Teacher Education in a Liberal Arts Setting

FACULTY, DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION, ADELPHI COLLEGE

Through a varied program of firsthand experiences, the faculty of the Department of Education, Adelphi College, Garden City, New York, is attempting to provide a satisfactory balance between the liberal arts and the professional interests of students. Agnes Snyder is chairman of the Department of Education at Adelphi College.

A NEW teacher education program was initiated in the summer of 1950 at Adelphi College, Garden City, New York. While teacher education is not new at Adelphi—the college has always maintained a department of education offering a sequence of courses leading to state certification in secondary education—the present effort is new. A closely knit program covering the entire undergraduate college period and a year of graduate work is now offered to those students who wish to make thorough preparation for teaching as a profession. Built on a common combined general and professional education base, the program is differentiated in the later years to provide specialization for teaching in the nursery school, kindergarten, primary grades, intermediate grades and secondary schools, while preparation for such allied fields as those of the school librarian, school psychologist, school nurse is contemplated.

Those responsible for the program are proceeding on the assumption that, in the broadest sense, teachers can be most effectively educated in a college which is committed, as is Adelphi, to the goal of providing a satisfactory balance between the liberal arts and the professional interests of students. The advantages of such a setting in the education of teachers are regarded as very significant: the services of highly trained specialists in the major fields of knowledge; the use of well-equipped studios, laboratories and clinics; personal contacts with professors and students representing other fields than teaching. These advantages, if capitalized, can be potent factors in raising the standards of the profession. On the one hand, they can serve to lift teaching out of the danger of too narrow professionalization and help give that breadth of interest and knowledge characteristic of a good teacher. On the other hand, they can serve as a selective factor in that young students, not too clear or too sound in their reasons for choosing teaching as their field, may find, in their exposure to varied professional fields, a choice more suited to their abilities and interests.

Of course there are also disadvantages in educating teachers in a college de-
voted to a number of other interests. There is less autonomy than in a college concerned exclusively with the education of teachers. There are certain conformities—schedules, grading systems, attendance regulations, etc.—that seem at times to get in the way of education. There are also more different points of view on the faculty that have to be considered. But none of these difficulties is insurmountable. Through participation of the education faculty in the work of such important committees as those dealing with curriculum, standards, admissions, personnel, there is opportunity through the group process of working toward desirable changes in the all-college program. Indeed, where a department of education operates in a liberal arts setting it is imperative that the education faculty take an active part in all that concerns the over-all development of the college, for the work of any department is inevitably influenced by the total college setting. This has been a fundamental operational principle at Adelphi from the beginning of the program. Not the least of the benefits from the efforts at mutual understanding such activities involve is the demonstration to the students of the challenge and the potency of the group process. Living in an atmosphere where differences are regarded, not as something to be deplored, but rather as something to be welcomed as an aid to sounder procedures, is in itself a highly significant factor in the education of teachers.

A BALANCED PROGRAM IS PROVIDED

While the experiences of the students vary in specifics with their individual needs and interests, all students participate, in one form or another, in the following major features of the program:

- An orientation period of a minimum of six weeks in a rural setting.
- A broad general education foundation in each of the major fields of knowledge: the social sciences, the physical and natural sciences; the arts; philosophy, religion and ethics.
- Coordinating seminars relating the knowledge gained in the above fields to the problems of living.
- A summer in industry or business with a related seminar.
- A summer in community service with a related seminar.
- A period of study and travel in a foreign country.
- Professional education in courses and seminars closely related to informal teaching experiences, individual and group; to classroom student teaching; and to a year of internship.
- Comprehensive examinations at the end of the second year; before the award of the bachelor’s degree, usually at the end of the fourth year; before the award of the master’s degree, usually at the end of the fifth year.

To date, since the program is not yet two years old, only the first four of the above items are in operation. All students have had the rural orientation period, all are carrying the general education program and the coordinating seminars, and the sophomores have had a summer in industry or business. During the coming summer the newly entering group will have its summer orientation period, the present freshman group will have its period in
industry or business and the present sophomore group will work at some form of community service. The sophomores will have their first comprehensive examination at the end of the present academic year and will start their foreign study in the summer of 1953.

Rural Orientation at Springdale

The orientation period has been held during the past two summers at the Springdale Farm, a tract of 1200 acres in the Southern Appalachians in southwestern North Carolina. At Springdale students and faculty work, study, live, and enjoy recreational activities together. These several aspects of life are closely related and are centered on the effort to understand the surrounding culture.

A few simple questions direct the summer’s activities: Where are we? How did this land become as it is? Who are the people who live here, and why are they here? How have they influenced the land, and how has it influenced them? How do they earn a living? What do they do for recreation? What do they value? What of the future of the area?

Study and direct experience with the

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1 Springdale was formerly used by New College, Teachers College, Columbia University. Dr. Thomas Alexander, chairman of New College, purchased the Springdale property when New College closed in 1939. Dr. Alexander is now consultant for the education program at Adelphi and has made Springdale available to the program.

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Adelphi College students cut corn at the silo, Springdale Farm.

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land are combined. Working on the Springdale Farm, often side by side with workers drawn from the community; canning the fruit and vegetables from the farm in company with mountain neighbors at the cooperative cannery at the crossroads; attending services in the community churches; participating in neighborhood square dances, festivals and field days—such experiences go deep and give meaning to the study of the geography, geology, sociology, economics and folklore of the region.

