History Teachers' Forum

THE PREPARATION AND TRAINING OF SOCIAL STUDIES
TEACHERS FOR SECONDARY SCHOOLS*

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The whole process of the training of secondary school teachers of the social studies needs to be revamped. The value of the various courses in education and in subject-matter needs to be studied. Who knows whether educational psychology is more beneficial than general methods of teaching? Who knows whether a course in the history of the South is more beneficial than a course in the history of the old Northwest? What attempt do we make to diagnose the needs of a student before we sign him up in a course? The time has arrived when the college subject-matter teachers and the teachers of education should work in harmony. For the purpose of provoking discussion the following suggestions are made:

First, the freshman and sophomore years of college should be more or less exploratory. The student should be placed under the advisership of an instructor who will seek to know her. As soon as she expresses a dominant interest in teaching, a member of the department of education should become her adviser. He should lead her to an independent decision concerning her teaching fields, having her study the possibility for placement with various combinations, the requirements of the course of study of the state in which she is interested, the trends in these teaching fields, etc. Still under his advisership, the student should be sent to the various departments for further diagnoses and for a temporary plan of subject training.

Second, the subject-matter department should give a comprehensive test over its entire field. The test should be divided into units comparable to the specific advanced courses advised by the department for teachers. Concerning these courses the department should keep an open attitude and should seek to learn their value. Such tests should be validated by educational statistical procedures. Profile charts

*The matter here presented includes only the final portion of a paper with the same title which was read on Dec. 9, 1933, before a meeting of the History and Social Studies Section of the Indiana State Teachers' Association. The meeting was held in connection with the annual Indiana History Conference which occurred at the Claypool Hotel in Indianapolis on Dec. 8-9.
showing the results of these tests should be filed, given to the student, and sent to her adviser together with a carefully prepared plan for the student's future work in the department. If the student should be able to show good reasons why a second diagnostic test should be given, it could be administered at any time subsequently.

Third, the adviser should give the student a comprehensive test over the general fields of learning to determine where and what courses should be taken to give her a broad background of general culture. Such a series of tests should be constructed and standardized. They likewise should be validated. Such tests should measure oral and written English, scope of vocabulary, and attainment in the realms of science, language, music, literature, who's who, what's what, etc. As a result of this analysis a program should be prepared for the student to remedy her shortcomings here.

Fourth, since personality traits correlate more highly with teaching success than either a knowledge of professional subjects or of subject-matter, a careful personality analysis should be made either under the guidance of the adviser or of the psychology department. If objectionable personality traits are found, the student should be shown why these must be overcome before she can teach. Likewise, a plan of attack must be established here so that the student can improve, unless the case is entirely hopeless.

Fifth, a comprehensive test over the field of education should be given and a program should be made for the student, she being a partner in every phase of this activity.

Sixth, the student should now begin her work of teacher-training. She should understand that she must satisfy both the subject-matter department and the education department of her ability to teach before being permitted to have charge of a high school class in supervised teaching. To attain this distinction might take approximately only three years for a few, four for some, and five or longer for most students. It would not be a matter of time or of semester hours and credit points, but of attainment.

Seventh, the supervised teaching semester should be spent largely in the high school. Observation and teaching should be done in more that one class—preferably in classes of differing abilities and of different subjects for which the teacher
has prepared to teach. She should be brought into the sponsorship of one or more clubs and into contact with all of the duties of a teacher. On this level of training she must be rated favorably by three agencies: the subject-matter departments in which she has prepared to teach; the education department; and the supervisory and administrative staff of the high school.

Eighth, having succeeded in her work in supervised teaching, the prospective teacher would now be ready for an internship of at least one year. In this she should prove herself a success before the school that prepared her, after which, with the approval of her work by state and local supervisors, she should be recommended for a three-year term license renewable at intervals upon satisfactory evidence of success and growth.

Various states are considering placing a limit upon the number of teaching certificates issued annually in accordance with the needs of the respective commonwealth. Such a scheme has been suggested for Indiana. It contemplates a careful study of the teacher-training institutions and the allocation to each of a definite number of teachers with certain teaching combinations. If such a plan should be approved, the institutions would be forced to adopt measures for a more rigorous elimination. Is not the time ripe to do something about the situation? How far do you agree with the suggestions of this paper? With which of these do you disagree? Why? What would you do about it?

In conclusion, permit me to say that it is your and my opportunity to push the educational frontier beyond its present narrow limits. Today our problem is common just as it was in the eighteenth century. We believe in the value of the social studies and we want good teachers. Our problem is not one of fewer hours in education as a leading mathematician of this state would have us believe; neither is it a problem of fewer hours in history as another friend of mine recently suggested. Ours is a struggle in the interest of humanity and to this end I invite your frank discussion, your correspondence, and your sincere efforts in working out a cooperative plan.