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ABSTRACT

The careless training and placement of college teachers is discussed in this document. The role and professional demand placed on teachers in a comprehensive community college is more student oriented by the nature of their work. Three suggestions to incorporate the community college teachers' qualities and the qualities of the teacher in the 2- and 4-year college are presented: a) graduate students who wish to become community college teachers should be identified as early in the graduate programs as possible; b) community college teachers are often student oriented and should balance this with research in their field; and c) the candidate should be required to involve himself in two learning experiences of a professional nature--formal classroom experience and laboratory experience. (MJM)

THE PROFESSIONAL TRAINING OF COMMUNITY COLLEGE TEACHERS

Robert E. Engel

Introduction

It is difficult to imagine or identify any major occupation or profession in the United States that is as careless in the training and placement of its members as is the profession of college teaching. The American college ironically leaves the development of its faculty to tradition and to chance. Moreover, because institutional goals often are not clearly defined, the desired outcomes against which the educational process or product should be tried are uncertain. These uncertainties in turn contribute to an amazing scene which may seem chaotic to the student and in which almost everyone involved seems busy doing his own thing--or someone else's.

Take the typical faculty member as an example. She or he may accept a position on the basis of available openings, location, salary and other perquisites, and general impressions. While there may be other personal factors involved in making the selection, certain highly important professional variables are usually difficult to assess. Although he may know what his personal and professional goals are, the candidate may have difficulty in determining from the typical interview, or from other sources, what the goals of a particular institution may be. The commitments of one's future colleagues are often not revealed at the time of the interview. This uncertainty introduces a significant element of chance into the selection process. If he "feels right" about the college and his peers seem congenial,

combined with the promise of adequate material benefits and an opportunity to teach and do research in an area of his special field of knowledge, he is convinced that he should take the job.

Likewise, the search committee often makes an equally subjective decision. It, too, decides that the new colleague seems congenial and that his credentials are acceptable. Moreover, he seems to be equipped by training or experience to profess the area of knowledge for which a teacher is needed. Consequently, they enter into a kind of marriage of convenience.

One may ask what all this has to do with the training of college teachers. The answer is that one normally receives training in order to do something that can be identified and against which the quality of one's work may be tested. While the typical young college professor has an acute familiarity with some body of knowledge, he often seems best trained to pass comprehensive examinations and to write theses--in other words, to do research. Normally he is not trained how to teach what he knows. Nor is he trained how to identify and to analyse the complex variables of the typical teaching-learning situation, how to establish course objectives or behavioral outcomes (performance goals), or how to measure them against the goals of the department, the college, or the student. He may know very little about how to relate the substantive and syntactical structures of his discipline to the objectives which he and his colleagues and students are trying to achieve.[1] Such things as item analysis, programmed learning, or the effect of environmental conditions on achievement may be a mystery to him. The dynamics of human relations in the classroom or the developmental aspects of college

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[1]Joseph J. Schwab, "Problems, Topics, and Issues," in Stanley Elam (ed.), Education and the Structure of Knowledge, Fifth Annual Phi Delta Kappa Symposium on Educational Research, Rand McNally & Company, Chicago, 1964, pp. 4-42.

freshmen in late adolescence may interest him only vaguely and in a peripheral way.

Discussion of many of these issues, which are such a critical part of successful teaching, may be notably absent in the typical interview. The employer often seems to assume that if one can identify a teacher and some students, both with the proper credentials, and place them in the same room, the optimum in teaching and learning effectiveness will occur. But this is not necessarily so. Most of us have heard it said at some time that Professor Knowsalot is well qualified in his field but he just can't teach.

An Outline for Action

Teaching involves a good deal more than simply being an expert in one's field. While a teacher can never know all the answers to problems he may face, he can become acquainted with some basic questions which should be asked in each new teaching situation as well as how to answer them.

Specifically, he will want to know the goals and purposes of the institution, where his discipline and/or courses fit into the institutional self-image as it is expressed in the curriculum, the characteristics of the students, and how all this fits his professional goals and self-image. Although an imaginative teacher can identify these and other questions on his own, just as conceivably he can become self-educated in his discipline, the process can usually be expedited by the aid of formal learning experiences in his graduate program.

The preparation of the teacher for the comprehensive community college has been selected as an example because an institution of this type is

easily identified, and its emphasis is primarily on teaching rather than research or service. It is expected that many of the concepts in the following outline would be applicable to the preparation of college teachers generally.

