

A Core Program in Teacher Education

F. G. MACOMBER

In an attempt to "practice what they preach," the staff of Drake University's College of Education has initiated a program of curriculum improvement that features the development of a core curriculum in teacher education. Dean F. G. Macomber tells the story of this program as it has developed during the past three years at Drake University, Des Moines, Iowa.

"HE LECTURED to us for the whole term about the importance of pupil participation in the teaching and learning process, but did he give us a chance to participate? He certainly did not! Why doesn't he practice what he preaches?" How often have you heard students make this complaint about professors of education?

Three years ago the Drake College of Education faculty began a program of improvement of the teacher training curriculum with the apparently simple purpose of trying to develop a program in harmony with modern educational thought—"of practicing what we were preaching." Three years later a somewhat disillusioned but not discouraged staff still believes that it can be done and that we are making progress, even though such progress is painfully slow at times. A university-wide grading system that can't be ignored, the conventional division of the university day into periods of fifty minutes each with most student programs cutting across at least three colleges, teacher certifica-



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tion requirements which often are expressed in terms of set courses of specified numbers of credit hours in each—all these factors, combined with the fact that traditionally college professors are highly individualistic—create what at times seem to be almost insurmountable difficulties.

Plan of Procedure

The staff was in general agreement with the guiding premise that procedures desirable for public school curriculum improvement were equally applicable to the improvement of the teacher education curriculum. In general, these procedures are:

- ♦ *Clarify your own educational philosophy.* In this case, it meant the clarification of a philosophy of teacher education.
- ♦ *Develop a clear concept of the aims of education.* The aims of education are con-

sidered to be lines of student growth, or, as some prefer, developing behavior patterns. The aims of teacher education, then, are those developing behavior patterns essential to successful teaching.

♦ *Determine the kinds of learning activities (experiences) essential to the achievement of desired student growth.*

♦ *Develop a plan of organization consistent with the working situation—plant, faculty, equipment, community facilities, university organization—which will facilitate the development of desired learning experiences, and which holds the greatest promise of achieving desired student growth along the lines of the aims of teacher education.*

♦ *Develop a program of continuous guidance and evaluation.* This should be consistent with recognized principles of guidance and evaluation, with emphasis upon pupil decision in guidance and self-evaluation in achieving desired student growth.

♦ *Develop a program of continuous evaluation to determine the effectiveness of the curriculum.*

♦ *Recognize that effective curriculum development is a process of continuously improving the learning situation and is not a process of sudden and complete change.* What is important is the progress made over a period of several years through cooperative faculty and student planning and accomplishment.

Basic Point of View

Space here allows only the briefest presentation of the evolving program of teacher education and the philosophy involved. Certain concepts, however, are of such importance that they must be presented even though very briefly and dogmatically, with all the dangers involved in such a presentation. Among these concepts are:

☐ Essentially, the professional preparation of elementary and secondary teachers is much more alike than un-

like. While academic preparation may differ due to demands for a higher degree of specialization at the upper secondary level, the basic professional needs of elementary and secondary teachers differ very little.

For instance, the same psychological principles apply to their teaching. The social and biological needs of the child and the adolescent youth differ only in degree, but not in kind. The aims and purposes of secondary and elementary education are the same. If one believes in the tenets of the so-called experience curriculum, there is no essential difference in method at the elementary and secondary levels.

☐ Students learn as they experience and what they experience. The implication should be very clear—that learning a modern philosophy and psychology of education will be greatly facilitated if students experience such philosophy and psychology in operation in their own college classes; in other words, if college professors practice what they preach.

☐ An experience curriculum with learning experiences developed cooperatively around fundamental problems or *centers of interest* requires more flexible time allotments than does the conventional course organization. When recommended curriculum procedures are applied to the improvement of teacher education, the evolving learning experiences do not fit the conventional and neatly organized course patterns. Rather, large blocks of time and provision for flexibility in beginning and ending the various phases of the work are needed.

☐ An experience curriculum requires

cooperative teacher participation and opportunity for teacher-pupil planning in developing desired learning activities. This requires an administrative plan that will permit several teachers to work and plan together in developing a year's work for a group of students, rather than the usual individual course and load assignments for teachers.

☐ Laboratory-type classrooms need to be developed and equipped. The classroom becomes a place where students and instructors come to work together rather than a lecture room, or a combined lecture-discussion room. The conventional college classroom with its straight rows of tablet-arm chairs arranged chiefly for note-taking is not adequate for a modern teacher education program.

Organization of the Curriculum

The first year of the program of curriculum improvement was devoted to a clarification of philosophy, to the development of a statement of the aims of professional education, to making an inventory of desirable student learning activities, and to planning a curricular organization that would provide adequate time and flexibility. Two experimental groups were organized the second year of the program, with expansion to five groups the third year. Ultimately, all teachers in training will come into the core program.

Space will not permit a complete discussion of the statement of aims, which enumerates those growth patterns deemed desirable for the successful teacher. These aims, listed as teaching competencies, are organized under some thirteen headings and are specific in nature.

