

Bridging the Gap

What is being done to bridge the gap between the liberal arts college and the teachers college? Progress toward this goal is indicated in several current programs.

THE IMMEDIATE reaction of a colleague at summer school to the subject of this article was, "Mister, that's no gap—that's a gulf."

This, unfortunately, is too often a true picture of the relationship between the liberal arts and teachers colleges. Rugg decried the situation when he emphasized the wide gap between the two groups.¹ John Whitelaw has been prompted to say that "In the field of teacher education the conflict between the liberal arts camp, on the one hand, and the practical school administrators, on the other, has reached the state of boredom where further discussion can only be guaranteed by the most outrageous statements from either side."² However, in spite of this pessimism, and the oftentimes seemingly hopeless situation, progress is being made in overcoming this obstacle which has been termed "the most vital problem in teacher education of this mid-twentieth century."

First of all, on the action level, we do find teacher and liberal arts groups who are willing to face this problem together. At Carleton College, under the direction

of a visiting consultant, Dr. Woodring, the liberal arts and teachers college faculties worked together for an extended period of time to develop a program relating the two points of view more closely than had been done before. At Harvard, it is stated that the Master's Degree Program in education is "jointly sponsored by the faculty of arts and science and the faculty of education."³

A program which has been in operation since the 1930's is the All-University Plan at Syracuse University begun under the direction of the Dean of the School of Education, Harry S. Ganders. Here the School of Education is thought of as a part of all of the other colleges on the campus, yet retains its identity in certain professional, technical areas. Under this plan, professors from the liberal arts college assume the responsibility for prospective teachers in their areas for their knowledge of the subject matter content, and the methodology; and they are the ones who supervise the student teaching. They attend meetings with the faculty of the School of Education. The School of Education retains control over all admission requirements.⁴

¹ Harold O. Rugg. *The Teacher of Teachers*. New York: Harper and Brothers, 1952. Ch. VII.

² John Whitelaw. "Carleton College Shows the Way." *Higher Education*. Washington, D. C.: Office of Education.

³ Robert J. Schaefer. "Three Teacher Education Programs at Harvard." *Harvard Educational Review* 23:60-4, 1953.

⁴ In conference with Harry S. Ganders, August 1956.

We also note a program such as that at Adelphi College, under the direction of Agnes Snyder, where the liberal arts and education faculties work on "a common combined general and professional education basis." There are, of course, other places that could be pointed out where attempts are being made by the two groups to bridge the gap between the liberal arts and teacher education, but space does not permit mentioning them all.

A Liberal-Professional Education

Other than this willingness to discuss the total program of teacher education by the liberal arts and teacher education groups, we find frequent concern about the meaning of liberal education for the student of today. There appears to be a tendency to move from the position that the liberal arts are exclusively concerned with the seven classic arts to the position that liberal and general education are one. "The terms . . . have lost precise meaning," says Dean Keppel in his 1954-55 *Report* to the President of Harvard University, so he uses them interchangeably.

Theodore Greene, in his *Liberal Education Reconsidered*, takes a broader point of view than has been held previously by many of the more conservative group. In this expanded definition of the meaning of the liberal arts there seems to be an inclination to consider liberal or general education from a holistic point of view. Apparently there is a growing interest in considering the whole individual in his liberal education, an interest in providing in

the liberal education a study at first-hand, as well as verbally, of the local and world community and a desire to bring about a deep and broad understanding of life as a whole, together with the relationship of one's work to this life. It is not improbable that out of such a search for an adequate liberal education the relationship of liberal and professional education will be seen as two parts of one total situation.

If this trend should continue we may begin to think more of a liberal-professional education as one education rather than liberal versus professional education as two entities.

