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A Teacher Education Point of View

by

Velma V. Watters

What kind of growth does one want to promote in the student? This is a philosophic question and also one of values, according to the literature.¹ Fortunately, in our culture, there is a fair degree of consensus among those who have given this question thought as to what some of these basic values are. Few thoughtful persons, however, would deny the desirability of helping children and youth to achieve² maximum growth physically, mentally, emotionally, and socially.

One should be primarily concerned about the kind of product to be released, the kinds of experiences for each student and the group, the nature of the problems involved in selecting and preparing the able youngster, the time element, and the adequacy of facilities and personnel. These are only a few of the basic factors to be considered.

In an effort to arrive at some pertinent conclusions, one must have some general beliefs about teaching and learning and the purposes of the school. This attitude may lead the individual to formulate a working point of view or philosophy which is acceptable in terms of basic principles of education and which he can and will be willing to abide by, in the meantime, revising as often as necessary. It is the belief that:

Those responsible for selecting and preparing the student must first be convinced that intelligent application and responsibility in the creation of a philosophy . . . implies an informed professional body . . . , secondly, teacher education institutions with a philosophy based upon the tenet that only the best students available should be considered as candidates will have admission policies reflecting that attitude.³

All education is a unit. It should contribute to the needs of the students in the society to be served and to the development of the character of the individuals to be educated.

“How safe then is it for all concerned with preparing the learners to motivate and guide them to the extent that they will grow and develop into the kinds of individuals who have the ability to think accurately, objectively, and

¹Carleton Washburn, “Design for Long-range Research in Teacher Education.” *Journal of Educational Research*, XLVI (September, 1952-May, 1953), p. 712.

²*Ibid*, p. 712.

³Immel, Ada, “A Philosophy.” *The Nation's Schools*, LXIV, No. 3 (September, 1959), p. 78.

in terms of ascertainable facts; . . . acquire understandingly and functionally those skills . . . that are essential to effective living in our present society; . . . have a basic framework of knowledge of the world around them and how it came to be what it is, and to know how to fill in that framework wherever and whenever it is necessary for them to do so; have an appreciation of the esthetic side of life and to be able to find expression of their creative urge toward beauty; . . . grow in appreciation of their fellowmen, in ever wider circles, and to feel a sense of responsibility toward the well being of ever more inclusive societies, . . . be able to work cooperatively with their fellow human beings toward the achievement of socially desired goals; exercise self-control; respect the rights of others; keep strong and healthy bodies."⁴ We must gradually realize that quality in teaching is to be desired and striven for in our pursuit of excellence in education. According to Hechinger⁵, a teacher's incompetence is just as unpardonable and damaging as that of an incompetent surgeon's knife or an airplane pilot's flying.

If this is the consensus of opinion or the general belief to produce this type of learner, then every individual responsible for his growth and development must:

Put forth effort to understand each learner.

Have a knowledge of how learning takes place.

Decide upon sound and basic objectives, and strive toward fulfillment of them in every learning situation.

Realize that providing wholesome experiences for and with the learner is a joint responsibility and a continuous process.

. . . value teaching enough to make it attractive to creative minds.

. . . help those who are preparing for teaching to acquire a depth of scholarship that will enable them to guide the explorations of the immature into the riches of the cultural heritage.

. . . relieve teachers of the burden of clerical, custodial, and police functions so that they may be free to teach.

. . . use and reward the unique talents of gifted teachers. Focus on the needs of youth and on the kinds of experiences that the school wants to provide for them.⁶

. . . urge that instruction be oriented to problems and concerns of youth.⁷

⁴*Op. cit.* pp. 711-715.

⁵Hechinger, Fred, "Good Teachers for 20,000,000 Children," *Parents' Magazine*, XXXIV, No. 9 (September, 1959), p. 98.

⁶Francis S. Chase and Harold A. Anderson, *The High School In a New Era*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958, p. 225.

⁷*Ibid.*, p. 229.

In addition, opportunity must be provided for consideration of a set of criteria for the selection of superior candidates to the teacher education program. Washburn contends that it is imperative to select a reasonable sampling of the kinds of growth to which teachers should contribute.

Use existing instruments or prepare new ones that will measure the kinds of growth we hope to foster. We must apply these at the beginning and end of a period of time—for example, an academic year—to know which growths are measurable.

. . . measure the growth that takes place under the most effective teachers in contrast with that which takes place, or fails to take place under the least effective teachers, in a variety of ways and in children of widely varying backgrounds.

