

# Teachers, too, Learn by Doing

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If teachers are to participate competently in the curriculum planning process, it follows naturally that they should have some experiences in planning in their pre-service education. George F. Budd, coordinator of field services at the State Teachers College, Oneonta, New York, looks at the opportunities on the college campus for future teachers to plan and points out ways in which they may have needed experiences.

THE DESIGN for a program of teacher education must be based on the realization that a teacher is an individual, a citizen, and professional worker. The college which hopes to equip a person to function adequately in the profession of teaching must recognize its three-fold purpose, and its program must be planned in terms of the needs which appear with respect to each of the three phases. It is recognized that each prospective teacher differs in his needs from each of his neighbors. However, there are certain areas of similarity of need. These common needs of all teachers must be emphasized. In too

many instances we have become somewhat overwhelmed by the tremendous task which confronts us when we attempt to meet the individual needs of scores of individual persons.

## Teachers for a Democratic Society

If we look closely at the problem of educating teachers, we must conclude that the kind of teacher who will be most effective is determined by the kind of school that will meet the demands of a given society. Since the American people are committed to the democratic method of controlling society and since we have been trying through



*Illustrations in this issue are by Alla Berkeley Cooper*

our schools to equip citizens to work effectively in that type of society, it follows logically that each teacher must have an understanding of the society in which he lives, of the schools in which he will teach, and of the contribution which he can make. These needs are common to all teachers. The difference among individuals then becomes one of emphasis rather than kind.

If this viewpoint is accepted, it is clear that every prospective teacher needs both general education and professional education. One without the other does not equip a person to function effectively as a teacher in today's schools. One without the other produces a lopsided individual who should stay out of the teaching profession until he is more adequately prepared. The most important point in this connection is the fact that much that may be termed general education for the teacher—those experiences designed to meet his needs as an individual and a citizen—is also professional education since the teacher must apply to individual children what he knows about the individual and the citizen. This statement defines the curriculum problem for those preparing teachers and raises two important questions. What are the abilities which the pre-service program should develop in its graduates? What is the place of experience in a program designed to develop those abilities?

#### A Credo for Teacher Education

The following purposes of a program for the education of teachers are presented despite the fact that it is realized that any credo is open to criticism. Idealism is admitted. Its defense lies in its value as a sight raising device.

#### It is the purpose of teacher education to prepare teachers who:

- Are fine examples of the American culture
- Are emotionally mature
- Have mastered the technique of solving problems
- Are unafraid of new situations because they are skilled in sizing up their own powers, making choices, and developing plans for meeting the demands of a given set of conditions
- Have a fundamental respect for the personality of individuals
- Are socially as well as academically intelligent
- Have an understanding of and appreciation for music, art, and literature
- Have a sense of the appropriateness of things
- Are committed to the democratic way of life because they understand its historical development and the promise of its future
- Have an understanding of the world and its institutions
- Have the ability to communicate effectively both orally and in writing
- Have the ability to work effectively with individuals and groups
- Enjoy the company of young people and understand their problems
- Have a scholarly grasp of some body of knowledge that is important to the fullest development of human society
- Have skill in mediating knowledge
- Know the restrictions and trials of the profession of teaching but also understand its satisfactions and its importance as socially useful work
- Have a broad scientific knowledge of the processes of human development and possess skill in using that knowledge in guiding the learning efforts of others
- Are familiar with curriculum materials, and types of organization of the curriculum
- Are familiar with modern methods of evaluating the processes of education and have skill in the use of those methods
- Have a broad, practical understanding

of the functions of the school in this society and of the organization of schools and school systems

This is by no means an exhaustive listing of the competencies of an effective teacher. Rather, it is suggestive. It serves to illustrate the point that much that is general education for every citizen is actually professional education for the teacher. The effective teacher in today's schools must indeed be an effective individual and citizen as well as a professionally prepared worker.

### Experience for Professional Competence

Much has been said regarding certain inadequacies in programs of teacher education. An important area of concern, stemming from the increasing interest in programs of curriculum development, centers about the inability of some teachers, particularly recent graduates of the teacher preparing institutions, to work with a sense of accomplishment in a situation which departs from the tightly structured program which has been characterized by the term "traditional."

