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The Language Arts Preparation of Elementary School Teachers.

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A national survey of 80 universities was made to determine their course offerings designed to prepare elementary-school English teachers to teach listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Survey questions asked whether or not the universities presently required certain specific courses in liberal arts and in education as well as whether or not such courses should be required. Liberal arts courses surveyed were foreign language, speech, oral composition, creative dramatics, written composition, the nature of the English language, American and English literature, and literature in a foreign language; education courses were the sociological and psychological bases of teaching, observation of children in schools, methods of teaching reading and language, children's literature, and student teaching. Results indicated that colleges required insufficient liberal arts work to back up the professional courses required. (Tables presenting data from the survey and a list of universities surveyed are included.) (JS)

THE LANGUAGE ARTS

PREPARATION OF ELEMENTARY SCHOOL TEACHERS

An address based on a national survey collected and presented by Naomi C. Chase, University of Minnesota, to the annual meeting of the Minnesota Council Teachers of English on April 27, 1963.*

Seven formative years of schooling: kindergarten, first, second, third, fourth, fifth, and sixth years, are passed by the child under the leadership of teachers prepared for their work under an ever-changing curriculum of teacher education. These seven formative years constitute the period of time in the child's learning in which he employs perhaps more broadly than ever again, all of the communicative arts: listening, speaking, reading, writing. Whether or not he gains power in communication during the elementary school years depends almost entirely upon the leadership of the elementary classroom teacher. The influence of the home and neighborhood constitute a worthy area of exploration, but recognition of the impact of out-of-school environment will need to be sufficient for this report.

The preparation of the elementary school teacher for the teaching of children in the activities in which they spend most of their school time--in the areas of the communicative arts--is our concern today. The influence of in-service and other post-graduate work constitutes a significant area of study. However, recognition of the values of such study is the limit of such consideration for this study.

*Survey to be replicated by the author in 1970.

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Our immediate concern is the pre-service college preparation of the elementary teacher for the arduous tasks of teaching children how to grow to the greatest extent of their abilities in the use of their own language: English as it is heard, spoken, read, and written. Certainly, we shall agree that taking a course is not equivalent to the complete knowledge of the field that the course represents, but today I shall try to bring to you a timely concept of the college preparation of the "English teacher, elementary school style!" This will be as strong a request as that made by either the scholar-educators in the field of science or of mathematics, and the request will come from colleges all over the country! It is the responsibility of the teacher of the elementary school child to do a large share of the foundation-building for a life-long development of the communication skills. How shall we help the teacher to prepare for the responsibility?

An analysis of the task of the teacher in the classroom has been made-- effecting the development of listening, speaking, writing, and reading skills. Let us assume that the content matter of the Language Arts will appear at the appropriate level of recognition and understanding; in high enough quality to deserve the acts of communication; in suitable interest to alert attention. These particular aspects of subject-matter suitability give rise to the topic of the first of the pair of areas that concern the teacher-preparing institutions of our country, that of "Subject Matter Preparation." The second is, of course, "Professional Methods Preparation." The first is the responsibility of the Liberal Arts Colleges; the latter is the responsibility of the Colleges of Education. Both are the responsibility of the field of Teacher Education whose personnel set up the curriculum of the student who is the "elementary teaching major."

Concerned about the proper alignment of these requirements are three committees on which I am present serving: (1) The Minnesota Council of the Teachers of English Committee on the Preparation and Certification of Teachers of English, Chairman Dr. John McKiernan of the College of St. Thomas; (2) the State Advisory Committee on the Preparation and Certification of Teachers of English, Chairman, Dr. Harold Allen of the University of Minnesota; and (3) the National Council Teachers of English Committee on the Preparation and Certification of Teachers of English, Chairman, Dr. Eugene Slaughter, Southeastern Oklahoma State College. For this latter committee I am the Associate Chairman with responsibility for expressing the point of view of the elementary teachers of English, and all elementary teachers are teachers of English!

After months, even years, of meetings and discussions concerning teacher preparation at the secondary level, on which there seems to be vigorous progress for reform and improvement at the present time in Minnesota, the consideration of the work of the elementary teacher is about to come into focus. A national survey of selected teacher-preparing institutions gives support to my own convictions about the problem, and today I am pleased to be able to present the most pertinent findings of the study completed this spring.

With the help of questionnaire responses from seventy-seven percent of a sample of eighty colleges of the United States selected because they were complex and multi-purpose in nature, because they have enrollment totaling over five thousand, and because they offer curricula for the preparation of elementary teachers, I am prepared to report in some detail the offerings, and opinions about gap areas in the offerings, of some of the greatest institutions in the country.

Let us begin with the first of the pair of areas surveyed, the Subject-Matter areas, with sub-heads one through nine.

SUBJECT-MATTER AREAS

1. Nature of the English language
2. Foreign language study
3. Speech
4. Oral composition
5. Creative dramatics
6. Written composition
7. American literature
8. English literature
9. Literature of a culture other than our own

About the preceding areas of liberal-arts study several questions were asked of the respondents. The first two are most relevant here today: (1) Do you require a course or courses leading to competence in the area? (2) Do you feel such elementary teacher preparation should be required?

