

# *Frontiers in Teacher Education*

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This article depicts frontiers in the education of teachers for today's programs of general education in elementary and secondary schools. It stresses the importance of persistent effort and the use of intelligence and research in the adequate preparation of teachers.

**A** PROFESSION has no more important task than the preparation of its members. Their values, insights and skills determine the profession's effectiveness. As teachers, seeking to improve our competencies and therefore our social contribution, we can well be alert to the frontiers in teacher education. These are the points at which growth and progress are most likely.

In this statement the concern is with frontiers in the education of teachers for programs of general education in elementary and secondary schools. Pre-service and in-service education are viewed as having a common basic purpose in the preparation of competent, effective workers.

## **How Determine Frontiers?**

Frontiers can be discovered in many ways such as (1) examining shortages in our general education programs and ascertaining how teacher education might contribute to their amelioration, (2) assessing the valid demands made upon the school and determining how teacher education can help to meet them, and (3) conducting analyses and

research which are directed toward discovering better ways of performing the tasks which we set for ourselves as teachers. On the basis of considerations such as these, three questions are asked which suggest frontiers.

## **Do We Understand Learners?**

A study of the psychology of education has had such a long and honored place in programs of pre-service and in-service teacher education that the need for understanding learners may not appear to be a frontier. The psychology of a quarter century ago, based largely on laboratory studies of individuals, has been broadened enormously to include group influences on the individual's learning. Important studies in the sociology of childhood have added other significant insights for teachers. Investigations in human growth and development have resulted in new concepts such as those of readiness and developmental tasks. Thus, new emphases in psychology have broadened remarkably the understanding of learning. The field of psychology which once was presented as but a fragmentary account of human behavior has not only ramified and grown but has increased in its impact on teaching methods.

The translation of the full implications of recent discoveries in learning,

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in human growth and development, in the sociology of childhood and in group dynamics for methods of teaching represents a most significant frontier. For too long, we as teachers have taken courses and read books in these areas without actually coming to know and understand learners, without developing a genuine liking for or kinship with learners, without discovering how we can use the knowledge we have acquired about learners as we work with specific boys and girls in our own classrooms. May it be that we need increased opportunities in teacher education programs for work with boys and girls, in a variety of free situations, under the guidance of experts in learning, in growth and development, in group dynamics and in the sociology of childhood? Is it possible that we need experience under expert guidance both in studying specific learners and in using what we can discover about them, for aiding their future learning and development? Would not our effectiveness be increased if we had a more widespread respect for boys and girls and greater skill in studying their learning problems?

### **Can We Relate Our Knowledge to Learner's Concerns?**

The subject matter preparation of teachers has long been a major focus in pre-service and in-service teacher education. Often the concern has been with the quality, the amount or the breadth of the study of one or more disciplines. From time to time, attention has been given to the possibility of professionalizing subject matter or of helping prospective teachers to see how they would handle specific subject mat-

ter in work with a designated age group. Thus, science for elementary school teachers might vary from science for secondary school teachers.

Subject matter to be used in programs of general education has been evaluated increasingly on the bases of (1) its potential contribution to an improvement of the quality of living and (2) its potential meaningfulness and significance to individual learners. The first of these bases of evaluation reflects an increasing recognition of the social goals of education. The second reflects an improved understanding of the conditions basic to sound and efficient learning. An application of both of these bases of evaluation has resulted in much subject matter in a variety of fields such as English, mathematics, social studies and science being dropped from the curriculum planned for general education. This, however, is only a mechanical approach to the problem.

Some attempts have been made to help us as teachers relate our knowledge of a subject field to the concerns of learners at varying stages in their development. However, is this not as yet a largely unexplored frontier? Are we helped sufficiently, under expert guidance, through our programs of pre-service and in-service education to relate our knowledge to either the problems of living or the state of readiness of the learners we meet in our classrooms?

