

The Importance of People

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Leaven Within the Loaf

TEACHING is a seriously fragmented profession. The chemistry professor feels little kinship for the primary teacher—or for the high school chemistry teacher either, for that matter. Within the public schools, we find ourselves separated by school level, credential authorization, and district regulations. Nowhere is this professional dichotomy more apparent or more disturbing than between our public schools and our colleges of education. Despite the common experience of preservice training, and in many instances repeated reconciliations affectionately known as summer sessions, these two natural partners seem well on their way to prolonged legal separation, if not outright divorce. Education professors bemoan the professional lethargy they supposedly see in too many of their erstwhile students. Teachers in turn complain about the unrelated theorizing endured throughout their college education courses.

Whatever the reasons, this uncongeniality is distressing. One corrective step might well be taken through some united effort on common problems. Education professors may feel that they already spend a considerable amount of time with public school teachers. Normally, however, they appear in the more or less detached role of workshop consultants or as special lecturers. Their actual

contact with children is too often limited to the selected environs of the campus demonstration school.

The suggestion made here is that public school folk and campus folk work together on honest-to-goodness school problems, centered this time in the everyday public classrooms rather than the college library or lecture hall. Specifically, we recommend that each school of education maintain at least one course per semester devoted exclusively to some study or problem specified by a cooperating school district.

The initiation of such a cooperative project might come, most properly, from the college itself. We should not be surprised if our first overtures are not accepted with alacrity. The teacher who seemed docile throughout the summer session may, on his own grounds and on his own terms, prove surprisingly independent. Certain concessions will be essential on each side.

The college must be prepared to make at least the following modifications:

1. Sufficient flexibility in the college program must be found to undertake an "outside" problem with all its specificity and detail. We may, for this occasion, have to discard the approved syllabus and the treasured lecture notes we have so long cherished.

2. Genuine academic recognition must

be granted for the efforts of those teachers who participate. This means that college credit, on an appropriate level, should be available for those who wish it. Such credit must normally be applicable toward degree requirements, either undergraduate or graduate, provided the degree field of concentration is related.

3. The full academic facilities of the college must be opened for the pursuit of the problem at hand. Library resources of the school and the college may be pooled. Duplication services, laboratory facilities and the other adjuncts of regular college instruction must be available when needed.

4. The cost of the project must be kept within the reach of the district and/or the individual teachers involved. The college professor should not be obligated to subsidize the research program of a school district, but the financial arrangements for tuition and other charges must be in line with the instructional costs usual to his own institution.

5. Most important, the college must provide leadership that will promise a more successful outcome to the study than would have been possible by the school district alone. Whoever serves from the college of education must indeed be the idealistic combination of practitioner and theorist. His scholastic stature must be such that he can invite his colleagues from the academic disciplines to join him in ways that will be fruitful.

The school folk in turn will find that they too have work to do if the experiment is to be meaningful.

1. The problem defined for study must be of the kind and the magnitude to justify a full semester of attention. An imposing accumulation of trivia does not collectively make a good investigation.

The import of the problem area must have real significance to a considerable segment of the public school program.

2. The problem must be carefully defined to lend itself to research treatment. If the resources of an institution and the time of a group of teachers are to be devoted to study, the problem must be such that group work can conceivably bring justifiable results.

3. School leadership must undertake to find and enroll a majority of the class members. Minimum enrollment in college sections is essential. Normally the class enrollment comes from the school personnel most concerned. Outside teachers need not be excluded but they should be admitted only with a clear understanding of the nature of the problem and the intent of the course.

4. Provision must be made for sufficient time on the part of the enrollees

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either during school time or at convenient out-of-school hours to allow the study to proceed with due haste. Additional accommodations such as meeting place, class supplies and any other auxiliary costs may well have to come from district budgets.

5. There must be some guarantee of implementation of proposed solutions. Only if the administration of the district is willing to follow through in the utilization of suggested outcomes can any enthusiasm for cooperative effort be maintained.

Such cooperative effort will, of course, not be easy to establish, particularly for the first time. Public school personnel may well feel suspicious. College instructors will find the arrangements somewhat upsetting to their established personal routines and particularly to their book of college rules. One course per semester may seem hopelessly little but, as leaven within the loaf, it can have far-reaching effects.

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Interpreting

(Continued from page 301)

The fact that the old myths about language and communication are still held by a large segment of the public is demonstrated whenever one of the above points is made public through the popular press. Any suggestion that the English language is a flexible instrument of communication not bound by irrevocable laws brings forth a plethora of letters to the editors that the schools are lowering standards. Teachers and

curriculum workers need to help the public distinguish between standards of instruction in the language arts and obeisance to mythical standards concerning language usage and linguistic change which have never existed in the history of our language. What exists is a popular attitude of mind about language matters which linguist Donald J. Lloyd has described:

The demon which⁷ possesses us is our mania for correctness. It dominates our minds from the first grade to the graduate school; it is the first and often the only thing we think of when we think of our language. Our spelling must be "correct"—even if the words are ill chosen; our usage must be "correct"—even though any possible substitute expression, however crude, would be perfectly clear; our punctuation must be "correct"—even though practices surge and change with the passing years, and differ from book to book, periodical to periodical. Correct! That's what we've got to be, and the idea that we've got to be correct rests like a soggy blanket on our brains and our hands whenever we try to write.⁷

There is a great need for interpreting the new knowledge about language to the general public if we wish the public to understand our developing curriculum in the English language arts. Informed teachers and curriculum workers must find ways to inform the public at the same time they are planning new instructional materials and curriculum patterns. The goal continues to be the planning of learning experiences for young people which will assist them in the development of language power and thereby help make the English language a more flexible and sensitive medium for all.

⁷ Donald J. Lloyd. "Our National Mania for Correctness." *The American Scholar* 21: 285; Summer 1952.

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