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UA37/44 Our Early Crowded Conditions at The Normal

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When I first came here, and for many years thereafter, we began school at 7:30 and ran on until late afternoon, with so-called chapel hour taking up thirty minutes after two class periods. It was a rare day when chapel ended on time; sometimes it ran over half of the next period. But most of the students were directly from the farm and had been used to early hours. Some teachers, like Colonel Guilliams, were not averse to having a class before breakfast, say at 6:00, and there were a few night classes as far back as I can remember and plenty of meetings of students for drills after the day was over. Our literary societies met at night or after school. Thus our days were long, but always full. We assumed that all schools ran on our schedule, with classes every day at the same hour. This was so marked that I felt some surprise when I enrolled at Indiana University for some classes that met every day, some for three days, some for two, and one class for one hour on Tuesday night. It soon became easy to adjust to this sort of program, but it was a good deal later that our college here adopted any such plan. And then we grew so accustomed to our hour-long classes that we felt that we had reached the limit of scheduling. Our present system shows how far wrong we had been; it has not been necessary to schedule classes of regular students for Saturday morning and thus cut across our in-service program or at night and still further complicate things. It will probably never meet the approval of some of the oldsters, who somehow felt that what was good enough for them, in a small school, is good enough for anybody, anywhere.

When we first began to limit the size of classes, we met opposition, too. Some of the teachers, not necessarily the best ones, felt that having a small class was a sign of our being soft and sissy.
I have not forgotten one of my earliest terms as a teacher, when I had 504 different students, whom I met five times a week. My six classes ended at 4:30, my sixth class having 54 students in Beginning Caesar. And once I had 125 students in a single class in Grammar 2 and 160 in Nature Study. These were not like science courses, with smaller groups in laboratories, but were my sole responsibility. I almost had to sneak in our first Freshman English classes with 30 students each. After we would close the class at that figure, we nearly always had some late registration that forced our reasonable figure into far more than our planned, sensible figure. Sometimes our class of 30 grew, after the regular registration days, to 40 or more. No one who has lived without teaching a freshman class in English can possibly know how much extra work that one act would entail. That we had as few gripes as we did may be a fine tribute to our loving to teach; it may also be an unnecessary sign of our being softies; I have not yet decided which we were. That the classes suffered from our being overcrowded cannot be denied, even though your predecessor said that I ought to enjoy teaching eighty to a hundred in a single class. Certainly I might have enjoyed such a program if I had had some able graduate students to help me, as is now regarded as necessary. I did have 80 upper-ranking freshmen in the fall of 1936, but I also had as my helper one of our best and one who has continued to be outstanding as a teacher at Transylvania, Miss Mitchell Clark, but a chance to have such a helper is rare. Not much of the student help that I had was anything to brag about. Some notable exceptions were Evelyn Hope, now Mrs. Merrill Schell, and Joe Robertson, now assistant secretary of agriculture of the United States. Mere size of a class is not everything, but a decent-sized class offers a better chance to student and teacher alike to do a good job.