This point of view was found reflected to a large degree in the New College Experiment conducted at Teachers College, Columbia University, and more recently continued with some modification at Adelphi College under the aegis of Agnes Snyder and Thomas Alexander. The program is carried out with concern for the individual as a controlling factor. It is "based on a series of experiences designed to develop the individual potentialities of each student as a person . . . a series of experiences forms the framework of the curriculum: pre-freshman orientation, work in industry, participation in community service, foreign study, wide acquaintance with schools and other educational institutions at home and abroad, participation in out-of-school activities with children and adults, student teaching and internship . . . the richness of the liberal arts education which the students are pursuing is coordinated with the more strictly professional aspects of the program . . . the program is developmental . . . how the program is affecting the individual is the major concern . . . the problem at all times is to find those experiences which will

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best develop the inherent potentialities of the individual."⁵

Somewhat similar in its outlook is the bio-psychological approach at Troy, Alabama, where general education is unified in its purpose and planning. The freshman year emphasizes personal guidance. Forty-eight quarter hours of education and psychology are required of all education students. Secondary education majors acquire credit in a number of contributing courses. Both groups take three psychological and three foundations courses in education.

Even in those situations where there is little or no contact between the liberal arts and the professional education groups some outstanding efforts to bring closer relationship between the liberal arts and teacher education are meeting with success. The state teachers colleges are notable for their efforts in this direction. Dean Keppel observed this when in his 1954-55 *Report* he noted that "Some of our strongest graduates have been trained in teachers colleges which have devised programs of general education which, in my judgment, are distinctly stronger than those that may be found in colleges which claim the name of liberal arts. The strengthening of the curriculum in the arts, social sciences, and sciences in many teachers colleges is a development which has been inadequately understood in recent years in the academic world. There is a far greater agreement between the aims of these institutions and the stronger liberal arts colleges than appears on the surface." Rugg has stated that "the most important cooperative rethinking and reconstruction of teacher education in the United States is being

⁵ Department of Education, Adelphi College. *Student Teaching: An Experience Contributing to Personal Development*. Garden City, New York: the Department, June 1955.

done in the State Teachers Colleges (irrespective of name) or in private colleges in which the facilities for the education of teachers are closely integrated."⁶

The State Teachers College at Troy, Alabama may be cited as an example of work in this direction. The faculty has devised a total four year program, taking in the entire education of the teacher from the freshman to the senior year. The content of the academic curriculum was changed in many respects, the teaching of history was revised, and there has been wise use of the Great Books. Freedom is felt in crossing academic lines.

There are, finally, those college faculties which have attempted to meet a broadened concept of liberal and teacher education by making it possible for their students to have firsthand contact with the local and world communities. Among these are Tallahassee, Florida, and Gainesville, Florida, and Queens College of New York City which take their students on extended bus trips to other parts of the country than the one they already know. Some, like Adelphi College, have their students spend several months in Europe, living with a family there, studying the culture and education of that country. Others, like the University of Illinois, and Teachers College, Columbia University, have a broad basis of sociological foundations for prospective teachers.

Direct reference to those college programs which emphasize a preliminary liberal arts education as a foundation for a teacher education program has not been stressed in this discussion since there is too often too little reference of one part of the program to the other. Most promise seems to be offered by

⁶ Harold O. Rugg. *Op. cit.*, p. 231-32.

those colleges which require "readiness" for professional training and yet determine that once this readiness has been reached, liberal arts and teacher education programs should be closely inter-related.

In summary, it may be said that in those colleges where a rigid definition of the liberal arts is held, little is being done to bridge the gap between the liberal arts colleges and the teachers colleges. In those institutions the professors of liberal arts look upon their colleagues in the teacher education divisions as too practical, too concerned with methodology, too superficial. The educators, in turn, look to the professors of the liberal arts as too theoretical, too stuffy, and too much out of tune with life.

However, where the attempts have been made by the two groups to get together to solve a common problem—the best education of teachers—the following things appear to have happened:

1. The definitions of liberal arts and general education have come to have much in common.

2. The liberal arts and teacher education have assumed an approach of concern with the development of the total individual.

3. Both groups have shown a deep interest in a more realistic education for teachers that concerns actual community experience.

4. The foundations of the teacher education program have broadened to include the esthetic, sociological, psychological, and biological, rather than the merely intellectual.

5. There has been concern with the development of an adequate social philosophy.

6. Teacher education has been recognized as a distinctive discipline.

The extent to which inter-relationship has been achieved between liberal arts education and teacher education is on the whole very slight. Here and there one recognizes approaches of considerable promise. It may be that a synthesis of these various approaches will prove to be the foundation on which an adequate bridge between liberal arts and teacher education is achieved.

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