See whether there are certain clusters or categories of children whose growth along different lines is largely conditioned by the past experience since they come from many kinds of homes, and have a wide range of experiences both in school and out of school.

. . . discover what characteristics and kinds of behavior on the part of teachers are most closely associated with the growth of various clusters of children. A different but essential part of our job will be to segregate as far as possible, the direct influences of the teacher from the out-of-school factors and such school influences as are not directly attributable to the teacher. An absolute segregation is probably impossible, but with wide samplings and techniques known to all of us, predominant teacher-influence should be discoverable.

Under some teachers we may expect to find decidedly more growth in certain characteristics than under some others . . . it should be possible to identify distinguishing characteristics as between the most effective and the least effective teachers. These characteristics will be found by close observation, by a study of the teacher's past training and experience, and by whatever other forms of evaluation prove to be most effective.

We should not expect to find one best pattern . . . there are a number of different patterns of high effectiveness and a number of different groupings of characteristics that make for relative ineffectiveness. Having identified, tentatively some of these characteristics that seem to result in effective growth . . . along a number of desired lines . . . Which of these desirable characteristics of teachers can be produced or augmented in college, or afterwards while actually teaching? What kind of pre-service and in-service ex-

periences and learnings aid measurably in their development?

In the process of continuous evaluation there will be, as further stated by Washburn, the need to:

. . . discover what patterns of teacher behavior and understanding distinguish the more effective teachers from the less effective ones.

. . . know what types of persons entering our colleges are likely to achieve these characteristics if given the most effective learning experiences we can devise.

. . . discover what these most effective learning experiences are so that we can evaluate and improve our programs of teacher education.

Test our products before they actually take responsibility for educating children and youth.

Submit the whole program to the ultimate test of whether or not teachers who have been through it actually help the boys and girls entrusted to them to grow effectively in the achievement of the values which we agree are necessary for the fulfillment of their potentialities as persons and as contributing and responsible members of society.⁸

Since teacher education is concerned with the basic skills, understandings, and attitudes to be acquired by all teachers, then according to the aims and purposes of the teacher education program of the Division of Education at Savannah State College, "The goals of this program are seen as qualities that should mark the superior teacher. (1) He should have a wide general academic and cultural background, with that specific command of subject matter which will enable him to adapt content and experiences to the needs, problems, and interest of pupils. (2) He should be proficient in the communication skills and able to assist pupils in developing these skills. (3) He should have effective knowledge of human behavior, of the processes involved in growth and learning; and he should be skilled in the adaptation of materials and experiences to the needs and interests of pupils. (4) He should be able to further good human relationships. (5) He should be able to think and plan effectively."⁹

At this point it seems that there should be full realization that, as Francis S. Chase has put it, "The quality of education cannot rise above the character and competence of those who teach. We shall be able to attract large numbers of highly qualified men and women to teaching when

⁸Washburn, *op. cit.*

⁹"Aims and Purposes of the Teacher Training Program," *Savannah State College Bulletin*, Savannah, Georgia, XI, No. 5 (April, 1958), p. 49.

we provide for the teacher and his learners essentially the same kind of professional responsibility that the physician has for the care of his patients. This view calls for changes in the administration of our schools and for better understanding on the part of citizens of the importance of the teacher's role in our society."

Chase continues by indicating that "criticism of the schools may help to demolish false notions and bad practices; redefinition of the aims of education may help to give the schools a set of priorities that will make their task more manageable; but, if any nation desires a quality education instead of a shoddy, mass-produced product, it must allocate to its schools and higher institutions of learning the resources necessary for the task."¹⁰

We ourselves must be assured of the type of quality product we want to release. Why should we be as extremely concerned about our new teachers for the decade ahead? The challenges of the 60's demand an ongoing dynamic school system staffed by superior teachers who are eminently qualified to provide our country with more linguists, more scientists, more experts in human relations, more persons in fine arts who are able to help the populace to see the beauties of life and more highly skilled workers for an automation era. If we are to compete with our greatest adversary, Russia, it is imperative that our new teachers for the public schools possess skills, insights, basic understandings and a keen intellect. In order to procure this new teacher for the years ahead, those who are responsible for teacher education in our colleges must have an excellent program of selection, admission, placement and follow-up of those whom they prepare as teachers.

Swain and Loree are of the opinion that "When parents send their children to school, they may ask themselves: Is the school causing him to suppress his initiative? Is the school contributing to the development of a distorted self-concept or bringing about other consequences detrimental to sound mental health? The answer to the question "Is the school achieving its objectives?" can, of course, be obtained from the answer to the question "What are we doing to our students?"