Our subject matter preparation appears to focus very largely on gaining command of an organized discipline or of the accumulated cultural experience in a specific subject area. Much of what we learn is neither relevant to the problems of living of boys and girls at either the elementary or secondary

school level, nor is it geared to their level of maturity or readiness. Yet, unless we as teachers are successful in relating our knowledge to the social purposes of general education and to the readiness of learners, it becomes non-functional and relatively meaningless.

The use of our subject matter preparation in teaching for general education goals either at the elementary or secondary school levels, through special subject courses or through unified or core courses, is a professional task with which our teacher education programs have not adequately assisted. Further experimentation is required to discover how this challenge can be met. Possibly some aspects of the subject matter preparation of teachers should be on a problem basis. Possibly abundant practice under expert guidance would help us as teachers to relate our subject matter learnings to the interests and concerns of the specific boys and girls in our classes. Admittedly, the problem of being increasingly able to reorganize our knowledge to meet the demands of learning situations in elementary and secondary schools is a difficult one. Yet, our failures in this regard are probably a major cause of waste and inefficiency—a cause of pupil failure and of ultimate early school leaving.

### **Do We Understand Ourselves?**

School programs are increasingly devoted to the personality development of learners. As teachers we are concerned with the kind of person we are helping to develop. Mental hygiene emphases in the school program are seen as necessary in a society where the tensions and pressures on many individuals are often severe. The high inci-

dence of emotional disturbances of one kind or another among children, youth and adults suggests that school programs might well be analyzed for possible suggestions for ameliorating this condition. Mental health seems to necessitate among other things an ability to accept one's limitations and to be content to do his best with the resources he has. Can the school aid in this regard?

Evidence has been accumulating to support the belief that many problems in school learning are emotional problems. Children's failures are often due to the feelings which they have toward themselves and others. Many learners who leave school early are those who are unable to adjust emotionally to the demands of the school situation.

Those of us who are most sensitive to learners often are aware of the large number who have problems and difficulties. Some are actually suffering because of their inability to cope satisfactorily with their school environment. Others, although not suffering, are greatly limited in their possibilities for enjoying life. Often these are the boys and girls who have been neglected or misunderstood at home or at school. As a result they do not accept themselves and are often unhappy in their association with others.

The school program and teachers' demands can well be viewed as causal factors in the difficulties of numerous children. Children's learning problems often occur in situations where we as teachers do not provide sufficient support and affection. We often diagnose children's difficulties as requiring remedial teaching when possibly they re-

quire only understanding and positive, supporting help.

Many of us as teachers have long recognized that we differ in our ability to work effectively with various learners and in our success in ministering to their varying needs. Some of us are more aware than others of the psychological influence we have on many who meet us in the classroom. Some of us have been slow to recognize that we probably create the behavior problems which certain youngsters present. We know, from research at least, even though we do not internalize it personally, that as teachers we are the cause of many difficulties in learning. Evidence is accumulating which suggests that we are one of the principal causes as to why children drop out of our secondary schools. We cannot avoid the fact that we profoundly affect the way in which many learners value themselves.

The key to this whole problem seems to focus in how we as teachers understand ourselves. What are our ideas and values? How do we view ourselves? The significant factor for us as teachers is the apparently close relation between our attitude toward ourselves and our attitude toward the learners in our classes. If we would help others with problems of mental hygiene and per-

sonal adjustment—if we would help learners to understand themselves, it becomes necessary that we understand ourselves.

The full implications for teacher education are not as yet clear. But teacher education programs need to be focussed on the problems of selecting and developing teachers who are able to discover the perceptions of learners and who can understand these perceptions or views. In-service education could well give much attention to exploring the implications of what we as teachers do. By studiously seeking to find out how we can be of help to learners, we can learn much about ourselves.

### **How Can We Conquer the Frontiers?**

Pushing back or conquering the frontiers is always a difficult task. Persistent effort and the use of intelligence and research are called for. Undoubtedly, much can be achieved if staff members in teacher education institutions work with staff members in elementary and secondary schools in a joint attack on these problems. Much can be accomplished if as individual teachers we seek to train ourselves through personal efforts to study our own activities and to gather evidence as to which of these efforts results in the greatest success.



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