THE NEEDS OF FRESHMAN ELEMENTARY EDUCATION STUDENTS AT DANBURY STATE TEACHERS COLLEGE: THEIR IMPLICATIONS FOR CURRICULUM CHANGE

A Report of a Type B Project

by

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CHAPTER I

PURPOSES AND PROCEDURES OF THE STUDY

To a degree unprecedented in history, the public schools of America are offering educational opportunities to all of the people. With this greatly increased and diversified population the school has been designated by the people to assume many new tasks in addition to its traditional ones. There are four major responsibilities which devolve upon the schools. First, children must be helped to learn the fundamentals of reading, writing, and arithmetic. Second, children must be encouraged to acquire a rich store of knowledge which constitutes their cultural heritage. Third, the schools must help children to grow in the necessary skills, habits, and attitudes essential to the continuation and improvement of our democratic way of life. And, last, youth must be helped to select and prepare for vocations which are socially constructive and personally satisfying.

This tremendous task of the schools is the responsibility of all who are engaged in the educational enterprise. In the last analysis, however, the degree to which it is achieved for each child is largely dependent upon the effectiveness of each teacher with whom the child has contact. It is the classroom teacher to whom the child looks for help and

for understanding. It is the teacher who must select from among the multitude of possible experiences those which are most appropriate for one particular group of children at one particular point in time and space. It is the teacher who must guide the learning of each individual in the classroom so that each may achieve maximum growth. Upon the success or failure of the teacher depends the quality of American education. It follows then that the education of teachers must be of superior quality.

The quality of teacher education programs is dependent upon the validity of the assumptions upon which they are based and on the wisdom and judgment used in translating these assumptions into learning experiences for prospective teachers. Upon what bases should a teacher education program be built?

Three Bases for a Teacher Education Program

There are three basic interrelated factors which must be considered as teacher educators develop programs by which to prepare young men and women to assume the vital role of teacher in our society. These factors are (1) the needs of those young men and women as they embark upon their program of teacher preparation, (2) the demands which the values and realities of the American culture make upon those who would be successful citizens and genuinely professional people, and (3) the nature of the learning process which determines

the ways in which students may grow in ability to perform the teaching task.

The Needs of Students
One Basis

The term "needs" has been widely and loosely used by educators. The interpretations given have ranged from an emphasis on the immediate and transitory interests of students to an emphasis upon those characteristics which school and college personnel hope the student will have acquired by adulthood. One emphasizes the present, the other the future; one deals largely with the individual distinct from the society of which he is a part, the other largely with the society apart from the individuals who constitute it. No one of these emphases would seem to be a sufficient definition of needs. Rather, all are essential to an adequate explanation of the term. Interaction between the individual and his environment gives rise to needs. The continuity of living would indicate that future needs of individuals are determined by the ways in which past and present needs have been satisfied. Havighurst, using the phrase "developmental tasks" to denote a broad category of need, brings these four aspects of need into relationship in the following definition:

> A developmental task is a task which arises at or about a certain period in the life of the individual, successful achievement of which leads to his happiness and to success with later tasks, while failure leads to

> unhappiness in the individual, disapproval by the society and failure with later tasks.[1]

Recent developments in psychology and allied fields point to the highly personal nature of learning and indicate that, though education is a social process, learning is an individual process based on the experience and purpose of the learner. Two closely related learning principles which have been established indicate the importance of determining the problems and concerns--the needs--which students face. These principles are:

1. An individual responds to a situation in terms of the meaning it has for him.
2. An individual responds to a situation in terms of his own purposes.

Snygg and Combs in commenting on these principles say:

> The important thing in the determination of behavior is not the objective description of objects and facts in the phenomenal field, but the meaning that those objects and facts have for the individual. This meaning is found in the relationship of the object to the phenomenal self, in the role which the object or fact is felt to have in the satisfaction of need. . . . [2]

Corey, in discussing the same principles in relation to general education, says:

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[1]Robert J. Havighurst, Human Development and Education (New York: Longman, Green and Co., 1953), p. 2.

[2]Donald Snygg and Arthur W. Combs, Individual Behavior (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1949), p. 210.

