

Lighting Candles

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"It is better to light a candle than to curse the darkness," according to an ancient proverb. This article tells how a Child Education Foundation news letter assisted recent graduates in tackling their first jobs. Muriel Crosby is director of elementary education, Wilmington Public Schools, Wilmington, Delaware.

BRIDGING the gap between the pre-service education of teachers and actual professional service is a problem shared mutually by teacher-education institutions and school communities employing beginning teachers. Where the teacher-education institution feeds its graduates into a local school community, opportunities for close college-community relationships should narrow the gap. But, even so, there is a need for careful guidance of beginning teachers for under the best of circumstances the gap is usually present. In a sense this is good; certainly it is justified, for the alert teacher-education institution is in the forefront in modern education, having access to and using the findings of current research and experimentation in problem areas. On the other hand, the typical school community accepts change critically and slowly and this is sound, for we know that growth that is genuine takes time and cannot be accomplished by undue pressure.

Where the teacher-education institution sends its graduates far afield, the problem becomes even greater. Distance and time make it virtually impossible for the college to participate actively in the successful orientation of its graduates in their first professional jobs. Yet the responsibility remains.

FIRST JOBS PRESENT HAZARDS

This report describes an experiment by one college attempting to meet its responsibilities to beginning teachers and their school communities. It began with a conception that education possesses real hazards for graduates in their orientation to first jobs in the profession. It focused attention upon the rejection of patterns and the conviction that teacher education should be concerned with the broad development of the student as a person and a potential professional worker and not with the preparation of beginning teachers armed with a bag of tricks and prescribed patterns to meet any and all situations. The experiment was founded on a belief that the pre-service education of teachers should be geared to the conviction that an individual makes himself a teacher on the job. With such a premise it followed that emphasis in teacher education should be placed upon the fullest development of the individual equipped with broad scholarship, an ability to use the scientific method, knowledge of content fields essential in the level of teaching to be entered, skill in human relations, and an eagerness to develop on the job the competencies of successful teaching.

The most tangible pre-service aspect of the experiment to bridge the gap between pre-service and in-service experience was a senior seminar held the semester before graduation. Much of the work of the seminar centered in weekly, all-day sessions observing in selected centers representing a cross-section of philosophies and agencies; religious schools, modern, progressive and traditional schools, public and private schools, day-care centers and settlement houses were included. To graduates beginning their professional service in schools scattered far and wide came the realization that "Education, 1951" wore many different faces. This seminar experience was designed to act as a buffer between idealism and reality. And off went the graduates—seventeen of them from the seminar group—one to Brazil, three to the West Coast, three to New England, six to the middle-eastern states from Washington, D. C., to up-state New York, one to continue in college, and two to marry and postpone their teaching careers.

College Sponsors News Letter

With all the careful guidance given students through four years of college designed to help them become ready for their first teaching jobs, there was still need for more. In spite of the geographic barriers of space and distance, the college felt that some effort should be made to provide for its graduates a little of the security which ties with the immediate past give and which fosters wholesome independence. Accordingly, in the early fall following graduation, a letter went out to all former seminar members. This was a "feeler," the response to which would determine

whether or not letters should be sent at regular intervals during the first year on the job. Part of the first letter is quoted.

By this time many of the Class of 1950 are getting established in new jobs and beginning to feel very much at home. While many of our recent seniors are located near by, some are on far-flung shores. All of us are busy and frequently find it difficult to keep in touch with old friends. For these reasons some of us thought it might be helpful if an occasional note is sent to you during your first year of teaching, calling attention to some of the new resources which come our way and which may be of interest to you in your work. If you think this is a good idea and would like to be on our mailing list, please let us know.

Included in this first note were descriptions of several new pamphlets, films and other "good resources" with brief suggestions for their use.

Letter Wins Enthusiastic Response

The first news letter met with such an enthusiastic response that it was decided to follow through with a series of five letters during the school year. The second letter noted that:

It is too bad that everyone cannot see the letters from the Class of 1950. We have positions in many places; we work with children of many ages. On the whole, many in the class are well placed, in positions with more constructive features than negative ones. We have very large classes of children, though a few have small ones. Some '50's are already digging into their new communities and participating actively in raising educational standards.

