

ACADEMIC AND PROFESSIONAL TRAINING OF TEACHERS.

I.

THE conflict of traditions and novelties, the confusion of anomalous elements, personal, metaphysical, and institutional, gathering about the theory and practice of training persons to become teachers, constitute one of the most interesting problems in the present educational situation. To call attention only to the more obvious and commonplace aspects of the problem, there is a group of institutions characterized by the term "academic"—the college, university, and graduate school—the aim of which is primarily cultural and scientific, except when it is professional in the sense that refers to the more clearly recognized or "learned" professions of law, medicine, etc. From this group of institutions teachers for the secondary schools and for higher academic and professional schools of all kinds, including training schools for teachers, emerge or emanate either as a sort of by-product inherent in the rawness of the original material, or else as prepared for careers as teachers through participating in highly specialized scientific investigations, which may be as far removed from the science of education as the "semasiological changes in the pronoun *ipse*" are removed from the changes that are going on in the particular *ipse* of the youth who is to fall under the tutelage of the academically trained instructor. Then there is another group of institutions, comprising the normal or professional training schools for teachers, which is for the most part entirely distinct from the academic group, and which aims to equip an entirely different corps of prospective teachers, for a sharply defined and very large section of the school system, the grammar and primary grades. In this group of institutions the emphasis falls, not on independent and disinterested scientific investigation, but (1) on the storing up of predigested facts to be fed out a little

later to the growing minds of children; (2) on instruction in special methods and practical devices, presented, it is quite possible, deductively and authoritatively by experienced teachers, and accepted or shed, as the case may be, with too little independent inquiry and reflection on the part of the students; and (3) on training through "practice work" in the technique of teaching and schoolroom management. Over the whole is sometimes decently draped, sometimes inspiringly floated, a philosophy of education.

It is difficult to give a brief and general account of the normal- or training-school situation that shall be appreciative of the progressive factors in the situation, often peculiar to some locality or institution, and at the same time aware of the narrowing, wooden, treadmill round of learning to teach, learning to teach, which, like the "circular reaction" described by a contemporary psychologist, seems calculated to succeed in perpetuating a certain fixed condition of things, long after the forces of civilization have created a new landscape and moved on to a broader field of action. But I imagine few, if any, readers would patiently accompany further attempts to describe the nature of the separation between the academic and the professional training of teachers. The separation is so obvious that it is little short of commonplace. We are so used to the separation that we overlook, or complacently take for granted, its striking inconsistencies, such as are apparent, if one is willing to see them, when the educational situation is practically conceived of as cut in two in the middle, one section being manned by teachers who started out with the minimum of training in education, the other by those who have had the minimum of education in the course of their training. And why not? Is it not perfectly obvious, some would say, that a grade teacher should have had a normal-school training, a high-school teacher a college education, and a college teacher graduate study? The notion of a hierarchy, of a graded series of steps arranged in the form of a pyramid, seems always to have exerted a strong fascination over certain types of mind. Perhaps it stimulates a sense of emotional exaltation, of unques-

tioning peace and security. This must be true of an educational hierarchy, no doubt, as well as of other kinds, architectural, ecclesiastical, military, political, and metaphysical, that might be mentioned.

I do not wish to imply that the obvious contradictions in the existing methods of training teachers have not been frequently pointed out and commented upon. It is partly because of a growing consciousness of the anomalous elements in the situation that we come upon another source of confusion, namely, the disposition to meet the difficulty by simply combining the two forms of training. A teacher, no matter where he is to teach, must have had both academic and professional training. A teacher must have had the sum of certain courses in subject-matter, plus certain courses in method and technique, plus the drapery or flag of a philosophy of education. On the face of it, a perfectly practical and common-sense solution this! Match the subjects to be taught with subjects in the training course; add a judicious supply of methods and technique; and shake well—either the mixture, the drapery, or the flag, as the case may be. It may seem captious to inquire into this form of solution. It is so simple, so ingenuous, so comprehensive. But it involves one or two implications or assumptions, I believe, that will bear looking into.

First, there is the implication that during the time a student is engaged in learning a subject given as an academic course his mind is so much taken up with the subject itself that no thought of how to teach the same can enter in. Accordingly, what a course in the pedagogic method of a given subject-matter should do is to cause the student who has been over the ground merely as a learner to reflect upon the steps he took as a learner, and thus develop the proper methods of presenting or teaching the subject. In this way every academic course would be matched by a pedagogic course in the same subject. This certainly appears to be an improvement over the pedagogic course that simply imposed itself upon the student and the subject-matter from the outside; and yet there are reasons for believing that the improvement is more fancied than real.

Is it possible, it should be asked, for a student who is old enough to begin a teacher's training course to recall the earlier mental stages he passed through in learning any of the various subject-matters? How he felt and thought and what he did while he was mastering the elements of arithmetic, say, or of geography, or even of the subjects pursued in the academic curriculum—is it likely that he can recollect all this with sufficient accuracy and completeness to be of material service in laying out methods of teaching these subjects? But supposing that a student were able to do this, of what avail would such recollections be in arriving at methods of teaching that were desirable and proper? It is conceivable rather that the more clearly he remembered just how *he* learned a given subject, the more likely he would be to work out a method correspondingly narrow and rigid, a copy or imitation of his own method of learning or of being taught, another case of the “circular reaction.” We are somewhat familiar with exhortations to teach spelling, for example, or arithmetic, in the good old way we used to learn it.