Included are those philosophical and psychological concepts which it is hoped the students not only will understand and accept, but be able to apply in their teaching: the ability to utilize the democratic process in guiding individual and group learning; the ability to guide the development of "experience units"; the ability to evaluate pupil growth in the aims of education; the ability to obtain and utilize instructional materials and equipment—these are only a few of the competencies listed in the six-page statement of aims.

Without further discussion of the relatively long process involved in determining desired learning activities and in arriving at a plan of organization, be it sufficient to say that the activities of the professional core program with, of course, the exception of supervised teaching, are developed in a two-hour period. Groups meet three times weekly over a period of two years during the sophomore and junior years, with the period shortened to one hour during the senior year. Freshmen are enrolled in a two-period orientation class of one hour in length.

Originally, some sixteen different units formed the major "*centers of interest*" for both elementary and secondary pre-service teachers. As a result of two years of experience with the core program, several of the original units have been fused so that now the professional studies, in addition to student teaching, consist of the following *centers of interest*:

- I. Understanding and Planning Your Teacher Education Program
- II. Understanding the Learner and the Learning Process

- III. Understanding the Social Order and Implications for Education
- IV. Understanding the Curriculum of the Modern School
- V. Planning and Developing Group Work Around Large Centers of Interest (Planning and Guiding the Development of an Experience Unit)
- VI. Guiding Development in the Basic Skills
- VII. Evaluating Pupil Growth
- VIII. Understanding the Guidance Function of Teaching
- IX. Understanding Our System of Education
- X. Professionalizing Education
- XI. Clarifying Our Educational Philosophy

Originally Units II and III were divided into two units each, and there were additional units on Obtaining and Using Instructional Materials and Equipment, Making the School a Community School, Developing Creative Ability, and Guiding Health Development. The learning activities of these latter units are so much a part and parcel of certain of the eleven units listed above that fusion seemed desirable to the staff.

The staff is of the opinion that the supervision of student teaching should be the responsibility of the instructors who coordinate the core activities. Consequently, while not all persons who work with these groups act as supervisors of teaching, all persons who supervise teaching are actively engaged in the core program.

Developing Coordination

During the first two experimental years of the program, from two to five

staff members worked together in planning and guiding the work of a single group of students for the year. As an illustration, during one semester three instructors coordinated the program for one of the groups, with each instructor guiding the class for several weeks. Each staff member was especially well qualified by reason of training and experience to guide the development of one of the three units centering around evaluation, instructional materials and equipment, and creative activities. (The two latter units now have been fused with other core units.) During the time the group was working with instructional materials and equipment, for instance, the students were under the guidance of an expert in this field and spent two hours on each of three days a week for several weeks in the audio-visual laboratory.

This plan of coordinated instruction had the advantage of providing students with expert guidance in each of the several areas, but had all the disadvantages inherent in departmentalized instruction, even though the faculty members worked cooperatively in planning the work. In particular, it was found that we were failing to develop an adequate program of student evaluation and guidance. We were failing to practice what we were preaching, namely, that if adequate guidance and evaluation are to be achieved, an instructor must be with his students for long enough periods of time to get to know them, and total student contacts must be held down to a reasonable number.

In its last planning meeting the core staff unanimously agreed that one instructor should act as the chief coordi-

nator of the activities of a group throughout at least a semester, and, where practicable, for the year, with the staff specialists coming in as consultants rather than assuming full leadership of the group. This is the plan for the coming year, with all of its involved administrative difficulties, including the adjustment of teaching loads.

Extent of the Program

So far, it has been feasible to develop the core program with its large blocks of time only with the students in elementary education, although the same units now make up the secondary curriculum as well, but with old course titles and time allotments retained. It is the hope of the faculty that all students preparing for teaching can be included in the core program ultimately, but it was thought best to expand the program gradually and experimentally rather than risk failure through an ex-

pansion that outran staff experiences and facilities.

Evaluating Progress

An attitude inventory administered at the close of two years of experimentation disclosed that students grow progressively more enthusiastic about the work from semester to semester. Students with one semester of experience with the integrated curriculum thought it only slightly more effective than conventionally organized classes, while students with three and four semesters of experience were highly favorable. In general, the faculty is of the opinion that the program definitely is superior to the conventional course organization in securing desired results, but realizes that we still are far short of our goals, especially in developing an adequate evaluation and guidance program and in securing student participation in community activities.

ASCD MEETS IN DENVER

The Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development will hold its 1950 national meeting in Denver, Colorado, February 12-15.

Some highlights of this fifth annual convention are:

- 35 Study Groups
- General Sessions
- Prominent Speakers
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- 1950 Yearbook Presentation
- Luncheon Session
- Educational Exhibits
- Free Evenings
- School Visits
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at the University of Denver

For further information, pre-registration, and housing blanks, write to the *Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, NEA, 1201 Sixteenth Street, N.W., Washington 6, D.C.*

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