

TRAINING THE ELEMENTARY STUDENT-TEACHER IN CURRICULUM CONSTRUCTION

Introduction—Steps in Curriculum Construction

THE leaders in curriculum construction maintain that the curriculum involves all the experiences children have in the process of living or education. If this be true, then all curriculum making should involve four steps:

1. Getting a common basis for thinking in education, such as:
 - a. Common principles in education
 - b. Common understanding of educational terminology
 - c. Common evaluation of educational procedures
 2. Setting up goals, purposes, or objectives for education
 3. Planning activities to carry out these purposes
 4. Actual testing, checking, and revision of results by teaching these plans
- I. *Getting a Common Basis for Educational Thinking and Setting Up Purposes*

The aim of this paper is to explain the method used at the Harrisonburg State Teachers College in giving students experience in these four steps. In our training school we have two groups of elementary students—a large group who are working for the two-year normal professional certificate and a small group who are working for the Bachelor's degree. Naturally, there is a difference in the educational background given these two groups. One prerequisite for student teaching in the two-year curriculum is a course in the Organization of Materials for Teaching. This class comes in the spring quarter of the freshman year and aims to help the student prepare materials for teaching. The first part of the course is a summary of educational philosophy, which has grown out of

experiences in reading for courses in education and in observations in the training school during the first two quarters. As a result of this study the students have a common basis for understanding the organization of curriculum materials.

The second part of this course is the actual study and organization of a unit around some center of interest. The student begins at once a collection of various kinds of materials which will aid her in carrying out the work of the grade she is interested in. Methods of filing pictures, clippings, class notes, summaries of readings, pamphlets, and bibliography cards are worked out by the students. The goals for teaching and units of work for each grade are discussed at length and observations in the training school are given. Thus many examples of various kinds of work in the elementary school are studied and evaluated. The class then breaks up into groups or committees according to grade placements for student teaching. Each group works out in detail a unit suited to the grade in which the members are to teach. Usually all the class work is on one topic or center of interest, such as Communication or Transportation. Keeping the class at work on a common problem affords opportunity for definite understanding of the discussions which take place. Occasionally the student will teach this unit in the training school, but usually she does not. It merely serves as a model or guide for her when she makes the one she does teach.

As the work of the unit progresses, the students have conferences with the supervisor of the grade the group is making the unit for, so as to keep in direct touch with the children. Several unit outlines are discussed, but in their actual organization the freshmen all use one outline in order to facilitate the judging of units in class meetings. These outlines are revised each year by the instructors of the course and the

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supervisors to fit better our growing conception of activity organization.

Besides making this unit, the group studies many others already prepared by student teachers and members of former Organization classes. Each student also begins an individual unit which she will probably teach in the training school the following year. Time does not permit her to complete this unit in detail, but her interest is aroused so that during the summer she adds to it and to her collection of pictures and other materials. By the time she teaches she has a fairly good collection of these and a rather definite idea of what she is to teach.

The prerequisite for students at senior level is an advanced course in the Organization of Materials. The first part of this course is similar to that for the freshmen except that the seniors are required to read much more widely in the philosophy of education and to make more systematic observations in the training school. Thus a thorough review of philosophy and of the techniques of teaching is secured. By this means their methods for evaluating teaching procedures are more highly developed. Each student makes out a unit which she will teach either in the winter or spring quarter of that year. Throughout this course these students also have conferences with the supervisor and make definite studies of children they will teach. The collection of materials which these students have assembled during their first three years is improved upon and added to. They are also given much practice in making summaries and excerpts and in filing them systematically. The instructor of this course this fall has decided to use for the unit organization Dr. Florence Stratemeyer's outline found in her book, *Effective Use of Curriculum Materials*. The result of this trial will be useful to the instructors who revise the outline in the spring for the freshman course. Some of the students in

this class who have already had student teaching in their sophomore year work in committees with the students who are preparing to teach. They do the same observation work, help organize the unit, and often watch the procedure as the unit is actually worked out in the classroom.

II. *Planning and Actual Revision of Materials During Student Teaching*

When the two-year students come to the training school, their period of induction is three or four days longer than that of the senior students. During this initiation period the unit or center of interest to be worked out is decided upon by the supervisor, the student teachers, and the children. If the student has begun the pre-plan of the unit chosen, she revises and completes it to meet the needs of the situation. In our present set-up, where we have five students to a supervisor a quarter, each student is responsible for pre-planning a certain phase of the unit. For instance, one student works on music and art, one or two on social studies, one or two on the tool subjects. These phases are assembled on the form chosen; the approach, story of the unit, and new leads are developed by the group in conferences with the supervisor. The phases each student plans are changed with the new unit. For instance, if the student has planned social studies in one unit, she will be responsible for some of the tool subjects in this new organization, with the result that the student gets a wider experience in curriculum making. If the unit decided upon is one that has not been planned at all, the students begin the organization from the very start. They are then given an increased number of hours off to go to the library and materials bureau to look for and to organize materials. The seniors follow the same procedure in planning as do the sophomores, except that usually the seniors have more material assembled for use.

When the unit has been planned in reas-

onable detail, the actual teaching begins. In our situation where we have a modified form of the activity program, each student is responsible for the teaching of the phases she has planned. Sometimes a student needs to get a wider experience in teaching and will then probably teach a phase some one else has planned. When this happens, the student who did the pre-planning will aid the one doing the teaching of this phase.

The work is then further planned in more specific detail each day, usually in the afternoon preceding the teaching of the plan. These plans are checked by the supervisor in time for the student to make all necessary revision before teaching them. Just after the lesson has been taught the student writes a summary or journal of what has taken place in the lesson and forecasts what needs to be done in the next lesson. These journals serve a three-fold purpose: first, they are a basis for judging the value of the lesson; second, they are a basis for the next plan; and third, they constitute a record of the development of the unit. The plan and the journal really make the in-course record. From this in-course record the outcomes, subject-matter outlines, and experiences in the pre-plan may be checked with the things that actually happen. For example—in one Communication unit the student pre-planned to make the newspaper the center of the work, but the children made the telephone the main center when the plan was worked out. These records are kept filed with the pre-plan, so that students may easily see the revisions which were made and the reasons for the changes.

Copies of each unit and its revision are kept by the supervisor and serve as a file of materials in the curriculum of each grade. A copy of the unit is also kept filed in the training school offices or in the materials bureau of the college. This bureau is a work room for all college students, but especially for the student teachers. Here are kept on file subject bibliography cards, pic-

tures, clippings, educational magazines, modern textbooks, and supplementary materials of various kinds.

These units also serve as a basis for the constant revision of the elementary school curriculum. The main purposes of this revision are: first, to give opportunity for the setting of better standards of teaching through the choice of worthwhile units and to care for the overlapping and omissions in the subject-matter content in the curriculum of the various grades. The supervisors discuss freely these curriculum materials and aid and encourage students to assemble materials useful in teaching each grade.

III. *Conclusions and Outcomes*

When the student goes into her own classroom in the field, she should have the following outcomes from this training:

1. A clear idea of goals or objectives for the elementary school
2. General and specific goals or objectives for each subject
3. Knowledge and use of a few basic educational principles
4. Knowledge of children's interests and needs
5. Knowledge of the subject matter to be presented or experience to be lived
6. Good files of pictures and other ephemeral materials
7. Two units of work organized around children's interests
8. Practical experiences in the development of the four steps in curriculum making

These should enable her to adjust herself to the work of teaching in any situation and to build up her own curriculum in the school in which she teaches.

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Those people are strongest who do not in an emergency let their emotions dominate their reason.—ARISTIDE BRIAND.