

Graduate Professional Education in the Preparation of Teachers

By LAURENCE H. SNYDER

When I came to the University of Oklahoma as Dean of the Graduate College six years ago, I brought with me a background of research and teaching in biology. I had had some experience in administrative work as chairman of a department, and as a member of various university councils and committees. I soon discovered, however, that in my new position here, there were many areas of university work with which I would have to deal in intimate fashion, but in which I was quite naïve. It therefore became my immediate concern to visit, one at a time, every department on the campus, and to learn at first hand as much as I could concerning the functions, the goals, the hopes, and the frustrations of each area.

I do not flatter myself that I have learned all I need to know, but I must say that people in every field have been sympathetic to my desire, and have given me every aid. In particular the staff and students in Education have done everything in their power to co-operate, and I express my appreciation to them. I have at least tried as hard as I know how to comprehend their viewpoints and to give them the sympathetic consideration which I have always found them to deserve.

Nevertheless, I feel peculiarly impotent in trying to discuss the topic which has been assigned me. After all, I had never been asked by any of my advisers all through my eight years of college and university training to take a single course in Education. This I regret. Such methods as I may have acquired I have had to pick up by observation and by reflection. I am sure that I would have profited by courses in methods and in the philosophy of education.

It is paradoxical that, although I would not be permitted to teach elementary or secondary students, I have been allowed and encouraged to teach at the very highest university levels. Surely some preparation for the actual process of teaching could have helped me, and would help others.

What I have to say, then, comes from the viewpoint of an outsider, an observer, but one who is keenly interested in the

progress of education, both with and without the capital E.

These are days when professional education is being widely and freely criticized. Resentments which had long smoldered have now burst into flame in such articles as those by Fuller and by Bestor. I trust that each one of you has read these and similar articles, and that each of you has pondered deeply over them.

Each of you must be seriously concerned over criticisms such as are expressed so freely these days. Dean Rackley and I must be equally concerned. How shall such criticisms be answered? I do not believe that they can be shrugged off. The answer must come from within the profession, after careful soul-searching and serious contemplation.

The first requisite is to have an abiding faith in the inherent worth and dignity of the teaching profession. Unless you yourselves feel that there is no calling more worth-while or more deserving of the highest respect of your fellow-men, you can not make progress in obtaining that prestige and respect. Your professional curricula are dignified here with the rank of a college. Graduate training leading to the highest possible degree is offered you. The best faculty we are able to obtain is put at your disposal. It is up to you as students to round out the picture by being willing to buckle down to difficult mental problems when they are presented to you, or if perchance they are not presented, to identify for yourselves such problems, which are always inherent in any field, and to tackle them.

Is it true, as is so often said, that you are interested only in technics and methods, and not in subject matter? Is it true that you do not need to know what to teach, but only how to teach? Is it true that knowledge of a foreign language and a first-hand acquaintance with the literature of another people are inconsequential in a teacher's preparation? These are just examples of the many questions that are asked of me, and that I can answer only on the basis of what you as students actually do.

I have had the privilege of participating in the formulation of the new series of certification programs which were recently developed at the undergraduate level. There was close co-operation between your faculty and the people in the arts, the sciences, and the humanities, and I believe that the undergraduate programs are quite satisfactory. Do you, then, as graduate students, continue such a well-balanced program? I am not certain that I could give as unqualified an affirmative answer to this question. Out of 340 people who took the degree of Master of Education at the 1953 summer Commencement, 326 had all their graduate work in education. Only 14 took work in the subject matter of their teaching fields.

I am frequently criticized for this state of affairs, and I often find it difficult to answer the criticism effectively. I am of course aware of several reasons for the dilemma. Too many students enroll on the campus only after they have had extension work, or transfer work, or both. The remaining hours must frequently be used in the fulfillment of requirements in Education. Then, too, many of our graduate students want to pursue the avenue of administration, and hence legitimately cut themselves off from subject matter in specific teaching fields. Again, I fear that too often a student simply shrinks from the examination on subject matter which must be taken as part of the master's examination if a minor in a teaching field is presented. I am also aware that many of the teaching-field courses which are offered in the summer do not seem to be suitable for your needs. In fairness it should also be said that when a teacher occasionally decides to take an advanced degree in the teaching field itself, the teaching field department does not send the student to Education for additional preparation in methods or philosophy.

Nevertheless I would be most happy if we could together work out some way whereby more than lip service could be paid by graduate students in Education to their continued development in the mastery of the teaching field itself.

Let me again assure you that I am quite aware of the tremendous importance of

methods of teaching. It was forcibly brought home to me on a recent occasion when we had a workshop here for girl scout executives. Among other things the executives had polled their charges on their various organized activities, asking them to rank these activities in terms of likes and dislikes. Amazingly, the results were as follows: the thing they hated most was "nature"; the thing they liked best was "being out-doors." Obviously the girls had been presented with facts about nature and nature study, but equally obviously these facts had not been presented in a way to be appreciated or to be of lasting intellectual or social value.