The question is often asked, "Why Springdale?" Answering opportunistically—because it is available. But there is far more than mere opportunism behind its choice. First, because of its sharp contrast to the way of life to which most of the students are accustomed, and because of its comparative simplicity, some of those concepts of human behavior and relationships fundamental in a teacher's education, are readily and realistically grasped. Second, the remoteness of the community facilitates the mutual understanding of students and faculty essential to sound teaching and learning. Third, Springdale is within the area of the Tennessee Valley Authority and through seeing its benefits to the immediate Springdale community and through visiting the TVA headquarters at Knoxville, the dams and the experimental farms, the students have an unsurpassed opportunity to experience what Lilienthal has so aptly expressed as "Democracy on the March." The forward, constructive outlook implied in this great project can mean much to a teacher.
General Education

The students carry, along with other students, regular course work in the other departments of the college. A fortunate factor in the situation is the thorough examination the curriculum of the college is undergoing in the effort to strengthen the general education program. A two-year sequence in science under the title, "Man and His Universe," and a course aiming to acquaint students with the several art media as well as develop insight into modern art are examples of the effort in the direction of giving students a comprehensive outlook on the modern world. All students in the education program carry these two courses. Beside these, during the first two years all students have work in history, economics, sociology, psychology, philosophy, English and a foreign language. The last they are expected to continue until it can be used effectively.

While general education is emphasized during the first two years, it is continued throughout the college period. The movement is from a broad base toward specialization. Every student in the program, regardless of whether he is majoring in secondary or elementary education is expected to develop intensively some field of study.

The Coordinating Seminars

Most of the study during the first two years is carried on under the direction of faculty outside the department of education. The main direct contact the students have as a group with the education faculty is in the coordinating seminars which meet once a week for a two-hour period. Emphasis is placed on relating the courses students are pursuing to the problems of living as they are met in the modern world—maintaining physical and mental health, getting along with each other, utilizing the environment effectively, enjoying leisure, appreciating and creating art and beauty, earning a living, developing values; on the development of scientific attitudes; on the techniques of problem solution; on group processes. Several faculty members participate in each seminar and contribute to it according to their specialized knowledge.

Industrial and Business Experience

The period in industry or business begins with the students' attempts to get jobs. While some help is given, the students are put on their own as much as possible and guided in ways of intelligently seeking work. Then comes the problem of holding a job and doing satisfactory work in it. The students were quite successful in this last summer. All obtained jobs, all held them until the end of the period. They worked in factories, stores, hotels and commercial resorts and earned from $200 to $500 for the summer's work. Seminars were held by the instructor in charge, but because of the geographic scattering of the group not all could attend all of the seminar meetings. There was an inevitable irregularity in this arrangement that was taken care of by a continuance of the seminar meetings during the fall semester. Students kept diaries of their experiences and, through these and the seminars, were helped to interpret the realities they faced in problems of business and industrial ethics, working conditions, relations among employees, unions, la-
bor and management relations, the psychological effects of different kinds of work on the worker.

Period in Community Service

Plans are under way in cooperation with the department of social work at the college for the launching, during the coming summer, of the period in community service. It is expected that students will work in hospitals, health centers, social agencies, day camps, community centers. In the related seminar emphasis will be placed on the development of insights needed by a teacher in cooperating with social agencies.

Foreign Study and Travel

Before going to a foreign country the student will have developed a detailed plan for his study and other activities. In addition, he will be required to have a working competence in the language of the country to be visited. As a rule the student will spend the summer following his third year and the first semester of his fourth year in foreign study. He will settle in one place, attend a university or other institution of higher learning, pursue the problem on which he has planned to work, and do some travel.

Professional Education

The entire program is professionally oriented. It is so planned that from the very beginning students find themselves having educational experiences illustrative of the principles it is hoped they will apply in their own teaching. From the beginning, too, students are encouraged to participate in activities with children and youth. Even in the first summer at Springdale they work side by side with children and participate in their recreational activities. In the first two years—some sooner and some later than others—they do babysitting, teach Sunday School, work with groups in community centers, etc.

Formal classroom student teaching will become, for most students, a major activity during the third year and will be picked up again during the second semester of the fourth year after they return from foreign study. The coordinating seminar of the earlier years will become the education seminar, and to it the students will bring the problems they encounter in their student teaching. Plans for the study of these problems will be made and the competencies to be gained will be listed as a guide for study. Students may attend some of the existing courses in education either in whole or in part but, in the main, professional study will be carried on through close coordination of the seminar with student teaching and through self-directed study.

The culmination of professional preparation will be the internship in the fifth year. Here the student will be in full charge of the classroom but will be supervised jointly by the school and the college. The internship will represent both the consolidation of all the student’s previous experiences and the final test of his teaching competence.

Comprehensive Examinations

Students and faculty are working cooperatively in the development of standards toward the achievement of which the student’s efforts are directed and against which systematic evaluation of his progress is checked. At the time of the comprehensive examinations the

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cumulative records of the students will be examined in the appraisal of his accomplishments. This perusal of the records will be followed by a written examination testing the student's ability to attack a problem. The third part of the examination will be oral and will terminate in cooperative evaluation of the student's progress and plans for his further work.

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There has been little need to use the customary measures for the selection of students. The program, itself, is the best possible selective instrument. For it attracts only students who possess the potentialities for developing the qualities most needed in the teaching profession—courage, eagerness for knowledge and understanding, a scientific attitude toward life's problems, faith in the ability of man to shape a better future, desire to help make that future. It is believed that the little group of students now in the education program possess such potentialities.

Exposed as are all young people to pressures from within and without, this little group is working courageously side by side with the faculty. They have formed their own education club and through it select representatives to the department of education weekly meetings and to faculty-student committees. They participate in all matters of importance to the program—curriculum development, selection of students. They are learning that any sound educational program is the outgrowth of the sharing of responsibility by all concerned—students and faculty.

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