

Preparing Teachers for Tomorrow's School

What qualities and preparation are needed?

IT IS September 1985. In the Curriculum Laboratory of Thomas Elementary School, the professional staffs of the town's two elementary schools are meeting. Among the 56 people present, there are ten beginning teachers. While what is going on is important, there isn't time to stop and listen because we are interested in exploring what the new teachers are equipped to do and how they were prepared. In passing, however, it might be observed that the focus of this meeting is discussion of the beginning teachers' individual plans for continued development on the job.

These plans are the result of counseling with college advisors and those who guided their internships last year. They include analysis of the qualifying examination that was administered by the college. Taken by all teacher education

students as they complete their first four years of preparation, these comprehensive examinations are designed to test background information in general education, the field of specialization, and professional education. All institutions preparing teachers are required by accreditation standards to administer such examinations, and minimum scores must be achieved before the institution recommends a candidate for the internship experience during the fifth year.

While differences among the new teachers in these staffs are wide and significant, they have a great deal in common. Without exception, they are qualified to begin to teach, for each has just completed a skillfully guided internship. If an individual had not proved himself during that period, he would now be engaged in extending his pre-service preparation rather than beginning to teach. In common, the beginners have a level of mental health and emotional stability above that of the general population, for a specifically planned part of their preparation has been designed to develop understanding and acceptance of themselves and others.

Although their areas of special competence vary, each is already started on a path of true scholarship as a teacher. This may be stated with certainty be-

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cause their college programs made rigorous demands upon them as prospective teachers. There is a flame of productive imagination in every one of them, sparked by their deep conviction that they still have much to learn. Each is acutely aware that much of his time as a teacher will be devoted to exploring and discovering not only on his own, but with others, especially pupils. As a group, they possess in common that precious combination of security in knowing and the excitement and challenge of the unknown.

One cannot talk to these new teachers long without observing another characteristic they have in common—a strong sense of professionalism. In fully assuming responsibility for providing high quality education, the teaching profession in this year of 1985 makes demands on all its members. Through its carefully and cooperatively built machinery, the profession sets standards for continuous selection and retention of students preparing to teach, for teacher education programs, for licensure, and for retention of the license. The public has developed a high degree of confidence in the teaching profession and has shown a desire to have it assume more and more responsibility for protecting the public's right to good education. To be prepared to assume this responsibility these new teachers had, as part of their preservice education, planned opportunities to develop the attitudes, skills, and knowledge essential to proper functioning as worthy members of the teaching profession.

Accreditation

Differences among these new teachers are as telling as the qualities they have in common. Twenty-five years ago most of them would have been in an age

range of 20 to 23. Not so today, for the youngest of these beginners is 22 and the oldest is 43. Conditions causing this age range are interesting. For one thing, secondary and higher education are now pursued by many over a longer period of time because it has become common for individuals to combine work with education, selecting amounts of each in terms of individual need and readiness. Also, some women postpone special preparation for teaching until their own children are in school and, as mature people, they are free to prepare for and engage in a career. In such cases, postponing preparation does not lessen the amount or lower the standards; rather programs are individually planned to take advantage of experience and are modified in terms of particular needs. Factors such as these create a situation in which students enter and leave teacher education programs at varying ages.

Every one of these teachers is a graduate of a teacher education program that has met standards for professional accreditation. Truth is, no other programs are available to those who want to become teachers. As indicated earlier, standards for accreditation are set up and enforced cooperatively by all segments of the profession of education. These standards require minimum uniformity and maximum individuality in college programs of teacher education. Consequently, while all these teachers have had some similar experiences, each has had a unique program carefully planned with him. Even the three beginning teachers in this group who are graduates of the same institution have had quite different patterns of preparation.

For example, because Robert Nagle was quite gifted academically, he "tested out" of five courses through equiva-

lency examinations and proceeded into more advanced seminars. On the other hand, Truman Stevens very early demonstrated outstanding insights into how young children learn and unusual ability to guide them in their learning. Thus, while some of his classmates were spending more time in schools, Truman was devoting maximum time and energy to filling gaps in his knowledge as these were revealed in diagnostic tests. For some time it seemed as though Mary Pierce was not going to respond to the special psychological counseling she was having, so her admission to the teacher education program was delayed until her advisors were certain that she had overcome what was diagnosed as hostility toward members of her own sex.