Again, one who is led to recollect the earlier stages of his experience in learning never gets himself completely into the past, no matter how vivid the recollection. He sees the past experience always through the spectacles of present attainment. A good deal of sentimental and patronizing talk about child-life is due to this. In the more artistic and truthful expressions of reminiscences of childhood, as, for example, in Stevenson's *Child's Garden of Verses*, there is a peculiar irony which constitutes part of the literary effect. The self-deception has become conscious. But the more unconscious one is of viewing these earlier experiences through the medium of present attainment, the more likely is one to distort and misrepresent them, to be out of touch with the realities and genuine attitudes of children and of those who are learning. It is only when the index of the refracting medium is critically estimated that the adult can hope to approximate fairly accurate judgments, and these must, in the nature of the case, span wide lacunæ in the realm of recollection.

My point is that the learning of a subject, especially in the usual academic fashion as so much ground to be covered, does

not carry with it an implicit method of teaching worthy of the name, ready to be dissected out when the psychological moment arrives. It is, of course, desirable, even imperative, for a prospective teacher to reflect upon his methods of study and learning; but a method of teaching based upon such reflection is liable to be either vague and fragmentary or narrow and rigid, and in any case self-deceptive.

Of course, someone might say, at this point, that no teacher of special methods attempts to do what I have been criticising; that he offers instruction in better methods than those the student himself has followed; that what the student recollects concerning his past experiences in learning serves simply as a point of departure for the true development of methods. My reply would be that academic courses in subject-matter do not usually in themselves furnish the student with a basis for estimating intelligently the value of methods to be developed later in this fashion. Common-sense can, of course, in many instances be trusted to furnish a rough-and-ready basis of criticism; but even this rare virtue is not always proof against the unreflective acceptance of dogmatic and merely personal or empiric statements of special methods, or against the uncritical rejection of methods that do rest on a sound basis.

To sum up the point. Academic courses, such as would most likely be inserted in a combination training course, particularly those academic courses which throw stress on the mastery of subject-matter, do not implicitly carry with them desirable methods of teaching, ready to be dissected out and reapplied. Nor, on the other hand, does the content or subject-matter of such courses provide the student with a basis for estimating and criticising intelligently and independently the value of special methods presented in addition, however superior such methods may be. In fact, the better and more progressive the special methods—and I believe the experience of a considerable number of instructors in special methods would bear me out in this—the more necessary does the instructor find it to teach subject-matter in addition to method, even to students who are well prepared from the academic point of view.

I should like, however, to submit one positive statement regarding the bearing of academic work on the problem of method. There is no need of discussing the point that without sufficient grounding in scholarship, which may be derived through academic work, any form of method would be barren and scholastic; or the point that the more or less perfunctory following of academic courses would be equally barren and scholastic. The positive statement I should like to make is that the contribution of academic work to the method of teaching is precisely the one that has been utilized already in the training of teachers by advanced courses in the colleges and especially in the graduate schools; namely, the spirit of independent inquiry and investigation. There may have been an early and rather too vigorous crop of pedagogical cant in regard to "original research," produced by a precipitate anxiety for a showing of external and tangible results. But the widespread recognition of the educational value in the training of teachers of pursuing some line of special inquiry, of raising, defining, and attacking new problems, and of experimental work of all kinds and in all departments, is not only one of the most significant developments in what we call the "higher education," but is a direct contribution, if we would only receive it, to all educational method. I do not mean, of course, that it would be desirable to organize seminars in high schools, or to encourage every pupil in the grades to busy himself with some special problem and present a "thesis" at the close of the course. This would be imitating pieces of external machinery intended to be used for particular purposes, and not to be generalized in any such wholesale fashion. The contribution I have mentioned is more direct and practical, as well as more a matter of spirit. The point is that a student, even an advanced student, who is curious about some new fact, trying some experiment, or puzzling over some new problem, whose mind is playing about some line of inquiry, now baffled and confused, now plunging ahead with sudden freedom, is probably as near the attitude and experience of a learning child as he is ever likely to get; much nearer is he than any recollection could bring him, and much more likely in and

through the growth of his own mind to be in sympathy with the growth of another's, and thus in a position to stimulate and direct that growth. I am not anxious to defend the proposition that every advanced scientific investigator is *per se* a good teacher. I assume that a person has made up his mind to be a teacher. Granted this, and it will follow, I am convinced, that in proportion as he becomes a learner, a genuine inquirer, will he have a basis on which to found a sound method of teaching. The two must go together. Close the opportunity of electing more advanced academic work, with its stimulus and guidance in raising problems and in opening up new lines of inquiry and investigation; require the prospective teacher to feed upon prescribed areas of subject-matter for two years or more, fenced in and sheltered by special methods of presenting and developing the same—and you are in danger of starving the growth and movement of his mind, which is the only genuine basis of method, into a flabby tissue of facts, ill concealing a skeleton of rules and formulæ.

The conclusion to this point, or at least *a* conclusion, would be that that training school is best equipped on the side of method, to say nothing of scholarship, which does not rest alone on prescribed courses in subject-matter and special methods, but which provides in the sciences and in the arts ample opportunities of electing advanced academic work, in the direction of the interest and previous attainments of the student, *even when the subject-matter of such courses does not bear directly upon the subjects to be taught later.*

WILLARD C. GORE.

THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO
School of Education.