

# Learning Experiences for Future Teachers

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Since the central force in any educational program is the teacher, it is of the greatest importance that the pre-service education of teachers be of the highest quality. In this article Glenn Kendall, Chairman of the Division of Education and Psychology, San Francisco State College, points out some of the important areas in which prospective teachers should have experience and discusses a program of education designed to provide these experiences.

THE PEOPLE of this country have said many times and in many ways that they want good educational programs for their children. They know that it is of vital importance to have appropriate physical facilities, instructional materials, administrative organization, and community understanding and support of school purposes. As important as these things are, they are not enough. *The central force in any educational program is the teacher.*

School programs become real only in the day-by-day activities of teachers and pupils. What a teacher does and the way in which he does it in the classroom make the real difference in the quality of education which develops. The other factors mentioned in the previous paragraph cannot be any guarantee of effectiveness. Their value depends wholly upon what is done with them by teachers. In the hands of an enthusiastic and competent teacher they are valuable instruments. In the hands of an incompetent and dissatisfied teacher they are almost valueless. The schools are effective, therefore, to the extent that teachers have the necessary understandings and skills to work

with pupils in terms of the varying abilities and interests of each student, and in terms of the problems and resources of the community of which they are a part.

Viewed in this light the teacher becomes a very important person, in fact the key to the school's effectiveness. It follows, therefore, that the kinds of learning experiences provided for those who are preparing to teach are highly significant. Difficulties, costs, and tradition should not be allowed to become major deterrents to the development of a program that gives promise of developing teachers who will be effective in carrying out the purposes of the school.

The concern of this article is with basic experiences that teacher education institutions should provide for their students. It is understood, of course, that this pre-service program is only a part of the total program, that on-the-job development is an integral part of the process.

Before suggesting some ideas about the organization of these experiences, let us examine briefly some of the important areas of learning in which pros-

pective teachers should have experience.

#### GENERAL EDUCATION

There is common agreement that teachers should be "good specimens of the culture" and that they need to understand the culture in which they live. The maximum personal and social development of the individual is the major goal of general education. But in a major and peculiar sense they also need to develop a thorough understanding and appraisal of the social forces and conditions which face a society. They need to know these things specifically in terms of the society in which they live.

#### PROFESSIONAL EDUCATION

*Understanding Growth and Development of Children and Youth.* Through extensive research, observation, and experimentation, students of child psychology have arrived at basic principles which help us in understanding students. The good teacher has an appreciation of the phases of development through which a pupil passes and a knowledge of the instructional procedures to be followed during the periods of development. Principles that state "each individual is different from any other individual," that "individuals learn as 'whole persons,'" that "each individual's pattern of growth is uneven," or that "active learning is the best kind" call for experiences for prospective teachers which make it possible to build programs with students providing for their needs in varying situations and under many conditions.

*Experiences in Planning the Curriculum and in Developing Effective Teaching Methods.* Curriculum plan-

ning involves many persons—the pupils, the teacher, the supervising officials, and other resource people of the community. Choices must be made in determining what is to be used for learning purposes. The skillful teacher plans the curriculum with others in terms of the pupils and the society to be served. Becoming an artistic teacher involves extended experiences with students. Generally this skill is best acquired under the leadership of a teacher who has become a master at the job of working with children and young people.

*Experiences in Working Democratically with Others.* In terms of the generally accepted purposes of education in this country, it is not enough that teachers know how to plan a curriculum, the "subject matter" of the curriculum, and the method of teaching it. A school program is a cooperative enterprise involving many groups. Teachers need to work with students, with fellow teachers, and the administrative staff in developing policy. They need to work with groups in the school and community in such a manner that majority and minority groups have full opportunity to participate in matters of common concern. They need to work with parents in developing programs, in evaluating work done, and in determining "next steps."

*Experience in Utilizing the Educational Resources of the Community.* Teachers for today's schools need to know how to make full use of all community resources for learning experiences. As the school operates continuously as a part of the family of agencies serving the community, each teacher must clearly see the proper

function of the school in this family and then develop distinctive types of learning experiences growing out of the needs, the problems, and the resources of the community.