The comprehensive community college is the people's college. It has been referred to as the opportunity college, for it is there that the broadest possible cross-section of a given community is likely to find some educational program or experience in which one can succeed. This institution is called a college because most of its programs are in some sense post-high school. It is called a community college because special attention is given to the needs of the community it exists to serve and to the identification of the characteristics of the students in that community. It is called comprehensive because it does not limit its programs in the same way a typical two- or four-year college does. Research and service, in the sense in which one identifies these functions with a graduate university, would not normally be among the basic commitments of such a college. The comprehensive community college exists to teach.

Much is demanded of the teacher in the comprehensive community college. He must be well enough versed in his field to be able to reduce his special area of knowledge to basic generalizations and/or concepts which can be illustrated by a wide range of examples and applications. He must know how to start where the people are, and he must know how to acquire and transmit basic knowledge which his students can carry with them when they leave the classroom.

Whatever else is involved in learning, one tends to learn best that which seems pertinent. In order for a teacher to introduce his subject as pertinent, he must be sensitive not only to the characteristics of his

students as a group but, inasmuch as it is possible, to their individual abilities and needs. The teacher must be able to relate on a one-to-one basis, and he must be able to catch signs or clues (feedback) both from the class as a whole and from individual students. From such feedback he is able to adjust his procedures to accomplish the desired objectives. Such sensitivity is possible only to the extent that the teacher knows himself as well as his field. He must possess the qualities of sensitivity and humanness--qualities which are linked to personal maturity, integrity and security.[2]

Very little has been done in the graduate education of college teachers to prepare them for the special areas of professional expertise which are required for effectiveness. Preparation in one's discipline is not adequate in itself for the kind of demands that are placed upon the typical teacher of students in the comprehensive community college. In order to better meet this inadequacy the following suggestions are proposed.

(1) Graduate students who wish to become community college teachers (or who show an interest in this profession) should be identified as early in their graduate program as possible. In a typical graduate college there will be some such students in almost every major department or discipline. Early identification of these students will not only allow for careful planning of the individual's program of study, but it will afford a greater opportunity for the college to meet the common needs of these individuals as a group.

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[2]Claude E. Buxton, College Teaching: A Psychologist's View, Harcourt, Brace and Company, New York, 1956, p. 286.

(2) While the master's program may not differ greatly from that of the typical master's candidate, it may differ significantly. For example, prospective community college teachers are not usually committed to a professional life of research. They tend to be student-oriented rather than discipline-oriented and are most interested in teaching. Their master's program may, therefore, be of a non-thesis nature. Nevertheless, it should include some sort of terminal research paper or experience that will provide the candidate with a basic scholarly experience that can serve him in the future as he seeks to remain up-to-date and competent in his field of study.

(3) The candidate should be required to involve himself in two learning experiences which are of a professional nature. First, he should be involved in a formal class experience in which the issues raised earlier in this paper are considered. He should become acquainted with the history and philosophy of American higher education, and specifically with the place and purpose of the comprehensive community college within that setting. He should be exposed to problems relating to the substantive and syntactical structure of his disciplines. Basic aspects of the typical learning process, especially as these relate to the developmental characteristics of students, should be learned. Methods of presentation should be discussed in terms of the above problems, and a brief exposure to group dynamics and sensitivity training might be included.

Ideally, the second experience would be of the laboratory type, either simulated or in an actual community college classroom. Attention would be given to establishing course objectives and identifying expected behavioral outcomes, pacing and sequencing, and evaluation. This might be achieved

in a micro-teaching experience of one sort or another. Ample opportunity for discussion of problems met and solutions employed would be a part of this experience.

The two experiences outlined above would involve the candidate to a degree roughly equivalent to two three-semester-hour courses or about six semester hours in a thirty-six to thirty-eight semester hour terminal master's program.

Conclusion

Professional training of the type described above would be equally beneficial for teachers who plan to work in four-year colleges and universities and professional schools. Of course, most of these people will earn the Ph.D. degree, and minor adjustments would need to be made to suit their special situations. Graduate faculties in the various disciplines would do well to strongly recommend, if not require, that their Ph.D. candidates, who expect to teach, be exposed to such training.

These professional courses would likely be taught by faculty members working as a team. For example, one well versed in teaching-learning theory--perhaps from the department of educational psychology--would work with colleagues from the disciplines who had shown a special sensitivity to teacher-student interaction in the classroom.

Good teaching will undoubtedly remain something of an art, and precisely what constitutes good teaching will undoubtedly remain something of a mystery. Nevertheless, today's college students are growing increasingly impatient with the apparently haphazard way in which many of their

teachers go about their business. Student impatience, if nothing else, may cause the college teaching profession to identify and acquire those behaviors which any college teacher should practice for the sake of improving his effectiveness.