

JOY PHILLIPS

## 7. WE ARE FOXFIRE

Foxfire is more than just a magazine or a program designed to preserve the heritage of the North Georgia Appalachian communities. It is a bridge between the rivers of youth and the oceans of wisdom. As a former student of Foxfire in the 1980's, I have first-hand knowledge of the advantages of the program. Through my own personal experience, I was able to master skills in grammar, vocabulary, editing, and publication, as well as being introduced to skills in communication, socialization, and human decency and compassion. This program allowed me to expand my horizons from a normal classroom to the real world and experience the benefits of education through application. I was involved in video classes, audio classes, photography, and the production and publication of the Foxfire magazine. As one of seven children from a rural environment, these experiences provided me with opportunities I would not normally have afforded to me, including the chance to travel and associate with people of different cultures and beliefs.

As the mother of two, Foxfire has again proven its value to my family. Both of my children have served as editors of the Foxfire magazine, and have broadened their academic and personal success because of the program. My son, Ethan, is currently enrolled as a graphic design student in Piedmont College and the scholarship he was awarded through his work with Foxfire allowed him to pursue his educational goal. His affiliation with the program has also helped him acquire jobs exhibiting his musical talent. My daughter, Jessica, is a dual enrollment student at Rabun County High School and Piedmont College. Her work with Foxfire has strengthened her confidence and value not only as a student, but also as an individual. While they both were actively involved in the publication of the 50th anniversary edition book for Foxfire, Jessica is also involved with the publication of another Foxfire book currently being compiled. The summer leadership programs and student jobs offered to the students have not only increased their leadership potential, but have also provided them with summer jobs continually giving to and building up the students within the course.

As a member of the community, I realize the importance of learning from our ancestors in order to create a better future for successive generations. The wonder, experiments, and experiences of the past entice us to acquire knowledge to satisfy our needs and solve our problems. To better understand who we are today, we take from our individual and collective pasts. By sharing this knowledge with our children, it is our intent to pass on our best and worst hoping to evolve into a more productive

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society. Through this realization, I was happy to become an active member of the Foxfire Community Board upon invitation. Through volunteer service, I am able to contribute to the betterment of the students, raising funds for scholarships and other student services. While serving on this board, I realized that the program has not changed very much over the years, although the students and the audience has. Limited by funding, it didn't seem that an integration with newer technology would be possible in order for the program to evolve into a modern form.

In 2015, I was chosen as one of two teachers to begin a new program at Rabun County Elementary School called the School Within a School (SWIS). The program incorporates a rigorous, project-based learning environment for gifted and accelerated students in 5th–6th grades, permitting them to learn through inquiry and hands-on approaches, while developing a deeper understanding of the curriculum. M'ryanne Peacock and I continually research and implement strategies that will challenge these students and help them develop into motivated, independent learners, while offering them tasks that are authentic and valuable. As a teacher, I often reflect on the concept of Foxfire being all about the success of the students. Everything done within the program is for the kids and is contemplative of how they learn and how they achieve. This seemed to be a perfect fit for our new program. It is often difficult to keep the attention of kids when teaching Language Arts. I then began thinking about using the Foxfire approach for instruction of the course, while integrating technology into the classroom. It would be great to allow students to conduct interviews and write articles in the same manner as the high school students, while at the same time, creating something new. This is when the idea of a digital magazine was developed.

The idea was that sixth grade students could lead the project while fifth grade students followed. These students would perform the traditional interviews as in the original Foxfire magazine, but the publication process would be more modern. The interviews would be recorded and then digitally transcribed, but edited manually to reinforce Language Arts skills as required through content standards. The interviews would then be compiled through a digital graphic design layout and made available through online subscriptions or downloads. This could possibly broaden the audience of the Foxfire magazine through a partnership with the organization and allow a new generation to be introduced to the Foxfire legacy and approach to education.

The concept was introduced in July to Ann Moore, the Executive President of Foxfire, and Jon Blackstock, the Foxfire instructor at Rabun County High School. As the idea seemed appealing to them, it was then presented to Bryan Edwards, principal of Rabun County Elementary School, before being introduced to the Superintendent (Melissa Williams) and the Assistant Superintendents (Laverne Beck and Joi Woods), for approval. The final endorsement by the County Board of Education was granted on December 15, 2015. This would be the birth of *Foxfire Today*.

All 5th and 6th grade students received explicit instruction for interviewing, including conduct, how to develop appropriate interview questions, and how to guide the interview process. Following mock interviews for practice, sixth grade

students have chosen their topics and interviewees, conducted and recorded their interviews, and are in the process of transcribing the articles using digital dictation methods and Chrome Books. Students will self-edit and peer-edit their articles, prior to submission to the instructor for final edit. Fifth grade students will follow with the same process. The layout will be conducted through the assistance of graphic design experts volunteering their time and expertise to help with the production. It is the hope that an additional partnership with a local organization will enable the subscriptions/download process to be performed through their company. All proceeds from the sales will be given to the SWIS program to be used to further the digital magazine program and purchase materials for the students.

It is my belief that the success of this project can and will spark a new interest in the Foxfire program. Younger students will become involved and be loyal to the program throughout high school. Participation should increase and new programs can be introduced over time. I would love to see the creation of a virtual museum and other digital programs which educate a new generation to a new Appalachian culture – our Appalachian culture. As time has evolved, so have we. We have voices and have made so many accomplishments which are worthy of recognition. The past teaches us, but the present defines us. We are Appalachia and we are proud. We are *Foxfire Today*.