

TEACHER PR

(By the Michigan State University Committee for the New Curriculum of the University Unit at Oakland,

THAT THE POSITION of the United States both at home and abroad is precarious is a proposition generally accepted as valid. Domestically, we find ourselves, at the moment, apparently unable to cope with certain of the problems which have emerged in our dynamic society. Abroad we are challenged as never before to show that we possess the philosophy, the knowledge, the willingness, the energy to enable us to take the lead in the establishment of the good society throughout the world. There are those who think that both domestically and internationally we have seriously lost ground in terms of both our coping and our leading during the last quarter of a century. Whether or not this be true, there is no doubt that our plight is serious. Perhaps it always has been. Equally certain is the fact that the only long-range solutions which seem to give

promise are deeply rooted in and dependent on the quality of our educational process. There is little argument that the center of this educational process is the teacher, and we cannot hope for that process to rise in quality above that of the individuals who play this central role.

For this reason, a seminar devoted to a consideration of teacher preparation has significance far beyond one which concerns itself with but a special field. It is of little use to discuss programs in engineering, in science, and in business if the students who arrive on the university campus to undertake them have been taught inadequately throughout their elementary and secondary experience.

Compounding our difficulties, although perhaps if properly dealt with, multiplying our opportunities, is the fact that the community as a whole has become a most effective teacher, perhaps more

EPARATION

Michigan, under the direction of Dr. Thomas Hamilton, now President of the State University of New York)

effective than the schools themselves. Values, attitudes, even the willingness to learn seem in large part to be a reflection of the community rather than learned in the classroom. To a degree this has always been the case; but support might well be found for the hypothesis that there has been an increase in the success of the impact of that portion of the community other than the school, the home, and the church; and there is little evidence that the shift will assure a happier situation either for society or the individual.

Perhaps a sensible point of departure would be to make certain that it was thoroughly understood that the preparation of teachers is a responsibility of the total university and cannot, with success, be delegated alone to any department or division or college. The reason for this stems from the fact that the preparation of teachers is nei-

ther a simple nor unitary task, but rather a complicated four-faceted responsibility which can only be borne by the total university. It must not be held that each of these responsibilities is the exclusive concern of a single sector of the university. On the contrary, as will be seen, these functions, regardless of by whom treated, must always be viewed as interrelated, supplementary, and complementary rather than discrete.

First, it should be observed that all teachers regardless of level or speciality must be provided a liberal or general education of excellence. Not all would agree precisely as to what the content of such a liberal education should be, and certainly not all courses which describe themselves as liberal merit the label. In all likelihood, however, the presence of liberal programs which pursue their reasonably similar objectives by various routes is healthy in our

pluralistic society. Certainly there would be fair agreement that the liberally educated person, be he teacher or engineer or doctor, should know something about the social world in which he lives, its history and cultural antecedents, possess an understanding of the nature of science as an intellectual process, be characterized by considerable ability in the skills of communication so taught as to take full cognizance of the relationship of skills to content. This seems minimal. It also is agreed that teachers should receive this liberal education in the company of those who are being prepared for other professions. Liberal education knows no geographical boundaries, neither does it recognize professional provinces. That students with varying professional ambitions can with profit learn together seems obvious.

A second dimension of this complex of education designed to prepare teachers is involved in providing for prospective teachers learning experiences which will make certain that they have competence in the special field in which they are to be certified as teachers. How extensive this should be cannot be answered generally. Perhaps it would be well to describe

the desirable situation in terms of the student achieving sufficient competence of this nature that, if it subsequently prove feasible, the teacher can build a graduate program on this undergraduate training. The elementary teacher naturally presents a special problem in this connection, for what in fact, is the special competence which he should acquire? Under present circumstances, he should ideally be provided with the most comprehensive "general" education possible. While it can be held that the elementary teacher should be expected to demonstrate a subject matter competence of no less quality than that displayed by the secondary teacher, there is a point of view holding that the special competence called for in this case is a thorough understanding of children and how they learn and grow.