Specialization

Back in 1960 laymen and educators alike were strongly advocating more intensive subject matter specialization than was true in most programs at that time. In retrospect, it is clear that criticisms of inadequate preparation in teaching fields and various proposals for increasing subject matter demands on teachers made during the 1950's and 1960's had a generally positive effect upon teacher education programs. Direct results of persistent pleas for better subject matter preparation are illustrated in the backgrounds of the beginning teachers joining the staffs of these two elementary schools.

First of all, each of them has a field of specialization to which he devoted a large portion of time in his preparatory program. For example, one of them concentrated in the physical sciences, building his own knowledge background in this area and giving special attention to

the role of physical sciences in the education of the young. Another specialized by extending his course work and related experiences in the major areas of general education. A third one of these beginning teachers comes to the job with specialized background in psychology and educational psychology. Every beginning teacher now has a subject matter specialization, for this is one of the requirements set up by the profession and enforced through the accreditation process.

Other effects of the emphasis on subject matter preparation so characteristic of 20 years ago are, from present perspectives, perhaps more important than program revisions requiring content specialization for all teachers. Significant modifications in concepts of the kind of subject matter specialization best suited to teachers have resulted. For example, intensive acquisition of knowledge in a narrow subject is no longer considered adequate preparation in a teaching field. Emphasis is now placed on selecting carefully from the mass of accumulated knowledge in a field those things that should be learned and on becoming reasonably well acquainted with related bodies of knowledge.

The most fundamental shift in study of subject matter, however, is away from the single purpose of acquiring the information already organized by scholars in a given field to primary concern with understanding and acquiring skill in using methods of inquiry unique to a field. Modifications such as these result in classroom teachers today who not only know the content of their teaching fields but also are eager to continue to learn and have increasing control over methods of acquiring and organizing new knowledge.

That these modifications have oc-

curred is due to the willingness on the part of scholars in subject matter to give direct attention to the needs of prospective teachers and to alter their views of their responsibilities in the total education of teachers. Because members of learned societies joined forces with professional educators and because faculty members in liberal arts joined with those in professional education on college campuses to work cooperatively, programs of teacher education have been greatly improved.

It has taken the beginning teachers attending this staff meeting today five years of systematic study to complete their preparation. This, too, is partially attributable to the same emphasis on subject matter, although other factors have also prompted the now minimum requirement of five years for preservice preparation. Sound general education for all teachers was for a time threatened by the strong insistence on subject matter specialization. But the crucial import of broad liberalizing education was recognized and it soon became apparent that minimum preparation for teaching could not be done in the traditional four years.

In-Service Education

At the same time that increasing demands were being made on subject matter specialization of classroom teachers, new proposals regarding the professional education component of the program were getting much attention. What had been a growing restlessness about the quality of courses in education had, by 1960, crystallized into severe and specific criticism. Literature of the fifties is replete with propositions calling for the elimination of preservice study of theory and practice in education with the claim that these could best be ac-

quired on the job. Whether such proposals precipitated the barrage of criticism, or vice versa, is difficult to assess. Serious students of teacher education, along with other educators and some thoughtful laymen, attacked what was described as unnecessary duplication, the "tricks of the trade" approach, and abstractness in professional courses.

The combination of criticism and proposals resulted in tremendous upgrading of professional education at both the preservice and in-service levels. Vigorous examination of professional education courses and an unprecedented amount of experimentation with new patterns in the preparation of teachers were well under way by 1965. The high scholarship level of education courses, the diversity in arrangements for and sequence of experiences in professional education, and the rigorous research and evaluation characteristic of the present are in no small degree the result of earlier criticisms of this component of teacher education programs.

Despite strong urging by influential persons in the fifties and sixties, the proposal that systematic study of theory and practice be removed from the preservice program and placed in in-service teacher education was never fully accepted or implemented. Several circumstances account for this. First, the science of teaching was growing rapidly and it was recognized by many that the quality of teaching could be enhanced through careful and specific preservice preparation in this science. Second, while study and experimentation demonstrated that a few highly selected persons could actually teach effectively without professional preparation, it was clear that the demand for teachers was far beyond what could be supplied through employment of these selected, gifted individuals

only. Most teachers, it was agreed, would profit greatly from specific professional experiences prior to their assuming responsibility in the classrooms of the nation. Third, the organized teaching profession was moving in bold leaps toward disciplining its members, and part of this movement was insistence that the total professional competency of its new members be demonstrated before they were permitted to impose their skill, or lack of it, on children and youth.