> People learn in order to reach goals or achieve values that are of personal worth to them . . . learning is undertaken because of purposes that are significant to the individual himself. In order to achieve these goals, he seeks experiences that he believes will enable him to learn what he must in order to become [what he aspires to be]. 3

These two basic learning principles would suggest that in the building of a program for potential teachers conscious attention should be given to the student, his past experiences and his present aspirations. They would further suggest that to realize the desired goals of any program, the curriculum maker should utilize all available knowledge about students and devise new ways to secure additional information. Three kinds of knowledge about students can be brought to bear in the planning of a program of experiences for prospective teachers. These are: (1) the needs of the late adolescent generally; (2) the over-all needs of the student body of the particular teacher preparing institution; and (3) the needs of each individual student. The first and second may be utilized in the preplanning of a total program of experiences. The second and third would suggest that continuous study of students, individually and groupwise, be carried on in order that the program may continue to be purposeful and meaningful to those for whom it is designed.

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[3]Stephen M. Corey, 'Psychological Foundations of General Education,' General Education, Fifty-first Yearbook of the National Society for the Study of Education, Part I (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1952), p. 53.

The needs of individual students define the starting point in an educational program. They do not define the end goals. 'The ends and objectives of education are social ends and objectives, having their source not in the purely private needs and interests of individuals but in the ideals and demands of society."[4] It is therefore to the nature of the society that we must turn for the second major basis on which to build a teacher education program.

The Needs of Society a Second Basis

The goals of education are social. The school has become the chief agent for the induction of children and youth into the culture. There are two major responsibilities which the school must carry out in order that this induction be successful. Children and youth must grow to understand and act upon (1) the ideals and values of the culture, and (2) the social, economic, and political realities of the society. For the curriculum maker this indicates that experiences must be selected which foster such growth. It further indicates that the means chosen must be compatible with the ends sought. Democracy will not be fostered in the authoritarian classroom; social understanding will not develop from a consideration of facts apart from their social context.

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[4]B. O. Smith, W. O. Stanley, and J. H. Shores, Fundamentals of Curriculum Development (New York: World Book Co., 1950), p. 162.

Quite obviously, those concerned with teacher education must give particular consideration to the values and realities of our culture for upon teacher preparing institutions rests a double responsibility. Prospective teachers must themselves be mature in their understanding of and action upon social values and realities. Further, they must grow in ability to help children and youth attain such maturity. Clearly, the teacher educator must examine carefully the ends--the knowledges, skills, attitudes, and behaviors--which the culture demands of its citizen-teachers, and the means--the selection, organization, and guidance of experiences--which will prepare such teachers.

The Nature of the Learning Process a Third Basis

The two bases for curriculum construction which have been discussed indicate the beginning and end points in program planning. The third basis--the nature of the learning process--clarifies for the curriculum builder the route which must be traversed between these two points. In the past several years much has been discovered about the general nature of learning. It is generally agreed that learning is a process rather than an end product; that learning is the result of interaction of the individual with that part of his environment which he perceives; that it is through experience that learning takes place.

> Experience is simply an interaction of a child, adult, or other living thing with an environment. When a student has experiences, he is stimulated and reacts. . . . Experience is simply seeing, hearing, feeling, tasting, smelling, and so on, and perhaps doing something else as a result. We learn because things happen to us, and we do something in return. There are no special kinds of learning that take place through other processes than experiencing. It is only through experience that we learn.
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> The significant point is that the kind of learning which takes place is the result of the kind of experience which we have.[5]

Knowledge has been accumulated through psychological research about the ways people acquire motor skills, factual knowledge, concepts, generalizations, attitudes, and other learned behaviors. This knowledge offers a basis by which to select, organize, and guide the specific experiences by which, in a span of four or more years, prospective teachers may be helped to achieve those skills, attitudes, and knowledges demanded of them as professional persons and as effective citizens in the American culture.