In addition to endowing the field of Education with dignity and professional standing on the campus, we have tried to do other things for you. Let me discuss some of these, and then talk with you a little about the things you might try to do for us.

One of the most vexing problems with which graduate students have been faced is the problem of prerequisites. Often a certain course outside of a student's field becomes of critical importance in the writing of a dissertation, or in rounding out his or her training. In the past, the lack of the specific prerequisites has effectively barred a student from taking the course, since, although he might audit for no credit, this ordinarily seems to the student an inconceivably foolish proposal. With the need for certain outside courses in mind, the Graduate Faculty has now removed all blanket prerequisites as far as the graduate office is concerned. If the instructor of the course and the student's adviser recommend that the student be admitted, and submit reasonable explanations for his taking it, he will be admitted and given graduate credit.

We have likewise removed the blanket rules on reduction of class load for employment. The discretion now lies with the chairman of the student's department or his designated representative.

We have provided a very full state-coverage in extension courses for your benefit. I am a firm believer in broadening the campus to the corners of the state. But I have one restriction, with which my colleagues agree: extension courses, to deserve graduate credit here, must be taught by bona fide members of our own faculty, and not by persons out in the state who do not live with and understand the general faculty and the institutional policies. Thus far we have been able to stand by that restriction.

Formerly we permitted you to bring to bear on your master's program eight hours of extension credit, or eight hours of trans-

fer credit, or eight hours of a combination of the two. Now we have broadened that to permit you to bring to us eight hours of extension plus eight hours of transfer, and we have made it much easier for you to get transfer credit close to home by our approval of the various Oklahoma state colleges for the offering of graduate credit.

We have permitted the granting of the master's degree with no written thesis. Moreover, in spite of the fact that you have no formally designated departments within education, we have agreed that the four required hours in some department other than the major may be met by four hours in some other area within Education.

For the doctor's degree we have agreed that the language requirement for full graduate standing may be met by passing an examination on a reading knowledge of the language, and not necessarily by ten credit hours on your record.

All these recent modifications of older regulations indicate the continuing and contemporary interest which the University and the Graduate College are taking in your professional advancement. Although I am frequently warned by people outside the field of Education that we are lowering standards in our graduate education degrees, I do not feel that we have done so. I can defend every action we have thus far taken.

There are, however, some suggestions which I would like to make to you, which, if they were followed, would help to meet some of the present criticisms of professional education. If it is too late for you yourselves to follow them, perhaps you could pass them on to your own students and others who will come here.

First, take as much of your work as you possibly can here on the campus. If we are to guide you through a well-rounded sequence of courses, and put our seal of ap-

proval on you with a graduate degree, we should have a sufficient opportunity to work out with you a complete program.

Second, enroll here as early in your graduate program as you can, preferably for your very first work. Only thus can you be properly and efficiently advised.

Third, broaden your program as much as you possibly can. Do not take all your graduate courses in education. Move a little farther ahead in your teaching field. If necessary, take some prerequisite courses, even though they may carry no graduate credit. I do not believe that any graduate program, however intensive and specialized, can ever give you all the facts and information in a subject that you will ever need. Remember that you can never feed a man enough that he will never be hungry again. Train yourself mainly in the ability to know where to look for and how to obtain the intellectual food you will need in the future. Remember that just as from a biological standpoint a man needs a variety of nutritional foods for physical health, so from the standpoint of world citizenship he needs a variety of intellectual foods for mental health.

Learn to respect and to desire a knowledge of foreign languages and foreign cultures. You will find such study surprisingly rewarding in many ways. Do not associate yourself even slightly or indirectly with the current wave of anti-intellectualism which is threatening to sweep the country.

Realize that your students are by natural endowment and by training, individually different. Do not seek to force them all through the same sieve. As a geneticist, I could talk for hours on this subject, but I will only urge you to develop a tolerance and a respect for individual differences.

And, finally, keep in mind that the ultimate aspirations of the Graduate College for its students might be summed up as

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

The question of the satisfactory preparation of teachers in our public schools has in recent months aroused widespread and at times acrimonious debate. In this address, delivered at the annual banquet of Kappa Delta Pi, July 21, 1953, Dr. Snyder, Dean of the Graduate College, discusses with appreciative understanding of the problems what he believes should be the standards of teacher education.

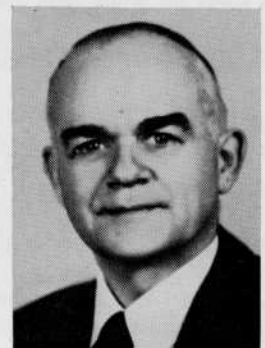


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