parliamentary Education') 7 pp; 70¢
340 'Foxfire Grows Up' (Elliot Wigginton) from Harvard Educational Review Vol 59 No 1, February 1989. 26 pp; $2.60

Previously listed articles relevant to the Foxfire project are:

008 'Cultural Journalism Publications' (US): Barbara Hatcher 4 pp; 60¢
058 Ascolta US Trip Report 18 pp; $1.80
104 'Is Your School Doing Its Job?' (Elliot Wigginton) 7 pp; 70¢
119 'Working With School Children Collecting Oral Records' (Aust): Loh 9 pp; 90¢
330 'Foxfire' 1989 brochure 6 pp; 70¢

FOXFIRE BOOKS - ORDER NOW

Elliot Wigginton from Foxfire will be bringing various publications with him in July. Copies of Sometimes a Shining Moment will be available at workshops and talks. While we cannot give a price at this point, you can order copies from Connect - we will notify you about cost and availability.

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