

# A More Humane Teacher Education

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**A**S WITH so many things in current American life, we know what makes for humaneness in a teacher education program, but we are not using what we know. In preparing this paper, a number of concerned and knowledgeable persons were consulted about this problem, and we found considerable agreement as to what the characteristics of a humane program are. Many of the ideas expressed here are found in existing programs; however, according to those persons consulted, there does not seem to be any one program which may truly be called a "humane" program.

The group consulted included: undergraduates in student teaching, school administrators, cooperating teachers in public schools, university supervisors of student teaching, and graduate students. The list of characteristics identified and presented here is neither mutually exclusive nor exhaustive; however, there was consensus with regard to the characteristics presented here. Since programs must be planned for particular situations, there is no attempt in this paper to describe an ideal program. The ideas indicated here could be incorporated into many different teacher education formats.

## Personnel

First, to create a more humane program, the personnel involved in teacher education must be more carefully selected. In gradu-

ate programs, greater efforts should be made to recruit individuals with social skills and personality structure that will make the teacher education programs in which they become involved more humane. The university faculty members working in the program must be "open" people. They must be accepting and able to work with a variety of students in many kinds of situations.

The public school personnel with whom students work must also be supporting and positive. Admittedly, realism usually enters the program through these people's efforts. However, this makes their roles even more important, for they need to be able to get the neophyte to understand educational problems without his becoming cynical and losing the heart to teach. Much more effort must go into recruiting able public school people to work in teacher education. In addition, public school people should assume a much larger role in the education of teachers, for a humane program is a program with a strong reality base.

Finally, there must be more careful selection of the students who enter teacher preparation. This does not mean just raising the grade point average for admission, for

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there is no evidence that, beyond certain minimum levels of academic competence, grades have any bearing on teacher effectiveness. Particularly, we need to recruit into teaching more able young people from minority groups. Education is a well traveled mobility route in our society, and some minority people have been cut off from this route by schools which have failed to be effective for them.

Early in their university careers, students must have the opportunity to explore their potential for teaching through real experiences with youth. Those who prove to lack talent for this kind of work should be counseled out of the program. At present, far too much effort is expended on university students who never teach because they really do not have good potential for it. Students entering teacher preparation should be mentally healthy, open to working with a variety of people, and truly interested in becoming teachers.

#### Instruction

Second, the instructional procedures used in teacher education should reflect humaneness in their approach. How can university students discover if they like young people and can work with them? Students need to gain a reality base early in their program, and this frame of reference must be maintained throughout the program. They must have much involvement with public school teachers and pupils.

The benefits of university students' working as instructional aides in the public schools are only now being explored, but there is evidence of great promise here both for the schools and teacher education. Through this kind of experience, university students may determine if they have potential for teaching before they have made large expenditures of time and money.

Students who plan to teach need to know themselves better as people. In teacher education, both time and opportunity must be provided for students to visit with advisers and instructors. Time for interaction with others must be part of the program, in the

form of conferences and small group activities. A common problem is that the faculty may be mainly composed of male Anglo-Saxons; hence, advisers with whom women and minority students can identify are not available. In faculty recruiting, a conscious effort must be made to broaden the sexual, ethnic, and racial makeup of the faculty.

Field experience is a time of self-testing, and under such conditions students undergo considerable stress and tension. Much of this stress may be alleviated by a close student-adviser relationship; however, in student teaching and the internship, it is suggested that small groups of students who are having similar experiences be brought together regularly to share their experiences. The opportunity to talk out problems in this kind of environment has proved to be valuable in a number of experimental programs.

In addition, psychological assistance should be available for those students who find their problems too serious to be handled in the above-mentioned ways. This help should be introduced into the program in such a fashion that the student becomes acquainted with the psychological counselor early in the program and as a regular part of it. Then, if a need does arise for the student to turn to this person for personal reasons or for advice on handling emotionally disturbed pupils, the relationship will already have been established, and there is a minimum of threat.

In teacher education, there is a need for greater individualization of instruction. Students enter the program at different levels of development in becoming teachers. The usual procedure is for students to take a sequence of education courses, with little variation in content from one student to the next. This practice fails to recognize the individual developmental levels of the students.

Under the guidance of faculty members, the students need to take greater responsibility for their own learning. These young people must become involved in real situations under the guidance of professionals so that they gain a clear perspective of areas in which growth is needed. As well, they must

have continuing contact with faculty members who may provide the expert assistance which they need to achieve this growth.

All too frequently, good students find that they must relearn the content of their major teaching field once they get into a classroom. Cooperating teachers complain that the students do not know their subject matter, but university supervisors know that frequently these same students have far better academic records than the classroom teachers who are making the complaints. University disciplines are not taught per se in the public school, for the teaching objectives are different. Therefore, the university students discover that they must restructure their content for classroom presentation. Usually the university experience has not provided students with an adequate grounding in the structure and methodology of the discipline; therefore they find such mastery to be a very difficult task. It is recommended that some academic, university courses actually be structured so as to prepare students to teach public school content. Furthermore, students need preparation in the structure and methodology of their teaching fields so that they are capable of reorganizing their fields for presentation at the secondary school level.

In teacher preparation the real criterion of success is effective teaching in the classroom. Even more important is the knowledge on the part of the neophyte teacher that he is becoming an effective teacher. Under these conditions, grades are largely meaningless, and a humane teacher education program would operate on a pass/fail basis. In consultation with their instructors, students should make their own decisions concerning their progress, and they should move on to more sophisticated tasks as rapidly as their development will permit. The professional teacher is capable of evaluating his own performance and of taking corrective action. Students should learn how to assess their own effectiveness as they develop teaching competence. The work of the professional educator in assisting with the development of this skill is an important part of a truly humane program.

## Field Experience

Third, a humane teacher education program provides the students in it with a sound reality base. Much has been said already in this paper about extensive experience in real situations. Of course, some very meaningful experiences may be contrived through such media as videotaping, micro-teaching, and simulations; however, the majority of the initial field experiences must be carried out in actual school or other field situations such as youth camps, playgrounds, and tutoring.

The potential of the instructional assistant role has already been cited. These assistants should have the opportunity to work with different grade levels and with children of different ethnic, racial, and social backgrounds. If we are to eliminate the long-standing practice of putting neophyte teachers into classrooms with the admonition to sink or swim, the supervised induction period into teaching must be greatly extended.

All student teaching should be full time and not less than a complete quarter in length. It would be even better if student teaching took an entire school semester so that the student could experience all aspects of the job. Student teaching should be followed by a full year as a paid intern in a public school prior to regular employment.

A full year as a paid intern following student teaching is a far more humane plan for inducting teachers into service than the current practice of the full-time, probationary teacher with little or no assistance. The intern should be given a reduced load and be regarded as a learner so that professional help is available and the threat of failure is lessened. Internships should be regular positions in the differentiated staffing of a department, team, or building, so that the neophyte teacher is in an interim position. He is still learning and at this point is not on trial for a particular position. The much more extensive and deeper field experiences provided by the sequence of instructional assistant, full-time student teacher, and paid intern should bring the young person into the profession by a far more humane route than our current abbreviated plan does. □

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