The problem is one of feeling at sea, of sensing a certain strangeness, of being somewhat lost because rules to which one has become accustomed are no longer adequate guideposts. The desire to return to old ways of doing things is a compelling force and the internal struggle which individuals experience results in frustration which saps strength and disperses effectiveness. This condition is not peculiar to school situations. As educators of teachers our job is to help young people find security in ordered change and to help them develop a mastery of the techniques which make possible a feeling of as-

urance in the face of dynamic situations. This ability is of tremendous importance for all people. It is of particular importance for those who are to guide the development of children and youth. Social competence is the goal; guided experience in meeting the persistent problems of life is the best assurance of achieving that goal.

Experience as used here means much more than the kind of thing which one encounters at every turn in the so-called extra-curricular program of the school or college. The values of participation in student government, dramatics, school writing activities, or athletics may be taken for granted even though much of the activity centers in relatively minor areas of concern and the benefits accrue to a relatively small group. *Experience*, however, as a noun having the connotation of being beneficial to an individual, must include the development of concepts which involve the release of leadership and the building of the ability to understand and benefit from freedom. These ideas characterize American people at their best. They are the supporting structure of the idea of American democracy as a system for controlling group living. Experiences chosen as educational tools must meet this standard. In addition, they must give strong promise of successfully developing the important qualities of social competence and sincere self-respect.

An examination of the programs offered by recognized schools and colleges reveals literally hundreds of untapped possibilities for providing thrilling, challenging, worthwhile experiences. Many schools have identified some of them. There are, however, two large

areas which are worthy of more careful scrutiny.

### No Alternative for Group Planning

The first of these is the planning of the content of courses of study. This is curriculum development in a fundamental sense. Let us recognize from the outset the fact that many sincere college teachers make an honest effort to permit the students to plan those affairs which supplement lecture, reading, and discussion activities. The words "permit" and "supplement" are the crux of the situation. It is here that we fail in our professional task. Planning is not permissive. It is a compelling force. Co-operative and evaluative planning is the heart of the school program, rather than the supplement.

Let us characterize ourselves in the college situation. We are a group composed of students and one or more teachers. We are faced with the problem of preparing ourselves to work in increasingly better ways in the profession of teaching. We have the advantage of being provided with time to investigate our problem, with tools for extending the horizons of our knowledge about the problem, and with the guidance of a person, designated as the teacher or instructor, who has had some experience in this thing.

But the job is a group job—it is not the instructor's job. The problems are group problems—not the instructor's problems. How, then, are we going to find answers to our problems? What techniques are we going to use? Shall the instructor be asked for answers? If he is, we are bound in courtesy to accept those answers, at least on the surface. And we are limited by the fact

that his answers are the ones which he has discovered for his situation. Or, on the other hand, shall we discover what the answers are for us at this time and in this setting?

What shall be our method? Shall we listen to a series of lectures, take notes on prescribed reading, and write a term paper on an assigned topic? Or shall we analyze the problems as they present themselves to us, identify the points of chief concern, prognosticate possible results, plan ways of reaching the ends we have set, and judge our successes and failures?

### Skill in the Know-How of Group Living

These are questions which we as educators of teachers must raise with each group of students. Indeed, since this is our work, we are conscience bound to bow to the disciplines of "work." We are not teachers of courses. We are teachers of teachers. And, therefore, we must be aware of process and we must seize every opportunity to help members of the group to grow in the know-how of group living. Growth in this area must merge with growth in other areas such as the understandings, skills, appreciations, and points of view which equip individuals to best meet the demands of their chosen profession.

The principles which govern the conduct of group planning in college situations also rule group planning by a school faculty, a committee, or the United Nations Council. These are important principles. Skill in their application must become the concern of the profession of teaching.