It is the third function to which the most adverse criticism in the preparation of teachers recently has been directed. This has to do with professional education. Let it be said at the outset that no one concerned with teacher preparation would deny that in some quarters there has been superficiality in this area and fragmentation of courses and subject matter.

Needless to say, this is not the only area in a university where guilt on these charges can be proved; but the fact remains that courses in professional education are in need of constant review and scrutiny both by those within and without the field. But when all this has been admitted, the fact remains that it is difficult to see how one could adequately prepare teachers in contemporary society without the availability of certain of the competencies and knowledge that have been developed in this field. It seems clear that prospective teachers should understand the history of the American public school as well as the philosophical position on which it rests. A knowledge of the continuing inter-action between the school and the social order is necessary. Similarly, the teacher should comprehend to the best of his ability the nature of the learning process and its implications for teaching methods. Finally, there are almost none who would deny the necessity for providing, in one way or another an internship through the form of what ordinarily is called "practice teaching." If there be valid criticism on this, it would be that frequently the practice teaching experience has not

been intensive enough nor coupled with an opportunity for learning through study of and reflection on the experience.

Acknowledging the necessity for work in the field of professional education, there remains the problem of how much of the total collegiate program should the prospective teacher devote to such studies? Inevitably the answer to this question must be quantitative, but it is unfortunate that such is the case. The important matter is the achievement of certain educational objectives, not the number of semester hours taken. Informed opinion would indicate that, including the practice teaching experience, the valid objectives of the professional part of a student's program should be attainable by most students in from one-sixth to one-seventh of the effort devoted to the total undergraduaté program.

The fourth and last aspect of the teacher preparation program has to do with getting each student to truly understand the nature of the discipline which he aspires to teach. This is a somewhat more newly recognized dimension of the teacher preparation program. It is an educational task which we seem to have performed bad-

ly. In the field of mathematics, for example, there are many teachers who are competent to deal with the subject in the manipulative sense. They are able to teach processes and turn out students who can follow directions with reasonable accuracy, but far less success attends their efforts to give to students an understanding of the nature of mathematics as an intellectual discipline and its proper relationship to other disciplines and, indeed, to the whole history of ideas. Probably by the very nature of the case, this is a function which will have to be performed at least in large part by those who teach the subject matter courses at the university level. If it eventuates that some of these university level specialists do not themselves understand the nature of their discipline in this sense, some embarrassment may ensue.

Again it should be emphasized that these functions are by no means discrete. Liberal education frequently provides the necessary subject matter for a teacher, and professional education courses if properly taught can meet liberal objectives. Certainly a thorough understanding of the nature of a discipline should give valid clues to the best methods by which it can

be taught. The implications, then, are clear. *Only the entire university is competent in the last analyses to assume the responsibility for the preparation of teachers.*

Of recent years we have come to recognize in preparation for teaching, as with preparation for other professions, that the university is not well equipped to do all that is required. Just as in medicine there seems to be a desirable division of responsibility between the university on the one hand and the hospital on the other, so in the preparation of teachers should the school system share the responsibility with the university. The problem, of course, lies in the difficulty in determining who should do what. Generally speaking, there seems to be agreement that the universities should deal primarily with the theoretical, the scientific, and the substantive, leaving problems of application to be considered within the public school system. To be specific, much of what is now taught in the field of administration, business management, and audio visual materials, to name but a few areas, might be learned better under the auspices of the school system.

In point of fact, a major improvement in the prepara-

tion of teachers could be attained if the universities and the school systems were to recognize more fully that theirs was a joint responsibility. There might be real merit, for example, in developing a teacher preparation program which in total was of five years in length, but with the last two years shared by the school system and the university with the student being paid full salary during this period.

Some such cooperative arrangement between the universities and the school systems might assist in preventing a loss of personnel in the teaching profession which comes about through the new teacher not being adequately prepared for the shock of the first full-time teaching assignment. The step from the campus to a classroom with thirty or forty youngsters not all completely dedicated to learning, or for that matter necessarily even decorum, surrounded by the complexities of the community, the bureaucracy, the parents, is a giant one. Too many promi-

sing teachers never recover, and quickly decide that their choice of a profession was ill-advised.

