

"Teachers for Today's Schools" . . .

A SYMPOSIUM

What is effective pre-service preparation for teachers today? Published by ASCD in 1951, *Teachers for Today's Schools*, by Laura Zirbes, has attracted wide interest among those concerned with improving pre-service education of teachers. This symposium article presents two thoughtful reactions to the booklet.

. . . Gain Professional Competence

TREVOR K. SERVISS

THE VIEW of Mark Hopkins on one end of a log and the student on the other may be picturesque, but it neglects the aspect of preparation for teaching. For most of us this preparation lies in an exacting training which interprets experiences of master teachers in terms of modern philosophy and practice. In *Teachers for Today's Schools*¹ Dr. Zirbes presents the problem of gaining professional competence in the light of the challenge which arises from past and present research and philosophical thought.

The role of the teacher has changed, she says, through participation in cooperative professional enterprises and she looks for a sound philosophy to be developed through consideration of a new approach to learning. Dr. Zirbes does not presume to strike a new key to professional growth. She does offer a recapitulation of the constructive efforts which have been made to provide competent teacher training and of the evidences of resistance to new edu-

cational ideas. She also presents an evaluation of the bases for growth.

A teacher may not be conscious of having a guiding philosophy or capable of defining the basic principles which support it, but his program of action, even in its most specific aspects, rests primarily upon his attitude of mind, his articles of faith. To paraphrase an oft-quoted remark of Chesterton, the most practical and important thing about a teacher is his view of his professional universe; a view which is, perhaps, what James refers to as "our more or less dumb sense of what life honestly and deeply means." For the teacher, this view, says Dr. Zirbes, is largely acquired during his pre-service education, and while it may be deepened or modified or strengthened in teaching, it will revert at times to the view acquired during his early professional development. If this be true, it follows that the education of today's teacher is good only if it is anchored to a sound philosophical and practical foundation.

The reorientation of teacher education and the reconstruction of the program for which Dr. Zirbes makes a vigorous plea are basic, she says, to a

¹ The ASCD booklet, *Teachers for Today's Schools*, by Laura Zirbes, may be ordered from the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, NEA, 1201 16th Street N.W., Washington 6, D. C. (Price: \$1.25 per copy.)

modern concept of the role of education in social growth and to the contribution which the teacher can make. This concept calls sharply to our attention the fact that an educational program good in one age is not always adequate as a blueprint for education in a later day. The problems of education are peculiar to the age in which they develop not only because of the immediate practical needs which arise, but because of the conditions which at the time stimulate (or deter) intellectual growth. One is aware of the new life under the old decay only when the rubbish is cleared away to reveal the budding sprout. Susanne Langer in her stimulating *Philosophy in a New Key* says, "Most new discoveries are suddenly-seen things that were always there. A new idea is a light that illumines presences which simply had no form for us before the light fell on them."

"Suddenly-seen things" form the basis of the evaluative approach to teacher education which is the core of Dr. Zirbes' statement. Upon examination it seems axiomatic that pre-service teacher education must be concerned with such things as "Need for Basic Learnings," "Need for Cultural Orientation," or "Need for Concern with Values." It seems only reasonable for those who are responsible for programs in teacher education to evaluate their courses in terms of the needs to which attention is called.

Much of the public's criticism of education stems from a supposed lack in teachers of an adequate understanding of basic learnings. In support of this criticism, documentation is often

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made from college catalogs in which methods courses appear to predominate and in which the so-called liberal arts aspect of learning seems to be under-emphasized. Even though this predominance may be illusory rather than real, there is little doubt that some teachers are ill-prepared in the subject matter which they will be called upon to teach. But an obvious danger lies in a recent proposal to abandon professional courses in favor of subject matter training only, for such a proposal presumes that competence in subject matter inherently gives competence in helping children to direct their experiences toward psychologically sound growth. Revamping the over-all teacher education program in terms of modern needs will help overcome many of the difficulties which have arisen from the "dichotomy between the liberal and professional components of the prospective teachers' curriculum." This hopeful possibility, as Dr. Zirbes sets forth, rests upon true integration of all aspects of general education for teachers.

Proper Use of Experience

The soundness of approach in this pamphlet is further exemplified in the discussion of the need for new emphasis on the role of experience. No student of modern education can fail to have had called to his attention the experimental nature of learning, but few, perhaps, really sense its many ramifications and its relation to specific fields of learning.

The author calls attention to the relationship between all fields of learning and life, and to the way in which experiences may vitalize learning. It is apparent that in a very real sense understanding of experience and of its function in learning will come from what Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., calls "the quiet immersion in the flood of experience." To call for a rejection of stereotyped devices, such as drill without meaning, is not to call for abandonment of subject matter, as some have presumed. It is simply to strengthen the demand for proper use of experience, which involves both subject matter and means of learning. Through experience we strengthen rather than abandon the word.

Dr. Zirbes presents a hopeful picture of the possibilities of improvement in professional pre-service education. Re-examination of prevalent programs and practice is badly needed if we are to prepare prospective teachers for the dynamic roles they must perform in today's schools.

"Teacher education," says the author, "is stirring. Some catalytic influence may be needed to rouse it to fuller recognition of the urgent need for its own reorientation in the light of the changing conception of the role of the teacher in today's schools." It seems quite likely that Dr. Zirbes' provocative statement, *Teachers for Today's Schools*, may be in itself such a catalytic influence.

... Understand and Apply the Values Approach

**PAULINE HILLIARD
and JANET M. McCracken**

EVERY human being must respond to a new factor or force in his living situation in terms of his own orientation to life. Thus our response to the ideas presented by Dr. Zirbes in *Teachers for Today's Schools* is out of our past experiences and present teaching situation. The first reading of this compact package of powerful and exciting ideas resulted in two copies of the pamphlet marked with such marginal notes as: "We are trying this!" "A help for this or that course." "A good idea to try!" "We are weak in this area!" and other comments relating to our own needs. Then we began to ask ourselves what focus our response might take that would communicate to others our in-

terpretation of the challenge presented.

The heart of the message presented is the values approach to solving the problems of education and living. Each individual develops a value frame of reference of his own out of which he seeks and interprets experiences, makes decisions, passes judgments, solves his problems and relates to other individuals. An individual's value frame of reference may or may not be consciously recognized by him. It evolves from his experiences and their resultant satisfactions, dissatisfactions and frustrations, and it may be limited by narrowness of experience, miseducation, prejudice and the conflicting problems of our culture and society. One's value

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