

Curriculum for Better Living

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TEACHER-EDUCATION institutions like the Louisiana Negro Normal and Industrial Institute, more commonly known as "Grambling," and educational experts are admitting increasingly that *educating a teacher on the job* is one of the best ways of realizing success in teacher education. But a much more significant fact commonly overlooked is that teacher education "on location" is the *only* way to guarantee first-rate teachers in America's millions of schoolrooms. Like leaves of grass, no two teaching positions are alike.

Thus, in the final analysis, there is no such thing as fitting a teacher for a certain position until the problems, needs, and interests of the inhabitants of the community where she works are made a part of the total equipment she takes into the classroom with her. Pre-service education, therefore, is but half the task of making a good teacher. Education in-service is the other half.

One idea destined to play an almost revolutionary role in future teacher-education methods is that these two choice birds, pre-service and in-service education, can be killed with one stone. It has happened in Louisiana through the widespread program of the teachers college at Grambling.

Long before our entrance into World War II, which forced school units everywhere to give attention to the mass of poorly prepared teachers entering the profession, Grambling abandoned the traditional teacher-education, normal-school curriculum and accepted the two fold responsibility of educating teachers *in school* and *on the job*. And both with equal emphasis. Finding that the moth-eaten teacher-education courses were completely ineffective in the improve-

ment of rural community living, it began, *not* by asking itself what kind of courses, but *what kind of communities?* What kinds of problems in those communities?

The Warp and Woof of Curriculum

The urgent problems of the rural Negro in Louisiana became the actual courses in the curriculum of Louisiana Negro Normal and Industrial Institute, and in short order the institution began to discover activities and procedures in teacher education that not only touched the lives of Negro children and adults, but which made a lasting contribution to the well-being and happiness of the people of Louisiana. With a motorized field service unit, made up of various members of its faculty, the college went into dozens of Louisiana communities with the result that those communities, through their respective problems, became the warp and woof of the school curriculum.

Poor health, sub-standard home conditions, improper agricultural methods, widespread adult illiteracy, lack of recreational and cultural facilities—these were the major problems of the rural Negro in Louisiana. Thus experiences in the areas of health, home-making, food production and conservation, child guidance, adult education, creative and recreative arts became the curriculum of Grambling.

Ten years ago many educators raised their eyebrows and shrugged their shoulders and doubted the wisdom, and above all, the practicability, of such a seemingly wayward program of teacher education. Were there not special agencies in health, agriculture, home-making and socio-civic relationships existing to solve rural community problems? Why should teachers attempt to duplicate what these agencies were doing already? And what would become of the sacred three R's if teachers took over the duties of home and other community agencies?

Grambling had but one answer for these disturbing questions: *Education is for better living, and better living is dependent upon the wholesome improvement of all phases of*

This is the encouraging story of how a teachers college and the public schools work together to help communities solve their problems. The program reflects a keen awareness of the importance of attacking community problems through the school. The author is Kara Vaughn Jackson, an instructor in Louisiana Negro Normal and Industrial Institute in Grambling, La.

community life. Why teach a child about a balanced diet if his parents were not going to make it available? And how were the parents going to be concerned about proper nutrition if no one helped them to realize the importance of it? And who was going to teach anyone any of this in the first place if the teacher herself was solely and perhaps incurably concerned, as a result of an antiquated teacher-education curriculum, with the parts of speech and mystifying computations about the cubic feet of air space in a New York sky-scraper? Inevitably the *whole* structure of community life and all agencies concerned therewith became the educational texture of the program at Grambling and the teachers it prepared. Community problems in this light—and can there be any other!—became education problems, thus *school* problems, therefore fundamentally *teacher* problems.

Colleges Work "on Location"

Now the best place to establish contact with a community problem is of course the locality where it exists. Clearly then, the best way to help teachers with the sociological problems influencing the educational process is to work with them right on the scene. Most teachers colleges find it necessary to go to communities to do their most effective work in in-service teacher education. Therefore, the community workshop in strategic locations became the principal means by which a well-rounded program of in-service education could best be carried on through the Grambling program.

Today in-service teacher education among Negroes in Louisiana is constantly active in the form of these community workshops. During the past three years, 20 of the 64 parishes (counties) in the state—in cooperation with the State Department of Education, Louisiana Negro Normal and Industrial Institute and Southern University (the two state colleges for Negroes), and various public-service agencies, consultants, and experts—have conducted workshops which have as their primary purpose acquainting teachers, pupils, and adults with the basic problems of rural community living and how to solve them.