When we evaluate according to the more traditional concept, objectives provide the criteria. What is to take place of objectives when we evaluate unplanned effects of an educational program?

To answer the question, it is necessary to refer first to a broader set of values—that is, the core of values of those in control of the school and the concepts that derive from them, such as the general purposes of the school. We be-

¹⁰Francis S. Chase, "The Response of the Schools to the Challenges of the Twentieth Century," *The School Review*, LXVII, No. 1 (Spring, 1959), pp. 22-23.

lieve that the school program as a whole, as well as student achievement and other changes that occur in students, should be evaluated, not merely in terms of stated objectives, but also in terms of these core values, general purposes, and other concepts derived from them."¹¹

"The overworked teacher presents a picture of his profession to the world that often makes truck driving seem preferable . . . Nor does the teacher who has to combine all the chores of recordkeeping, clerking, money collecting and so on, build a public image of professional dignity. . . . The original experiment in the use of "teacher aides," sponsored by the Fund for the Advancement of Education in Bay City, Michigan, has spread to many communities over the United States, thus enabling teachers to devote their full time and effort to teaching. Similarly, the more recent experimental program of "contract readers" has relieved teachers of impossible work loads of correcting English compositions—qualified part-time "workers" do much of the reading, grading, and reviewing."¹²

The services rendered a teacher by an instructional secretary seem to be an excellent means of restoring some of the teacher's time, energy, and skill to the pupils in his class.

The Experiment in the Use of Instructional Secretaries, now in its second year of operation in the schools of Davidson County, Tennessee, rests on this assumption. Here is a form of help to busy teachers that makes no additional demands upon them.¹³

This writer too, is firmly convinced that we shall not get the desired results in education unless we are willing to find ways of channeling a large number of the most gifted and highly trained young people into teaching.¹⁴ Hechinger bolsters this opinion by stating that: "we need to marshal facts instead of sentiments." Here are some basic ones:

1. It's silly to pretend that all teachers are admirable. According to the Rockefeller Report on Education, "as of 1956, 33 percent of the elementary teachers did not hold bachelor's degrees and more than 21 percent of all public school teachers had less than four years of college." What's more, requirements of teaching vary so drastically from state to state that the national range of training and competence is both wide enough and deep enough to form an abyss.
2. . . . A good teacher, it's now acknowledged, needs

¹¹E. I. Swain and M. R. Loree, "Broadening the Base in Evaluation," *The School Review*, LXVII, No. 1 (Spring, 1959), pp. 82.

¹²Hechinger, *op. cit.*, pp. 98-100.

¹³Turney, David, "The Instructional Secretary," *The Tennessee Teacher*, XXVI, No. 7 (February, 1959), p. 16.

¹⁴Chase, *op. cit.*, p. 23.

to be thoroughly grounded both in content (what to teach) and in method (how to teach it)¹⁵

The liberally educated teacher, says Paul Woodring in **New Directions in Teacher Education**, published by the Fund for the Advancement of Education, "will see his subject in broader perspective. His aim will be not knowledge of a subject, but wisdom which follows knowledge. He will teach his subject better because of his ability to see beyond it." This is the kind of teacher the current teacher-training trend is pointing to. In contrast to the narrowly erudite pedant or the windily ignorant methodologist, this kind of teacher should inspire confidence in his students.

Services which are badly paid aren't worth very much. Figures released by the National Education Association in June, 1959 show that teachers' pay ranks with that of skilled and semi-skilled industrial workers. "The root problem of the teaching profession remains financial," says the Rockefeller Report.

The real breakthrough on the salary front, too, is being effected by way of the new experiments: The television teacher, for example, demonstrates that teaching can pay. The "master teacher," in the latest experiment of "team teaching," along with two or three other teachers in a single classroom of up to 95 pupils, demonstrates there are many different grades of teaching talent. The "master's" excellence shows unquestionably that such superior services must be rewarded with superior pay.¹⁶

It is the belief of this writer that strengthening teacher education through better selection and admission of candidates for the teaching profession will certainly drive mediocrity out of the teaching ranks. Superior teachers will turn out a superior product. Superior products from our nation's schools will strengthen America in many areas where the country is weak. Only through excellent schools staffed by competent teachers can America face the challenge of these perilous times.

¹⁵Hechinger, *loc. cit.*

¹⁶*ibid.*