

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 066 096

FL 003 491

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TITLE An Open Letter to New Student Teachers.
NOTE 7p.

EDRS PRICE MF-\$0.65 HC-\$3.29
DESCRIPTORS Instructional Program Divisions; *Language
Instruction; Language Teachers; *Modern Languages;
*Student Teachers; *Student Teaching; Teacher
Education; *Teaching Methods

ABSTRACT

Practical advice is offered to the prospective practice teacher in this article. Comments focus on public relations, instructional materials, teaching methods, dress standards, student evaluation, and student-teacher relationships. (RL)

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AN OPEN LETTER TO NEW STUDENT TEACHERS

As a supervising or a college evaluating teacher, familiar with advising students beginning their practice-teaching in a foreign language, I have often asked myself where, in the absence of an experienced counselor in this specific and important field, could the cadet go for detailed information. It is in the light of this question that the following lines of guidance are here offered. The suggestions, which might be considered minimal, are presented in two sections; the first, treats of the essential things a student-teacher should do before starting his training; the other, presents specific regulations to follow during the actual period of internship, be it eight or ten weeks, or even a full semester.

Of primary importance is the cadet's first introduction to his sponsoring, coordinating or critic teacher -- whatever title is considered regionally appropriate. He should write or telephone for an appointment to visit the school to which he has been assigned well in advance of the period of his apprenticeship.

At this first visit, the student-teacher should learn the physical layout of the school -- where the library, gym, A-V room, foreign language rooms, etc., are located -- and meet the people with whom he will work. At this time it is also highly advisable to get from his sponsor teacher the following information: Number of classes to be taught, class size, titles of all textbooks and language materials used in the classes. He should find out what method of teaching is used in the foreign language -- traditional, aural-oral or a modification of either form -- and what type

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of class-grouping is followed. If a laboratory is part of the language program, a sine qua non is an early familiarity with its operation. Before leaving the school that day, it would be wise to borrow the school handbook and all class materials; the latter should be closely studied to inform him of the classwork previously done, and, too, with this available material the student-teacher can begin formulating lesson plans for the time when his teaching begins.

Good classroom discipline or a modern, acceptable and pragmatic form thereof is certainly an important corollary to good teaching; hence the teacher-trainee should learn what line of correction is followed. Does the teacher himself treat all types of infractions within or without the class, or are such cases referred to the sponsor teacher or head of the language department? In many instances, it is necessary to make all referrals to the guidance department or to the dean's or counselor's office. At this time the student-teacher might well formulate some personal guide-lines for dealing with problem behavior. Above all, he must not lose his temper, flounce from the room or indulge in any other dramatic nonsense which will cost him dearly in subsequent classes. The practice-teacher should be advised, too, at which one of these offices he can get additional assistance for students' academic problems.

Bear in mind that the young people of this technological age are very candid in their opinions, individualistic in their attitudes, maintain a "civil-rights" position on the importance of their own "now" style and already knowledgeable and worldly wise in subject matter considered tabu only a few years past; and keep uppermost in mind that today's students are also an enviable lot because of their many social and economic

advantages. Because of these factors, they will assess the "new teacher," closely and often identify with and as often respect him. Needless to say, such measures of deference and identity can be established through manner of deportment, speech and impeccable personal grooming. It would be advisable to seek advice on such points before that important first meeting. If the schools' officials are non-committal on dress, hair-styling, cut and growth of beards, sideburns, etc., let a conservative and practical philosophy be your guide.

Once the student begins his actual teaching, there are numerous points to consider. One of the most important is that of carrying out fully all obligations to the coordinating teacher, the students and the school. It has often been said that practice-teaching is a full-time job and should be extended to a full year so that the student-teacher may gain the experience and assurance so necessary for growth and improvement in teaching. But again, time being of the essence, every minute of the minimal eight-week period must be carefully spent. It is during this period that the trainee works very closely with the sponsor teacher; hence the first duty is to him or to her. In addition to the obligation of demonstrating a professional attitude at all times, it is important to note that other things are equally valuable. There should be an awareness of things to be done and an alertness in responding to suggestions and putting them into practice efficiently. Developing an awareness of things about to happen and preventing them from taking place have won for the circumspect trainee inestimable praise.

The student-teacher should consult frequently with the cooperating teacher as to the practicality of the respective lesson plan and understand

well in advance whether he is to try to be original in developing ideas or formulating and practicing teaching techniques different from those of his sponsor, and if he is, to hew the line.

When the cadet's own teaching program is less weighty, he should offer, as many times as feasible, to help the coordinator when the paperwork becomes heavy. Aside from making out the periodic report cards, correcting papers, updating students' progress charts, etc., remember that the language bulletin board and audio-visual equipment and materials will need regular supervision. These extra duties may seem endless and perhaps insurmountable to the neophyte, but with a growing experience and good organization, he learns ultimately to rise above this maelstrom of pedagogic duties. The following suggestions should prove helpful:

Let any work done at any time be accurate, neat and accomplished to the best of your ability; for the sum total of your work is here being closely observed not only by your sponsor but also by your colleagues.