The educational purpose in every instance has been popularly stated as *Education for Health, Education for Economic Well-Being,*

Education for Recreative and Creative Arts, and *Education for Integrated Personalities*. These workshops of course are not cure-alls, but they are fitting symbols of the ways in which the colleges are attempting to cope with the problem of helping teachers already in service and those recently recruited from among individuals who lack professional preparation, teaching experience, and a professional concern for community needs.

The problems of in-service teacher education in their present form are not new. The obstructions to supplying rural schools for Negroes with the best teachers have always been numerous. Poor salaries, working conditions, and tenure have all given very adequate reason for concentrated effort on the part of teacher-education institutions. Moreover, the changes in teacher supply and demand since 1936, which have forced Louisiana to use an estimated 1020 so-called *T-Teachers* with their hastily and sometimes too freely awarded credentials, have made the community workshop plan invaluable.

As implied above, a teacher's education in service is considered to be a sound extension of her pre-service education. The program now in existence was preceded by a revision of the curriculum in terms of community problems. Today the curriculum is in a constant state of revision on the bases of the individual, social and professional needs of the students or prospective teachers, and the changing and now complex local, state, and national rural scene.

College staff members are recruited from among those persons who are thoroughly familiar and have an abiding interest in rural community problems. At one time the college was content with pre-service apprentice teaching under typical conditions, a carefully planned rural supervisory program with attendant classroom visitations, group and individual conferences, and additional study in the summer at institutions of higher learning. However, this phase of the program admittedly reached only a small portion of the 4000 Negro teachers in Louisiana. To be effective many more teachers would have to be reached in a manner that would cause their work to contribute *directly* to improved living in rural communities.

This necessity ushered in the era of the community workshop. Basically, it is a way of taking the program of an institution di-

rectly to the teachers. Great care is exercised in planning the program for each parish, and its noteworthy feature is the establishment of procedures for first-hand participation in the affairs of the community by pupils, teachers, and other adults. The dreams of educational thinkers of the community-related school are certainly at least partially realized in those areas where during community workshops officials, teachers, supervisors, children, and parents come face to face with urgent community problems.

In the major problem areas—health, nutrition, food production and conservation, recreation and creative arts, child guidance, and home-making—all the pertinent local materials of instruction are prepared first in the teacher's language, then in the child's language, and finally in the layman's language. Thus a government bulletin on "Proximate Composition of American Food Materials" becomes common knowledge to all it concerns. Simultaneously, a well-managed laboratory school is at work with these materials of instruction as an actual demonstration of the school techniques, materials, and problems involving a teacher and her class and their community relationships.

A Continuing Program

Yet the in-service education plan does not end with the workshop. The college maintains a year-round follow-up program which includes constant visitations to the area by staff members. The local school leaders thus

have the benefit of continued guidance and assistance, and the college is benefited by being kept constantly aware of the problems confronting a teacher carrying out a community-school program.

During all this time, the supervisor of in-service teachers, a permanent and experienced member of the college staff whose main concern is with recent graduates of the college but who is available to all rural teachers, is in the field, a sort of traveling teacher, supervisor, consultant, and intelligence agent who keeps the in-service program ever alive. In these assorted ways, therefore, the college is forever off the campus, in the community, so to speak, and the teacher is forever in school—precisely at the spot where she can feel her service to the community and see the effect her work is having on its living.

Predicated on the point of view that the school is the central institution of rural life and should therefore take responsibility for helping to build a better community life, because the community unavoidably plays a major part in educational processes, this plan for the in-service education of teachers appears to strike where the iron is hottest—on community problems. And though by no means perfect, it is definitely believed to be a diligent attack on the fundamental issue of whether the rural community shall have an educational program adapted to its basic needs and best interests. That indeed is the nutriment on which it thrives.

Keeping Up With New Materials

News and information about school materials will continue to be presented each month in the "Tools for Learning" department of EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP. Topics for the year are: *October*—READING FOR TEACHERS; *November*—TEACHING THE SKILLS; *December*—AUDIO-VISUAL AIDS; *January*—UNDERSTANDING OUR TIMES; *February*—ART, SCIENCE, AND PLAY MATERIALS; *March*—SCHOOL EQUIPMENT AND SUPPLIES; *April*—READING FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE; *May*—BUILDING HEALTHY AMERICANS. The subject of the month will be introduced with a survey article by an authority in the field, and information about new materials will be presented through the advertising columns.

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