Look first at the area of "Nature of the English Language." How many of those present do you suppose have studied the English language in college for the purposes of knowing language history, language description according to the most recent findings of linguistic scholars, language variations within and among dialects, and much else that can be learned about a living, changing language? Note the way the respondents replied to the question as found under the first heading of Table I. The differences in percentages among the columns tell stories that will vary in credulity with the reader. No one can ignore the tendency, on the whole, to encourage greater liberal arts preparation in English than is now available, at the time of this survey, spring, 1963.

Take now for consideration the Professional Education Area Surveyed:

PROFESSIONAL AREAS

1. Sociological and psychological bases of teaching
2. Directed observation of children in school
3. Methods of teaching reading
4. Methods of teaching English (Language Arts)
5. Literature written for children
6. Methods of teaching a second language
7. Student teaching

True, courses in methods in teaching a foreign language in the elementary school fall low in percentage of colleges requiring it, but there is some significance in the fact that any do. All other areas are high and this is to be expected. Some rather unusual relationships between "required" and "favored" responses may be caused by differences in interpretation of points on the questionnaire.

Table II reveals percentages of "required" and "favored" professional courses with figures considerably higher than those of Table I. Right here seems to me to be one of our serious problems in elementary teacher preparation: insufficient liberal arts work (Table I) to back up the methods courses (Table II). The implications may be "across the board" for all subjects and skills of the elementary school, but for the present concentration on English, the problem is sufficiently great to warrant concern.

TABLE I

NUMBERS* AND PERCENTAGES OF RESPONDENTS WHO REPORTED REQUIREMENTS IN CERTAIN ENGLISH LIBERAL ARTS AREAS TOGETHER WITH CONSENSUS OF OPINION RELATIVE TO WHETHER OR NOT REQUIREMENTS IN SUCH AREAS SHOULD BE URGED

Liberal Arts Areas Polled	REQUIRE ?		FAVOR SUCH ?	
	Number who reported re- quirement	Per Cent	Number who urged such requirement	Per Cent
Nature of English language	20	32	35	56
Foreign language	18	29	27	44
Speech	44	71	52	84
Oral composition	28	45	41	66
Creative dramatics	10	16	26	42
Written composition	55	89	57	92
Literature:				
American	29	47	38	61
English	16	26	30	48
Literature of different cultures	12	19	27	44
American or English	9	15	9	15
American and English	2	3	1	2
American, English, or literature of a different culture	3	5	3	5

*N = 62

TABLE II

NUMBERS* AND PERCENTAGES OF RESPONDENTS WHO REPORTED REQUIREMENTS IN CERTAIN PROFESSIONAL EDUCATION AREAS TOGETHER WITH CONSENSUS OF OPINION RELATIVE TO WHETHER OR NOT REQUIREMENTS IN SUCH AREAS SHOULD BE URGED

Professional Areas Polled	REQUIRE ?		FAVOR SUCH ?	
	Number who reported re- quirement	Per Cent	Number who urged such requirement	Per Cent
Sociological and psy- chological bases of teaching	61	98	59	95
Directed observation of children in school	55	89	56	90
Methods of teaching reading	59	95	56	90
Methods of teaching English	54	87	54	87
Literature written for children	57	92	55	89
Methods of teaching a second language	15	24	34	55
Student teaching	56	90	52	84

*N = 62

COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES IN ORIGINAL SAMPLE

University of Alabama
Arizona State University
University of Arkansas
Stanford University
University of California
University of California
University of Southern California
University of Denver
University of Connecticut
George Washington University
Florida State University
University of Florida
University of Miami
University of Georgia
Northern Illinois University
Northwestern University
Southern Illinois University
University of Chicago
University of Illinois
Indiana University
Drake University
State University of Iowa
Kansas State University
University of Kansas
University of Wichita
University of Kentucky
University of Louisville
Louisiana State University
University of Maine
University of Maryland
Boston College
Harvard University
Central Michigan University
Eastern Michigan University
Michigan State University
University of Michigan
Wayne State University
Western Michigan University
St. Louis University
University of Missouri
Washington University
University of Nebraska

University of Omaha
Rutgers State University
University of New Mexico
Teachers College: Columbia University
Cornell University
New York University
Syracuse University
University of Buffalo
Duke University
University of North Carolina
Kent State University
Miami University
Ohio State University
Ohio University
University of Akron
University of Cincinnati
University of Dayton
University of Toledo
Oklahoma State University
University of Oklahoma
University of Tulsa
Oregon State College
University of Oregon
Pennsylvania State University
Temple University
University of Pennsylvania
University of Pittsburgh
University of Puerto Rico
State University of South Dakota
University of Tennessee
North Texas State College
Southern Methodist University
Texas Christian University
University of Houston
University of Texas
Brigham Young University
University of Utah
Utah State University
University of Virginia
Washington State University
West Virginia University
University of Wisconsin