Students who have matured in a college where they have planned with the faculty the content of courses are bet-

ter equipped to work successfully as staff members of a school undertaking a program of curriculum development than are graduates of schools which emphasize the instructor's course outline. They work more effectively for the same reason that a person who is skilled in the use of the *Education Index* is more competent and more at ease in a library. They have learned skills which are now familiar to them. It is only the unfamiliar which we fear—the familiar we can handle because we know its possibilities.

### Realizing the Campus School Potential

A second area where worthwhile experience can be gained is the campus school. The value of student teaching and the importance of the campus school operated by the teacher preparing institution are so well established that the pattern is seriously questioned in very few instances. We might well raise a question, however, concerning the efficiency of efforts expended in using the facilities offered. Does the program of teacher education make the best possible use of the resources of the campus school? Is the entire college staff aware of those resources? And more important, are the college students aware of and eager to develop those possibilities?

Surely the best way to become skilled in any technique is to practice it under the friendly guidance of a helpful teacher. If the object is to develop skill in working with a group to improve the curriculum of a school, then one must work with such a group. Where can such a group be found? The campus school must provide the answer. It must be a laboratory of curri-

culum development. Students of education must be a welcome part of the organization of the program.

Many questions are raised. How far can we go in this proposal? Must the classroom teachers step aside and permit beginners to tamper with the school program? Won't the children suffer when college students are allowed to help plan the program?

Answers are not simple; nor can they be categorical. Decisions in regard to when, how, and how much must always be reached in terms of principles upon which the group operates. If, for example, one principle is that no exploitation of the children is to occur, then plans must be laid in view of that value. If, again, the point of view is held that college students should plan the college program under guidance, then the same principle should apply to the campus school. Thus questions are answered before they are raised, or having been raised, the answer is found, not in the arbitrary decision of one in the status of leader, but in the judgment of the group based upon values jointly enunciated and commonly respected.

Given a campus school so organized and administered that a continuing program of curriculum development is the combined enterprise of the college staff, the college students, and the pupils of the campus school, the nature of the activities of each group must be considered.

### Focus on the Future Teacher

We are concerned primarily with the college student. Our purpose is to provide a wealth of opportunity for the student to observe, to be a part of, to acquire skill in, and to evaluate the proc-

esses by which professional workers operate most effectively. Each student, therefore, must become thoroughly acquainted with types of curriculum organization. He must be well-grounded in the psychology of learning. He must have a mastery of the field of human growth and development. He must be acquainted with the social realities of American life. He must hold a set of values which govern his living with his fellow men. All of these he must have. And he must use them in his contacts with his classmates, his instructors, and the children of the campus school.

This suggestion does not imply that a sequential hierarchy of abilities to be acquired by the student can be arranged or that these abilities can be learned in a given order. That would be too easy. The fact is that the student must have these abilities to work best. The process of acquiring them to an optimum degree is a developmental one. The complex matrix of individual personality includes each ability in some degree at all times. The challenge to teachers at all levels is to develop all of these important abilities to the greatest extent possible in the time span allowed. On the college level the campus school, as a laboratory for learning, offers an important opportunity for acquiring these skills.

#### **Experience Remains the Imperative**

As outlined here, the experience approach is a way of learning; therefore,

it must have purpose and time and place. It should be applied to courses other than those we accept traditionally as being professional. It is a technique which nets the greatest returns when the psychology of group adjustment in a professional setting is coupled with the study of the place and the influence of community groups interested in the production of goods and the servicing of the needs of this society. Activities planned by and with the learner to provide avenues for advancing his knowledge and ability should take the student of education into the factory, the shop, the pool room, the church, the playground, the hospital, and the museum as well as the library. The college, with all its facilities, is the focal point from which operations stem.

This is a broad interpretation of the experience technique in creating stimulating learning situations. But it is an interpretation which we must make operate in programs of teacher education. There is no equally profitable way of educating capable young people in the abilities required of competent citizen-teachers. Such preparation is the purpose of teacher education. The program designed to accomplish this purpose must be planned cooperatively by learner and teacher. It must be rooted in the important aspects of study which center in recognition and definition of a problem, gathering of data, and interpretation and application of the learnings secured.



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