Early in the program learn the pupils' names and achievement scores. Obviously here is a very good opportunity to establish an immediate and quick rapport with the classes. In addition to this, by giving students their first names in the language, a quick and pleasant liaison develops.

Occasions will arise when offers for academic and personal help will be requested, especially if the school does not have homogeneous grouping. Such requests should be granted. In specific cases, which go beyond the academic, the cadet may want to refer, with the sponsor's consent, the specific pupil to the guidance department for this special counseling.

If the school has a language club, be sure to take an active interest in it. While participating in the club's activities, show originality through suggestions and also enthusiasm for students' and colleagues' ideas alike.

Two important axioms must be mentioned at this point and practiced as long as the student-teacher

plans to remain in the profession: the first, is never use sarcasm as a defense ~~to~~ to discipline a student; the second, is to foster a sense of humor; rekindle it with new flares of wit whenever the embers are smouldering.

A most serious mistake beginners make is that of trying to be too popular with students -- his own or those with whom he has outside contact. Disaster can result if a cadet tries to be pals with the pupils. He must be reminded that he is on the other side of the fence; he is the teacher, the professional, and his conduct must be such as to keep their respect. Never give unwarranted grades, make concessions, do or say things which will jeopardize your position. Be fair in problems of testing and grading -- grading or not grading. To temper justice with mercy or mercy with justice has been the beginning teachers' bête noire. Be just and impartial in making seating arrangements, arranging a room for an A-V program, casting for the language club play, calling on students for answers, and, above all, in giving passing and failing grades in the course. In cases of doubt about pass-failure -- which is the student-teacher's responsibility -- be sure to check with the sponsor teacher as to the wisdom of your action.

Learn early whether or not you are expected to attend all or some of the school curricular and extra-curricular activities within the community. Final evaluation of a cadet's progress is often made on his absence or conscientious attendance at these functions and meetings.

A cadet's duty toward the host school is to help uphold its philosophy ~~whether~~ it be one of a high or middle academic standard or one that emphasizes sports and unallied subjects as a criterion of operation in the school curriculum. Loyalty to the place of your internship should be

of paramount importance. Personal opinions expressed openly or quietly to students or colleagues as to Why doesn't the school do it this way? or It would be better if... or In the high school I attended it was usually done in another way or Back in my college my professor said we were always to consider such a method of grading as totally unfair and similar open remarks must never be expressed. Let's be conscious of the fact that we are in a public relations job and that it is not up to us at this time to try to correct what is going on in the school nor to try to set right what we believe incorrect. We must not, as a student-teacher, be a critic. Tact and a will to cooperate fully at all times should be exercised.

Throughout the period of apprenticeship -- the most important one in the four years of a college education -- the cadet must remember that both the supervising and cooperating teachers control his success or failure. It naturally behooves him to perform to the peak of efficiency, physically and mentally. The transition from the passive role as student attending college lectures to that of a very active one, one comparable to the propulsions generating from a human dynamo, working five full days a week, eight hours or more a day, responding to a periodic bells or buzzers, getting "uptight" about many unexpected and frustrating problems and being forced to solve them to the best of one's ability, trying for some measure of control over scores of human beings, many of whom do not fit into any specific pattern mentioned in the pedagogical philosophies of educational textbooks, all this can be alarming to the tyro and make him "lose his cool." Be prepared to work hard with complete commitment; be ready to face some difficult and not ready-made situations; be pleasantly surprised if after a few weeks of teaching, the situations turn out to be delightful experiences because of a quirk of fate or your own good management.

Today the majority of the sponsoring teachers are well-trained, have experience in the specific language and culture of the people through travel and residence abroad and handle the language creditably. At the same time, the present generation of young cadet teachers is often surprisingly well-informed and frequently has enjoyed a semester of study abroad. On the other hand, if they are placed with a generation where oral command of the language is not praiseworthy, they must be exceedingly tactful and avoid correcting any obvious errors in pronunciation or grammar. Needless to say, the trainee must be well-fortified in the five main objectives of language teacher-training: reading, listening, speaking, writing and knowledge of the culture with a cultural understanding of the people about whom he is teaching.

Before closing this article, I would like to emphasize the following point: Prospective principals, supervisors and other employers in the academic field seeking your services will inevitably ask both supervising and sponsor teachers one very important question, How well did the cadet teacher perform in practice-teaching? The sum total of the merits and demerits of classroom work for that stipulated period can spell instant and pronounced success or failure. Understand, then, that practice-teaching is the most important experience in the prospective teacher's career. The outcome will determine, more than any other academic factor, your future development within this teaching fraternity.

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