The Scope of This Study

Extensive thought and research have gone into the determination of the problems and concerns of late adolescents in the American culture. Such research offers a basis

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5G. Lester Anderson and Arthur I. Gates, "The General Nature of Learning," Learning and Instruction, Forty-ninth Yearbook of the National Society for the Study of Education, Part I (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1950), p. 25.

for a degree of preplanning of a college program. In order that this general information may be most effectively used, it is important that every institution concerned with educating young people determine the particular backgrounds of its students and the specific ways in which generalized needs manifest themselves. Evidence of the existence of specific needs on the part of many students presents one firm basis for the preplanning of a curriculum. Evidence of specific needs on the part of a few students affords information necessary for determining the degree and kind of flexibility which the program must possess and the nature of the guidance which students must receive.

This study is an attempt to bring together information about and to determine the needs of elementary education students at Danbury (Connecticut) State Teachers College. For purposes of the study needs are defined as student concerns, problems, and inadequacies of a personal, social, physical, professional, or academic nature as recognized by students or staff. Information has been gathered concerning those elementary education students entering Danbury State Teachers College as freshmen in September, 1954. The assumption is made that this group is typical of students entering the elementary program in the recent past and of those who will enter in the near future;[6] and that data about the

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[6]John M. Tufts presents evidence in "Development of Reading Improvement in the English Program at Danbury State Teachers College" (unpublished Ed. D. project, Teachers College,

background and the needs of these students may be used, therefore, insofar as they may be considered valid as a basis of curriculum development.

After gathering and interpreting data about this group of students, these data are translated into statements of need which are then grouped into categories of needs. From this translation and categorization the implications for curriculum development are indicated and specific recommendations are made. Modifications of these recommendations and suggestions for next steps in the process of curriculum development at Danbury State Teachers College are made in relation to (1) the realities of faculty interest, readiness, and time commitment; and (2) student opinion of the effectiveness of the current and proposed procedures.

No attempt is made in this study to deal with the specific goals of a teacher education program, the specific experiences which student needs and the demands of the society require, or the specific contributions which each discipline may make to the accomplishment of agreed upon goals. Though these are problems to which answers must be found before a total curriculum may be projected, they are properly the province of the total staff requiring the many

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Columbia University, 1956), pp. 27-35 which indicates that this elementary education group is very similar to entering elementary education classes from 1950 to 1954 in terms of reading ability and IQ.

talents of all concerned.

Procedures Used in the Study

Data used in this study have been collected in four stages over a period of one year. Each data-collecting stage was contingent upon the completion of that immediately preceding it.

The First Stage: Collection of Written Data

The first stage, comprising the first semester of the college year, was focused on the collection of written information about the group of elementary education students who made up the study population. These data fell into three categories: (1) entrance data, (2) information collected through two course areas, and (3) interim period planning worksheets.

The entrance data are comprised of application forms; high school recommendations; entrance examinations to determine intelligence quotient, knowledge of high school subject matter content, and reading ability; admissions interview ratings with faculty comments; and medical records from a physician and from the college health and physical education department. Through required courses in the social science and education departments the following inventories were administered: the Allport-Vernon Study of Values Scale, the Watson-Glaser Critical Thinking Appraisal, and the Minnesota

Teacher Attitude Inventory. Sociograms constructed in Psychology were utilized. Statements on the choice of interim project and the reasons for this choice were extracted from the Interim Planning Worksheet forms.

After bringing together these data, a preliminary analysis was made to determine from them the direction to be taken in the second stage of the study. Because the cooperation of the study population was required to carry on the second and third phases of the collection of data, it became necessary at this time to introduce the students to the study and the role which they might play in it.

The orientation of the freshman elementary education students to the study took place in the regular class meetings of the required social science course, a year course taught by the writer. At this time the students were informed that an effort was being made to find ways to improve their college program by getting their reactions to it; their criticisms of it; their suggestions for changing it; and the reasons for their likes, dislikes, and suggestions. In order that the freshmen might not become self-conscious, the emphasis was placed upon the program; no reference was made to their needs. The students were then asked if they were interested and would be willing to participate in such a study. They were further informed that participation in the study would entail their contributing a two-hour block of free time either individually or in small groups. The opportunity was

given them to raise any questions they might have after which they were asked to think about the proposal and make their individual decisions before the next class meeting. They were assured that failure to participate would have no bearing upon the social science course they were taking.