New Aids to Teaching

Furthermore, in 1960 educators could have had only a faint foreshadowing of the role that was to be played by technological invention in education. Although educational television, mechanically controlled laboratories for independent learning by students, and an array of teaching machines were available for observation and study, very little real experimentation and research on the implications of such technological instruments for teaching and learning had been conducted. As results accumulated from studies of utilization of mechanical aids in teaching, exaggerated claims of their potential diminished. Thoughtful, forward looking educators began a creative search for ways in which such innovations might best contribute to organized education programs. This search continues today.

It is now generally agreed, however, that to make wise decisions on the use of available mechanical aids in teaching calls for deep understanding of learners and learning, skill in preparing and utilizing aids of all kinds as appropriate for individual pupils, and sound theoretical bases for determining purposes and making choices as to how purposes may best be accomplished. Today's teachers

are equipped through their preservice programs to make wise choices in helping individual children profit most in a rich learning environment. Too, they are ready to assume a range of different roles in teaching, sometimes working as team members with their colleagues, at other times skillfully tutoring individuals, and much of the time guiding the work of small groups.

Increase in number and kind of mechanical aids available and the variety of new roles teachers are called upon to assume are not the only factors requiring more intensive professional preparation. Teachers must have a high level of preparation when pupils have unprecedented opportunities to learn in home and community settings. Never before was it more important for teachers to understand each pupil and to be grounded in learning theory, especially that which deals with motivation for learning.

The know-how to help pupils with the systematizing of information is especially important. Furthermore, teachers must be unusually knowledgeable in a society where the general public is well educated.

While it is true that great diversity in patterns of preservice teacher education programs is characteristic today, still preparation of the new teachers beginning their work in this staff meeting is representative of common practice in 1985. They have already devoted the equivalent of five years to their preparation. Like all new teachers, each of them must demonstrate his proficiency by a year of success as a responsible teacher and be recommended by the local association's Professional Competency Board before the basic license to teach can be obtained.

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soned approach to the problem. All the media would form a symphony of tools wherein each can make an unlimited contribution to learning, rather than being forced into a prescribed predetermined "plate lunch" pattern of use.

Television, itself, will I hope, be used with more flexibility so that the medium can become more than a talking textbook and instead serve a variety of roles, such as stimulator of learning, opener of

doors, arouser of curiosity, promoter of critical thinking, and creator of wonderment and excitement in what is to be learned. This is a virgin territory for program development which needs serious attention as we become more and more mature in our uses of the television medium.

Who knows *for sure* that any of these things will come to pass, but it's interesting to dream!

Preparing Teachers

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Among the outstanding features of the five-year integrated programs from which these teachers have graduated are these:

. . . individual planning with each prospective teacher, beginning with careful selection at the point of admission to the teacher education program, including cooperative analyses all along the way, and the development of an individual plan for continued professional and personal growth as each student leaves the college and undertakes a teaching assignment in the field

. . . rigorous demands on scholarship in all phases of the program

. . . opportunity for equivalency examinations so that students may use their time wisely in advancing from where they are rather than unnecessarily duplicating earlier experiences

. . . group and/or individual therapy as needed to ensure mental and emotional health

. . . cultivation of open-mindedness, curiosity, imagination, and habits of inquiry, coupled with development of skills and in-

formational background that enhance productive thinking through inquiry.

. . . specialization for every teacher, with variety in kind based upon student need, special interests, and professional goal

. . . special preparation in the meaning and responsibilities of membership in the teaching profession

. . . intensive work in educational theory, accompanied by clinical experience from beginning to end, including an internship, skillfully guided by cooperative efforts of school and college personnel

. . . qualifying examinations to assure students' background information in general education, subject matter specialization, and educational theory

. . . qualifying proficiency demonstration through the internship and the first year of responsible teaching

. . . college teaching in every area of the program that is exemplary and carried on by specifically prepared teachers, each of whom recognizes the contribution of his work with students to the total preparation of teachers

. . . constant planning and evaluation of the total program by all-college faculty-student teams, by groups with representation from all segments of the profession, and by special consultants at the request of the college or of the profession.

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