In addition to the resources suggested by the staff, the second letter introduced some suggested in the first responses from graduates. A request was included also:

The college is setting up a curriculum center to expedite familiarity with and use by students of good curriculum materials. We need courses of study, curriculum guides and other suitable materials. Please keep us on your mailing list if you come across materials we can use.

Early in December the third and final letter for the first semester went out. Graduates had responded to the second letter with a number of fine suggestions for members of the group. These were passed along. Suggestions were made by the graduates also for additional "features."

Among the many letters we have had from the Class of 1950 a number have contained very good suggestions. Several have asked to have incorporated in our "news" letters some descriptions of current "first jobs" held by members of the class. Others have recommended good professional references for sharing through the news letters, for inclusion in the curriculum center and for consideration by future senior seminar groups. And still others have made valuable suggestions for making even better the quality of pre-service education provided at the college.

First of all let us bring ourselves up to date on former classmates. The following quotes are taken from letters received:

"Right now I am recruiting mothers to do house-to-house canvassing to urge people to vote for new school buildings. You can imagine how they

hate the thought of turning into saleswomen, but you can imagine also how desperately we need the new school buildings. I have sixty-eight children in double session right now, but the number varies so that I am constantly busy with personnel and census cards."—*S.A.*

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"I can't quite rival S.A.'s 68 kindergarteners, but I do have 49 of my own. I am in a school that was built during the last two years, and opened this fall. Of course the equipment is all new. The furniture is blonde mahogany, and the spinet pianos are made in matching wood."

"Perhaps someone could tell me how to distinguish between one identical twin and another. I can't."—*A.B.*

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"I am teaching 26 children in first grade. The parents are interested in what goes on, and at a P.T.A. tea several weeks ago, there were twenty mothers. That is a good showing."—*B.J.*

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"My teaching situation is absolutely wonderful. As you know, I am assistant in a first grade. The woman with whom I work is an excellent teacher, and I consider myself extremely fortunate. We have in our class 25 six-year-olds and are given the use of three rather large classrooms. We've arranged it so that the tables are all in one room, making it very easy for all the tool subjects to be taught there with a minimum of confusion. In the middle room we have woodworking or cooking or painting and the third room is left for indoor games, music, etc. We've divided into groups so that not everyone is doing the same thing at the same time.



Courtesy, Hillsborough County (Fla.) Public Schools

My days were full of unanswered questions. How do you introduce new words? How long should a reading period be?

"Last week the children had their first experiences in cooking. They made applesauce. Everyone (including the teachers) had a marvelous time of it.

"The school is situated in a wonderful location and the playground, while not the best equipped as to material, is grand in that there are plenty of trees, flowers, etc., around to stimulate an interest in science. We took our class of 25 first graders on a train trip last week and it proved to be highly successful. Our next trip will be to the new museum at Science Park. I'll let you know how that one turns out."—*L.E.*

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"Your suggestion as to the need for a public-relations job is of particular interest to me. At present I am in a country school, of wooden structure, built in 1900, the toilet facilities consist of an "outhouse," the second

grade (my class) and third grade are forced to share the same room, consequently, with 54 children together, the greater percentage in nailed-down seats.

"The town is reluctant to have double sessions or to construct a new school. The faculty, superintendent and a good percentage of citizens are willing to do everything in order to bring our schools up to those in the surrounding vicinities but we are still battling the old 'die-hards.' I feel that the movie you suggest may be just the right approach. Thank you very much for the suggestion."—*G.J.*

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"Teaching is wonderful and I love every minute of my time with my children. I have 21 in the morning and 18 in the afternoon. I think that's an ideal number for a new teacher. My setup is excellent and I have lots and lots of room. My floor

is linoleum and is just perfect for my children to take their shoes and socks off for rhythms. I have a new piano and I also have a victrola. The kindergartens have their own playground which is fully equipped."—*B.M.*

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By midyear it was felt that individual stock taking would be helpful. Accordingly, the fourth letter was designed to bring this about.

