

EDITORIAL

Process and Content in Education

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For some years the professional program for the preparation of teachers at the University of Calgary has been heavily process dependent. While the initial "case" based part of the program had definite readings designed to initiate the student into the notions of inquiry-based learning, of the importance of respecting the identity and diversity of each student, and of the inclusion of each student into the learning process, the majority of the program let the professors do pretty much what they wanted in the next phases of the program. The program was organized around themes: learners and learning, teachers and teaching, curriculum design and content, and finally field-based experiences, sweeping to a close with a term of revisions on the themes and hoping for generalization. Much of the initial energy went into thinking of processes of education as rather like the negotiations in conversation of which Gadamer speaks in his book *Truth and Method*. But in practice whatever notions of inquiry were held by an individual professor were likely the notions of inquiry that held sway in that professor's classes, classes organized around seminars of roughly 15 to 20 students. Most of the case-based seminars tended to become something else, namely, "professional seminars," in which the barest outlines of what was hoped for in the education of the students became the norm. This was to satisfy the professorial claim to "academic freedom." And in the final term of the program, after the practica or field-based experiences were finished, at least according to government requirements for licensure, professors were encouraged to offer their own special topics of interest to the students as matters of choice for the students. Thus students could study aspects of spirituality or of computer applications to education, or ethno-methodology, or sociology of education, or English as a second or common language, and so on.

Thus a program that began with a striking picture of a new and necessary common content, a content that could be delivered by inquiry methods to each and every student, became increasingly a program in

which the processes were to some degree common, but the content wildly diverse in the case of each student, a content dependent upon which professors they happened to get during the course of their two year program. Clearly something had to give and what has happened is an attempt on the part of a new group of those creating a version of this program to add definite content throughout the program once again. The processes of acquisition will still remain largely what can be managed in a seminar setting, although the common content will now be delivered, or will likely now be delivered, through a series of common experiences not contemplated in the previous version of the program. There will now sometimes be lectures, lectures that could be delivered to groups of 200 students or so, for each division or course in the program. These might also be delivered on-line instead of face-to-face. An alternative version might have each instructor take the first hour of a three hour seminar to deliver the common content required for that portion of the program to the students. Readings will now become, or most likely become, common, though in so far as there is encouragement to individual inquiry they would be expected merely to be the minimum, not the absolute norm and requirement. As to the field component of this program, there will be some interesting new wrinkles and considerable returning to earlier pictures of what the professional preparation of a teacher requires.

Up to now the field placements have been organized around a particular picture of what a student needs rather than what is convenient for the field, that is, the schools and classrooms hosting the student. Students were given an opportunity, early on by placements in such settings, to realize that about 40% of any graduating class will be employed in non-traditional educational settings rather than in publicly funded classrooms. Museums, businesses, government offices, and a host of small, non-government organizations, hire teachers in large numbers. Those placements have disappeared and the return, however unrealistic it may be for actual future employment for all, is to the publicly funded classroom setting in large school boards. This year, a bad economic time for Alberta and for the City of Calgary which are usually in economic boom, the publicly funded school divisions are not hiring very many graduates and students are finding themselves needing to scramble. Of course this will change in time, but it may be a difficult few years for the students hoping to be hired. The return to experiences for students which will make them more likely to be simply extra bodies for schools in need of free help rather than experiences that can be discussed in

some detail in a variety of classes on their return to the university campus will be a change from student centered field-experience to teacher and classroom centered experiences. The return to a final term dominating field experience will mean that the last and most important experience that a new teacher will have will be their sense of the way it presently is in schools rather than a discussion of that way it is compared to what it might be.

In weakening process, as we plan to do, and settling on more common content, we will have fixed one of the generally accepted weaknesses of our present manner of preparing professional teachers. One suspects that in a decade or so we will have to work on the processes once again. The more things change the more they stay the same, as our French friends say more simply and eloquently. All we can do is to try, asymptotically as it were, to approach certain ideals and hope for the best.

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