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ABSTRACT

In order to improve teacher education programs, stress was placed on research and inquiry in the classroom. The results of these methods gave teachers information on the way in which children learn most effectively. The classroom was a vehicle for teachers to learn from children. Therefore, the classroom was an experimental laboratory which facilitated the learning of both teachers and students. Also stressed was the use of filmed lessons, microteaching, and simulation in teacher education programs. The study of these methods led from simple, practical experience to the more complex arrangement of planning and organizing school situations. This end result was accomplished through intensive university study with teaching demonstrations, discussions, classroom simulation, and the study of learning and behavior development in children. It is hoped that confidence and direction would, therefore, be provided to the future teacher before he undertook a full-time teaching schedule. (BRB)

Can We Train Teachers Better?

N. V. Scarfe

Some months ago, I submitted to the organizers of this conference an abstract of what I thought I would like to say today. I believe these outlines are available and, therefore, I don't propose to repeat them here. What I would like to do today is to expand a little on some ways of improving our teacher education program.

In most teacher education programs far too little attention is given to the sequential development of skills through direct confrontation followed by searching discussion. A good deal of lip service is paid to this but few people have set out in exact detail or order a sequence of skills, nor have they planned a series of confrontations or practical examples, nor devised a proper discussion program that would lead to better practice of and greater achievement in these skills.

In many subjects studied in high school, particularly in such areas as Home Economics and Industrial Education the specific achievable skills are well known and they are arranged in order of difficulty with exact practical plans so that skills can be presented, practiced and mastered in a very down to earth and reasonable manner. Instead of attempting to apply theory to practice, practical skills are subsequently justified by theory or alternatively theory is made comprehensible through practice or derived from practical experiment. It is so often said that students in training find it extremely difficult to transfer theory to practice; it is a small wonder that they do since clearly this is the reverse of a normal learning process.

Another important element in teacher education is research orientation. Again we pay lip service to discovery or enquiry or research methods and may even attempt to put them into practice in school, but it is rare to find this same system applied in the teacher training institution, despite the fact that it has been well known for at least 30 years that such methods are a tremendous revelation to the students and stimulate much enthusiasm. Students in training find a great deal of satisfaction in devising factual questionnaires or even opinionnaires which seek to collect the opinions, ideas, feelings and doubts of children towards topics of study, methods of study, their worthwhileness, and their interest. Many children have valuable information to offer about ways in which they learn most effectively or remember well. Children provide many valuable insights when comparing various types of teaching and various methods of approach. In the process of this form of enquiry and there are many other forms - a great deal is learned which the enquirer does not set out to learn, not only about children but about methods of enquiry.

A classroom is an experimental laboratory and the teachers business is to learn from the children, partly by experiment and partly by enquiry. It is impossible to wait for the truly scientific investigation into methods of teaching. Objective and scientific research in teaching has so many variables and so many complications and it takes such a long time that it is impossible to wait for unequivocal and convincing evidence. The importance of enquiry and the excitement derived from it, however, can be obtained from inefficient forms of investigation and experiment.

In teacher education I am also concerned about the quality of discussion and the quality of thinking. While everyone seems to be in favour of discussion and seminar type activity, few seem to realize that the conduct of seminar discussion is one of the most difficult tasks for the teacher educator. They seem to forget that important new learning has to be achieved in every seminar or during each discussion. In fact the learning and thinking has to be more stimulating and more effective than in other forms of teacher pupil relationships.

One of the reasons for the many low-quality, time-wasting discussions seems to be the absence of important data for discussion. The data for discussion has to be available to each person; they often have to bring it with them or it must be provided for them. Important data for discussion in a teacher training institution are, of course, lessons, children and teaching situations. It is best if these are on tape or in film so that they can be replayed or stopped and discussed as they go along. A teacher training institution, therefore, has to have a large library of televised or filmed lessons or extracts of lessons or portions of lessons, in which the observers can concentrate on children, or learning situations, or on materials provided for learning or on teachers behaviors.

Seminars go best when all those in the seminar have similar expert knowledge and are exposed to similar experiences which are thought provoking or provide stimulating confrontations. Seminars which are simply pleasant periods of conversation over coffee resulting in little or no fresh learning or stimulus to thought, and which lack access to

factual data are entirely a waste of time.

I think I have said elsewhere we fail to make the best use of the brilliant lecture which is well supported by stimulating and provocative materials and apparatus for experiments. These performances approximate very much to the television programs. We seem to have little doubt that television programs have very considerable influence upon young people. The lecturer with his armory of materials and illustrations can, to some degree, emulate the television program and so there seems no reason why he and materials presented should not have a similar effect. Advertisers seem to have an enormous faith in the power of speech; certainly Winston Churchilll, during the war, emphasised that the spoken work had a tremendous effect provided that it is done the right way, and who should be better able to do it the right way than teacher educators?

The title of my talk was "Can We Train Teachers Better?". Clearly I believe that we can, particularly if we apply more assiduously and in a practical manner some of the suggestions that I have already made. But I would like to remind you that these suggestions are no more nor less than age old maxims of good teaching. These ancient maxims have, from time to time, been dolled up in other terminology, have been advocated in a variety of ways but have been honoured more often in the breach than in the observance. These maxims went as follows: Proceed from the concrete to the abstract; from the particular to the general; from the simple to the complex, from the known to the unknown. These maxims are simply devices to guide us in organizing a sequence of events or experiences and the kinds of stimulating questions that should

be proposed to those in training. These old maxims of good teaching simply mean that we should start with real children, real lessons or portions of lessons and simulated teaching situations and study these in very considerable detail in order to work towards generalizations and abstract theory. They encourage us to move from the simple practical examples to the more complex and intricate arrangement of planning a full program and organizing a variety of school situations. All of it implies carefully planned study and a precisely ordered sequence of experiences which become increasingly complex and more difficult as they grow, one from the other, like a biological organism.

Critical analysis of teaching by breaking it down into its simpler component parts seems an essential beginning to better teacher training programs which should never stray very far away from children and the practical problems of a classroom. On the other hand the discussion and study situations must be rigorous, intensive and scholarly. Mere observation of or exposure to classrooms or to children is quite inadequate. A diligent investigation of why things are as they are must constantly be presented to young people and they should be set searching for answers to their own problems. Enquiring of children and of teachers as well as of books, professors and others who may be able to stimulate thought should lead young people to think through their problems for themselves and come up with their own theory, and their own generalizations.

No teacher training institution can, therefore, operate in the future without a large library of filmed lessons or school situations, without its television to record on video tape for instant playback

activities of children and teachers, without continuous opportunities for micro-teaching and without a vast array of simulated materials of teaching conditions. No real teacher education can ever take place without direct involvement in and serious study of all the circumstances and conditions that surround teaching and learning. No institution can possibly succeed without the opportunity for repeated practice, on an intensive scale, of the skills needed for the final complex program of the teacher-learner relationships in a continuing school operation.

I am opposed to those who would throw students in the beginning stages of teacher education directly into schools to undertake a complete teaching schedule in place of the normal classroom teacher. I am advocating a high degree of intensive university study with materials that are brought there or with children who are brought there for direct study, enquiry and experiment. Demonstrations and intensive discussion of demonstrations seem to be a necessary preliminary to any direct involvement in active teaching in a properly organized school. I am, however, all in favour of children being brought to the campus, there to be used in small groups for highly intensive study of learning and behaviour development. I want young people to be very confident about what they plan to do and why they are going to do it, with some assurance of success, before they undertake the full burden of a teaching schedule of many weeks.