This "community shock" effect has been heightened of recent years for the new teacher comes to the community with relatively less status than was formerly the case. There are many reasons for this, not the least of which is that the total educational level of the community is much higher than in earlier times. The new teacher will find it far more difficult to establish his position as an intellectual and cultural leader than did his predecessors.

One of the problems which confronts those who are concerned with the preparation of teachers in the United States is the lack of career stability which characterizes the profession. All too often the teacher enters his profession clearly recognizing that it is not something to which his full professional life will be devoted. The primary reason for this rests in the fact that so many of our elemen-

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BLOCKHEAD

The recruit complained to the sergeant that he'd got a splinter in his finger.

"Ye should have more sense," was the harsh comment, "than to scratch your head."

ary and secondary school teachers are women who plan from the beginning to teach only until they have assumed their role as wife and mother. Quite naturally, with such a large segment of the teacher population being so motivated, it is difficult to build the dedicated, career-minded profession which is so needed. Part of the answer to this dilemma lies in attracting more men to elementary and secondary school teaching. There is evidence that progress is being made on this front.

Making teaching a career to which both men and women will be willing to dedicate their lives is not easy. Some of the difficulty rests in the matter of salaries, and there is no doubt that these need to be increased markedly. But more than this is required. Somehow communities must not only accord to their teachers appropriate status, but school systems must provide a situation where able men and women can see for the entirety of their professional lives such challenge that they will not be tempted to desert the profession for other pursuits. This means that school systems must rid the teacher of the necessity for being clerk, janitor, and nurse and must provide a way for the able and energetic to

rise in responsibility and salary as their careers develop.

One of the matters frequently discussed in the preparation of teachers has to do with the point at which students should choose their careers. On this matter there is some disagreement. Those who favor a late choice observe that many bright college students do not crystallize their interests until the later part of their collegiate careers and thus would make the teacher preparation program sufficiently flexible that at almost any time a student might enter into it. On the other hand, there are those who hold that career choices are being made too late and that it would be wise to hasten the procedure rather than delay it. Perhaps the best agreement which can be reached is that for most students the decision to enter the teacher preparation program should be made at the end of the sophomore year but that the program should be possessed of sufficient flexibility that later choice would be possible.

MANY STUDENTS OF the education scene have pointed out that the teacher preparation program would be far less difficult to operate if the candidates for it were se-

lected with greater care. There is no doubt this is true. In fact, the world's problems would be considerably diminished were the supply of angels less limited. Given the great need for teachers, it seems quite unrealistic to assume that the immediate future will permit of much greater selectivity than is now practiced. Other professions also are seeking and need the able individuals. It seems unlikely, and perhaps unwise, that the teaching profession will be able to attract a disproportionate share of the gifted.

Even to the extent that selectivity is possible, the instruments on which judgments can be made are far from infallible. Intellectual ability and performance can be measured reasonably well, but the more important desire to continue to learn is identified with great difficulty. Health and appearance, to the extent these are relevant, can be appraised. It is in the area of the prospective teacher's personality that great fuzziness attends the efforts to select. Instruments are so weak, the possibilities of great damage by the projection of stereotypes so great that caution must be exercised in acting on the valid proposition that the teacher's personality is an

important part of the learning process. It should be possible, and is in fact imperative, however, to provide special educational challenge to the able students who are attracted to the profession. In our concern for quantity the dimension of quality cannot be ignored.

The great danger faced by even a new university will be its failure to take into account the fact that the future will be characterized, as is the present, by great change. In short, we must plan on a social order where perhaps the only constant is the lack of a constant. This means that the administration of a university and its faculty must continue to be imaginative using the knowledge of the past but refusing to be bound by past limitations. Only in this way will it be possible to attract the quality of faculty essential. This exercise of imagination in fact is the task of the university, in any event, whether it is concerned with the preparation of teachers, lawyers, physicians, or citizens. As Alfred North Whitehead has put it, "Fools act on imagination without knowledge; pedants act on knowledge without imagination. The task of a university is to weld together imagination and experience."