These are some of the areas in which students preparing to teach should have experience. They indicate only the great breadth of needed opportunity. What then is a feasible program of education for those who plan to teach school?

#### A PROGRAM FOR TEACHER EDUCATION General Education

The proposal discussed here grows largely from the plans developed at the college where the writer is a staff member. This program includes a plan for both general and professional education. Each is intended to supplement the other. General education is the base of the program. The college has stated its general education goals as follows:

To provide a basic education that will help our students to develop as individuals and as responsible members of our democratic society. To these ends we are organizing a series of educative experiences in the following broad areas:

- ◆ The development of the individual
- ◆ Home and family living
- ◆ Choice of occupation or profession in line with the individual student's abilities and interests
- ◆ The development of the individual as a citizen in a democratic society.

This program consists of forty-five units of courses, including laboratory experiences and activities, recreation, and creative opportunities in music, art, drama. While it is hoped that most of the forty-five units will be covered in the first two years, there is no attempt to keep students from taking courses in

their major fields of interest after that time, when the plan has been carefully thought through. Specific requirements vary with the experience, ability, and future goals of the student. Decisions on individual programs are made by the student in consultation with the counseling staff.

As the general education program has developed, the following basic assumptions have been recognized:

► The maximum personal and social development of the individual student is the major goal of general education. The content and the method of education must relate directly to the life problems and basic needs of the students, individually and collectively.

► Effective general education requires combined emphasis upon instruction and guidance. Education cannot consist merely of teaching re-shuffled subject matter. Of central importance in general education is the development of a close personal relationship between students and faculty. The more direct and individualized this relationship becomes the more effectively it promotes student growth.

► Effective general education requires the maximum *integration* of content to provide for the clarification of relationships among the various course offerings in general education. Integration is made difficult, even impossible, to attain when *separate* courses serve as the sole basis for the presentation of the content of general education.

► The integration of content in general education rests finally upon the provision for a close working relationship among the members of the teaching staff.

► Effective general education requires

the utmost freedom and flexibility in programming, planning, and teaching approach.

#### The Professional Program—

##### Four Major Areas

In the case of elementary teachers who normally receive credentials at the end of a four-year period of study, the professional courses begin with the junior year. Secondary teachers normally receive their credentials at the end of a five-year period of study. The first two years are devoted to the general education program; the next two years are concentrated on major and minor teaching fields and in rounding out a program providing for individual interests. The fifth year at this institution is devoted to professional studies for secondary credential candidates.

The professional program may be divided roughly into four major areas:

##### *Competence in "subject matter" to be taught.*

For the elementary teacher this includes a block of elementary school subjects, grouped into a "minor." For the secondary teacher it includes the teaching major and minor.

##### *Understanding the nature of the learner and the nature of the society in which the learner lives.*

This is a large block of work done under the joint direction of two staff members—one in education and one in psychology. This course requires observa-

tion in the Laboratory School and in the community together with first-hand experience in working with children or young people in out-of-school activities.

##### *Curriculum and instruction in the subjects to be taught.*

This block of work consists of a number of activities and experiences in the workshops with major emphasis on the actual preparation of instructional materials together with a study of teaching methods to provide for individual abilities and interests.

##### *Directed teaching and problem seminar.*

Students spend a full day for a semester in an actual school and community situation. They report to the college regularly one day a week—late in the afternoon—for the seminar. They engage in these activities under the close supervision of a master teacher and the general supervision of a college staff member. The college supervising instructor has the responsibility for the seminar.

As far as possible, instruction in the college professional courses sets an example in teaching method for the elementary or secondary program which is being studied. Central to these experiences and their implications is the thought that a teacher must be a relaxed individual who enjoys his job. Prospective teachers, therefore, need opportunities to develop confidence in their capacities and abilities to see the job through and, along with that, a warm friendliness in dealing with people.



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