

ORIENTATION IN A TEACHER-EDUCATION PROGRAM

J. M. HUGHES

Northwestern University, Evanston

In developing the new undergraduate teacher-education program at Northwestern University, which was inaugurated in the fall of 1945, consideration was given to the relative emphasis which should be given to orientation. After carefully analyzing a number of studies on college orientation courses, the books prepared to serve as texts in such courses, and the efforts of other universities to provide such courses, it was concluded that the two principal aims responsible for offering such courses, namely, that they give the student perspective and afford teachers a basis for guidance, could be achieved through a complete, well-balanced curriculum in which courses specifically dedicated to "orientation" were not offered.

As the new program was finally worked out, study is divided into unit courses, and the four-year teacher-preparation program is comprised of sixteen units. Eight of these are of the "integrated" type. In other words, they are concerned with large cultural areas, cut across traditional subject-department lines and utilize a staff of instructors representative of the best scholarship in their respective fields. At the completion of his four-year program of study, the student will have had an opportunity to develop broad understandings and skills. He will be "at home" in his physical world and in his social environment, equipped to seek his fullest possible self-expression in literature, philosophy, music, the arts, and scientific exploration.

Organization of the teacher-education program at Northwestern, then,

reflects the viewpoint that orientation is not something which begins and ends at a certain time in a student's life or can be pigeon-holed. It is a continuous process. Nor is it something which the student can achieve under the guidance of a single person or a small group of faculty persons. It requires a number of teachers and it calls for teachers who have scholarly competence equivalent to that possessed by those who teach most advanced courses in a given field.

As students who enter the teacher-education program have made education their professional choice, their problem differs from that of other entering college students in that they need specific orientation to this definite professional area. Such orientation should be continuous and should be a part of the entire four-year program, just as orientation to other large cultural areas is achieved through the liberal education aspects of the whole four-year program. It follows, then, that professional training should begin in the freshman year and continue throughout the entire college career. Adequate professional orientation is basic to realization of maximum potentialities in college life.

In designing the freshman professional course at Northwestern, the more accepted principles of curriculum construction serve as guides. Factors of motivation are capitalized. The course requires the services of a group of instructors, so it is organized in a logical sequence of units to provide maximum continuity. The objectives for each unit

are stated in clear-cut terms, and the content and learning experiences are carefully selected to realize these objectives. Materials are screened so that only that which is relevant and significant to the student is included. Applications are concrete and constitute a logical part of each unit. Wide varieties of methods and aids are employed. Early analysis of the needs of each individual student forms the basis for immediate remedial treatment. Finally, complete records of the activities and effectiveness of each unit are made as a guide to future offering of the course.

The year's professional study, called "An Introduction to Personal and Professional Development," begins with a consideration of those needs which are occasioned by the student's adjustment to a new institutional environment. This involves an acquaintance with the university community, the wider community in which it is situated, some of their resources, and how they may best be utilized by the student. Emphasis is placed on assisting students to meet individual needs in such areas as health, recreation, and communication.

This year's course is planned from the viewpoint that, when a professional course is developed in terms of the personal and professional needs of students, a wide variety of methods and aids must be employed, which, in turn, makes it necessary that a representation of specialists participate in the instruction. The course is planned by specialists and representative specialists teach it. At Northwestern, three professors representing teacher education, child development and reading and health education constitute the directing committee present at every class session during the first two quarters. This committee, augmented by specialists in such fields as visual aids,

personal poise and appearance, nutrition, occupational information and speech, plans the year's sequence and teaches the major portion of the first two quarters.

Since one of the basic needs of freshmen who are planning to enter teaching is in the field of oral communication, the third quarter of the year's course is devoted solely to building speech competencies. Students are placed under a professor of speech education. He has assisted in developing the course during the first two quarters, has worked sufficiently with the students to be cognizant of their speech needs, and has access to the resources of the School of Speech in meeting these needs.

The plan of the teacher-education program at Northwestern has been favorably received by the profession, and it seems that there is considerable agreement upon the validity of the approach. It reflects a trend in teacher education anticipated by the *National Survey of Teacher Education* published in 1933 and by later publications such as the Harvard Report on *General Education in a Free Society*.

Our experience with the new program leads us to the conviction that a teacher-education program planned in terms of segmented courses with student electives, and in which perspective is given through orientation courses, is less effective than a program planned in terms of areas, with students' choice limited mainly to the selection of teaching fields, but with individual needs of students recognized within the units. Thus, for instance, the Northwestern program sets aside a block of time—one-fourth a year's work—to be devoted to "The Fine Arts". Within this unit the individual needs and capacities of each student are recognized, but no student is permitted to omit

study in an area which is calculated to develop those intellectual and aesthetic resources that are encouraged by acquaintance with philosophy and the arts, and which hence is deemed essential to providing adequate perspective. Thus, teachers receiving this preparation will not be in the position of the two-thirds of public school teachers which the National Survey of Teacher Education showed had had no training in fine arts either in college or high school.

My experience with the new teacher education program at Northwestern University leads to several convictions. Offering courses designed to fulfill the broad, general objective of "orientation" is less

adequate and effective in meeting needs of students than offering units of work which are designed to care for different aspects of the orientation needs and in varying degrees. By designing a complete program to develop the specific competencies and understandings which are characteristic of the cultured citizen and the successful teacher in a given field, the need for orientation will be satisfied without more specific attention. Orientation cannot be achieved through a single course or even in the teaching of a single department. It can be fully achieved only through a well-planned total teacher education program in which the many agencies of a university are coordinated to discharge fully the teacher education function.