As you evaluate your first semester of work on your job it would be helpful to those of us working in the field to have some responses to the following questions: (a) As a beginning teacher in September, how well equipped do you feel you were? What kinds of situations in teaching do you feel you, for a beginner, met well? What kinds of situations seemed hard for you? (b) Other than teaching, what aspects of getting established in your job do you feel (1) you were able to meet especially well? and (2) you found difficulty in meeting well?

If you find time please drop a note of response to these questions for it will help the new senior seminar group in their planning this year.

Several individual evaluations received from the graduates were quoted in the fifth and final "news letter" sent out in mid-April.

"I am now attempting to answer the questions of your February 5th letter. (a) As a beginning teacher I felt quite well equipped except that I still need more help in presenting music and rhythms to the children. (b) I found it fairly easy fitting into my job. Everyone was friendly and delighted to have a trained teacher.

They welcomed my suggestions and utilized them. They were particularly interested in the new trends in teaching. They are critical of dress at the Settlement House. They insist on neatness, cleanliness and not fancy attire. Advancement there ties up with your personal habits and qualities."

* * * *

"As a beginning teacher last February, I was amazed to find how little I knew about the mechanics of teaching tool subjects. I knew what should be expected of second graders, but had no idea how they were taught. The exception was arithmetic. After our Math course I could have taught arithmetic in my sleep. But in reading, spelling and writing I was lost. All I could do was memorize the guide book and hang on. My days were full of unanswered questions. How do you introduce new words? How long should a reading period be? How do you teach a child to write on a line, not half off? What can you do about mirror writing? I could go on for pages, but you know the kind of thing I needed—the mechanics of teaching tool subjects. I think we should have had the same kind of preparation for other subjects as we had for arithmetic. We seemed to spend a lot of time on reading, but never learned how to teach it.

"That is my main comment. It is all very well to say that each teacher must develop her own methods, but you can't develop methods out of thin air.

"I solved the problem of my identical twins, but sort of feel I'm cheating. Their mother bought enamel pins—a J for Jerry and a T for Teddy and she pins the initials on their shirts every day. But I still feel that I ought to manage without that."

News Letters Ease Transition

To all participants, staff and graduates, the "news letters" seemed effective in easing the transition from pre-service to in-service status. Space does not permit more than a sampling of letters and responses. The sampling is adequate, however, to demonstrate some of the values of this effort. Of the thirteen beginning teachers from the original seventeen-member seminar, nine responded to the news letters, six with regularity.

For the staff the "news letter experiment" was a valuable one. The eagerness with which it was received and turned into a two-way experience was gratifying. A firsthand account of conditions in teaching as they affected our

graduates was revealing in reflecting needs and strengths of our program. Of the graduates, seven taught kindergarten—three in public schools, three in private schools, one in a settlement house. Six became primary teachers—three each in public and private schools. One we lost track of. In all but two instances progress of varying degrees was reflected in the quality of success in teaching experienced by graduates during their first year on the job.

This experiment in bridging the gap between pre-service and in-service experience has demonstrated that the extension of the guidance program of a teacher-education institution has a legitimate function in the successful orientation of the beginning teacher.

Why In-Service Education?

SCHOOL BOARD OF AUSTIN, TEXAS¹

How do school board members regard local in-service education programs? This article describes the forward-looking practices officially adopted in the Austin, Texas, public schools.

IT IS axiomatic in the professional, business and industrial fields that those persons who are involved continue to study and to grow. The doctor who does not continue to study soon becomes antiquated in his field. The man who was an expert mechanic on the Model T Ford can do little with a modern automobile unless he has con-

tinued to study the new developments. The bankers hold regular courses for in-service education so as to be able to meet the new demands and follow the new laws. Likewise with teachers.

Whether a teacher is new to the school system or is a veteran educator, whether he has no experience or many years' experience, he needs the benefit of an effective in-service program. The school that does not have such a program soon lags behind. A teacher who lacks opportunities for some type of in-

¹This article was prepared by the Board of Education (W. I. Kocurek, president) and the executive staff, Austin Independent School District, Austin, Texas.

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