At the following session of the class all students agreed to participate in the study and indicated several two-hour blocks of free time which were available for meetings. They were asked if they cared to self-select their small groups or to have them arranged for them in the times they had indicated to be free. The students stated that they preferred to be assigned to groups. They requested that these groups be scheduled for meeting times and that the assignments and schedules be reported to them to assure that there would be no time conflicts created. This procedure was followed.

The grouping of the study population involved (1) division into two basic groups, namely, those who would participate in group conferences and those who would have individual interviews; and (2) division of those who would participate in group conferences into small groups. The names of all freshmen elementary education students were listed alphabetically by sex in order to assure that the small number of men students would be proportionally represented in each sampling. Every third person was designated to have an individual interview; the remaining two-thirds of the

group were designated to participate in group conferences. The latter group were then divided into small groups on the following bases: (1) time available in common and (2) at least two men students in any group to which men were assigned.

The Second Stage: Small Group Conferences

The second stage, carried out during the first half of the second semester, involved the collection of information from two-thirds of the study population through small group conferences. Five groups of from six to eight students met once for a period of one and one-quarter to one and one-half hours each. The conferences were held in a conference room which students were accustomed to use for informal committee meetings and in which a high degree of freedom from interruption could be assured.

At the outset of each conference the purpose of the study was reviewed; the students were informed that no names, either theirs or any they might mention, would be recorded; and a request was made that one student volunteer to take notes which could serve as a check against the writer's notes. Thus, during each conference handwritten notes were taken by a student and the writer. Following the conference both sets of notes were transcribed; the student's verbatim, the writer's with some few additions from memory of the conference

content.

The following discussion guide, based on data collected in the first stage of the study, was used in each conference:

1. Orientation program
   Whom did you meet? Students? Faculty? Your advisor?
   What things did you want help with?
   Knowing what you now know, what would you wish to have included in orientation?

2. High school background
   What has been of special help to you in beginning your work at Danbury?
   What have you been least prepared for?
   What has been your biggest adjustment?

3. Relationship of what you do to teaching
   Interim program?
   Course program?
   Other contacts through the college?
   Are there things you would like to be doing in relation to your chosen field?

4. Social activities - individual and groupwise
   What are you doing extra-class-wise now?
   Are there things you would like to be doing that are not available to you now?

5. Any last words?

Upon completion of the small group conference schedule, a preliminary summary of the content of these conferences was made. From this summary an interview guide was constructed to serve as the basis for the third phase of the collection of data.

The Third Stage: Individual Interviews

The third stage, carried on during the latter half of the second semester, was centered on the collection of information from the remaining one-third of the study population through individual interviews. Seventeen students had interviews lasting from thirty to seventy-five minutes each with most averaging between forty-five and fifty minutes. These interviews were held in the writer's office to which students were accustomed to come on both personal and academic business and in which a high degree of privacy and freedom from interruption could be assured.

At the outset of each interview the purpose of the study was reviewed; the student was informed that no names, either his or any he might mention, would be recorded; and the student was told that he should feel free to decline to answer any questions to which he did not wish to respond. Throughout the interviews detailed handwritten notes were taken by the writer. Following the interview the notes were transcribed with some gaps filled in from memory.

The following interview guide, based on data collected in the first and second stages of the study, was used:

A. Individual adjustment and responsibility
   1. What has been the major adjustment for you from high school to college?
   2. What have been your expectations for college?
   3. What expectations do you feel the faculty have for you?
   4. How do you use the greater freedom that you have here?

B. Study habits and problems
   1. Did you have any difficulties with time budgeting and time pressures?
   2. Did you have any difficulties with skills in reading for meaning? Note taking? Library usage?
   3. Are there any content area shortages which handicap you here?

C. General education recommendations
   1. Do you recognize a use for the work which you are now having?
   2. Are any of your courses interrelated?
   3. Are there things which you wish you knew more about? Which you wish you could study now?
   4. Do you see the need for electives in your program? In what areas?
   5. Should all general education courses be in the first two years? What of their relation to you as a potential teacher?

D. Professional program
   1. Where have you had opportunities to decide on teaching as a career? High school vocational guidance? Interim program?
   2. What, if anything, would you include in your program now in relation to teaching?
      a. How do you react to observation and participation with children? Through any particular course?
      b. How do you react to opportunities to gain more knowledge of schools and their programs?

E. Interim program
   1. How adequately did you understand the interim program? Its purpose?
   2. How well did you plan for it? Utilize it?
   3. Would you have any suggestions for all freshmen? For scheduling? For relating interim to course work in your regular program?

F. Social and extra-class activities
   1. Do you feel that you know others on the campus? Sections, departments, upperclassmen? How long did it take to become acquainted?
   2. Are you dating? on or off campus?

3. Do you feel at ease--know what to say, how to dress, etc.--in such situations as a tea, reception, formal dance, buffet supper, performing introductions, meeting new people?
4. What are the things you do through the college in your leisure time?
5. What are your outside activities? For work? For fun?
6. What activities would you like to see a regular part of the college program?

G. Student-faculty relationships
1. What kind of relationship do you want with faculty members? How best build it?
2. How well do you feel you know the faculty? All of them? Your own teachers? Your advisor?
3. What do you want from your advisor? Should advisors change?

H. Orientation program
1. How do you react to having:
a. A big-brother, big-sister system?
b. Initiation for freshmen?

I. Anything which you would wish to add or to emphasize about your program at Danbury?

Upon completion of the interview schedule the data collected throughout the college year, by all three procedures, were brought together and analyzed. The results of this analysis were translated into a statement of needs and these needs categorized. From these self-identified needs of freshmen elementary education students, implications for curriculum revision were drawn.

The Fourth Stage: Securing Staff and Student Reactions through Questionnaires

It was deemed wise to secure student and faculty reaction to the statement of needs and to the proposals for curriculum implementation. For this purpose two questionnaires--one to be administered to senior elementary education students, the other to the college staff--were constructed.[7] Both questionnaires were organized on the basis of the categories of need. Under each category heading the needs appropriate to that category were listed. Immediately following each category the proposed curriculum implementations to meet that category of need were listed.

The student questionnaire was administered through two sections of the senior Curriculum Materials course to fifty-nine of the sixty elementary education seniors. They were asked to respond on a three-point scale to two questions in relation to the needs listed in each category: (1) How much has the college helped you to meet this need and (2) how much responsibility do you feel the college should take for meeting this need? In relation to the proposed curriculum implementation they were asked to respond on a three-point scale to the question: How well do you think this curriculum implementation meets this category of need?

The faculty questionnaire was distributed to fifty-nine administrative and instructional staff members at

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[7]See Appendix C for copies of both questionnaires.

separate faculty meetings of the college and the two laboratory schools. Faculty members were asked to respond on a three-point scale to two questions in relation to the needs listed in each category: (1) How real and important a student need is this and (2) how much attention should the college give to meeting this need? They were further asked to respond on a three-point scale to two questions in relation to the proposed curriculum implementation to meet each category of need: (1) How well would this curriculum proposal meet the category of need indicated and (2) how much time is the staff justified in taking at this time to plan for this proposal? Forty-nine questionnaires, 83 per cent of those distributed, were completed individually and returned for tabulation.

With the return of both sets of questionnaires they were separately tabulated and comparative indices were computed using the formula

$$\frac{(\text{Little} \times 0) + (\text{Some} \times 5) + (\text{Great deal} \times 10)}{N}.$$

Comments made on both sets were extracted and analyzed. No additions were made by students to the listing of needs. Faculty members made several such additions. These were analyzed, and, within the definition of needs used in this study, added to the categorized listing previously developed. The student and staff reactions to the needs of students and to the proposed curriculum implementations were utilized as one basis upon which to make recommendations for next steps

in the development of the elementary education curriculum at Danbury State Teachers College.

The chapters which follow present the findings of the study. In Chapter II the college and community setting are described. Chapter III reports the descriptive written data, about the student population, gathered in the first stage of the study and Chapter IV the findings from the small group conferences. In Chapter V are presented the data from the individual interviews, the additions made by the staff to the listing of student needs, and the final categorization of student needs as revealed by the study. Chapter VI suggests the implications of these findings for curriculum development. Chapter VII describes the reactions of seniors and staff to the findings and curriculum proposals and suggests immediate next steps which might be taken in the elementary education program at Danbury State Teachers College.