

Special Ed leads the way

Dean of Education optimistic

Debbie Bodinger

One might be surprised to find a dean of education who's optimistic these days.

After all, many people seem to be disillusioned with modern educational methods and are critical of what they perceive to be a decline in standards. New teachers are having a hard time finding jobs because of budget cuts and declining enrollments. But Andrew Effrat, appointed Dean of York's Faculty of Education last summer, is optimistic, and quick to point to what he considers the success stories in his profession.

One of these is the area of 'special education': education for students who are 'special' because they have learning disabilities, physical disabilities, or even because they are exceptionally bright. "Great expectations were raised in the sixties," Effrat says, "and a lot were met but not seen to be met..."

Special education is one area, he says, "that can be seen to be doing things for kids..." Documenting



Andrew Effrat

these areas of success, Effrat says, "can help to reestablish the self-confidence of the profession, and the public confidence in what it (education) has been accomplishing."

Special education is a particular strength at York, Effrat points out, since there is a specialized programme to qualify teachers in this area. But Effrat is also proud of

the Faculty of Education as a whole. In particular, he boasts of York's "continuing commitment to consider the whole child in the whole context,"—to consider sociological as well as psychological factors in educating the child.

But doesn't this sound reminiscent of the 'progressive approach' that has met with so many criticisms? What about the call to go 'back to basics'? Are the two compatible?

Effrat thinks not. "I don't see that the humanistic goals that we (at York) have, aren't basic. Part of

Effrat: "We need to maintain a balance between structure and self-expression."

what we've learned is that you have to relate to the whole child to accomplish the learning of the basics. We need to maintain a balance between structure and

self-expression."

For Effrat, "Discovery learning and exploration may seem loose and unstructured, but they have an integrity and structure that promote not only the learning of a given subject but the learning how to learn."

As for the "decline in standards", Effrat challenges that it exists. "Studies I've seen," he says, "that looked at performance in students over three or four decades suggest that it would be hard to say that performance and standards have declined."

"You also have to remember," he adds, "that schools have been taking in new populations. They seem to be meeting the same standards while dealing with probably more complex populations and more complex subject areas."

What about the employment picture? With so few vacancies, how can he and the faculty of education, in good conscience, encourage students to look to education as a career?

"There is good reason to be optimistic," Effrat answers. "Ten per cent of teachers are expected

to retire in the late 1980s and the pupil decline will level off too."

Until then Effrat feels that York graduates still have reason to be hopeful. A survey conducted last year indicated that approximately 60 per cent of York education students graduating that year were employed full-time, and 22 per cent were employed part-time.

"Our people seem to have a particular advantage in the job market," he says. Part of this advantage, Effrat explains, is due to a unique feature of York's programme.

In other Ontario universities, students must first complete their undergraduate work, and then study another year for their B.Ed. At York students do their B.Ed. at the same time as their B.A. or other undergraduate degree. Students are in the school system gaining experience from the time they enter the B.Ed. programme (usually in their second undergraduate year).

"I think school boards appreciate the fact that they've been studying for three years," Effrat says, "that they're well committed, well practiced...they appreciate the maturity and quality of our students."

1800 search for jobs

No jobs for Ph.D.s in Canada

CUP

Daniel Maceluch

They're out there somewhere, about 1800 of them each year, scraping and scrounging for a job. And new doctoral graduates, fresh out of university, are finding that jobs, especially in the academic field, aren't as easy to come by as they used to be.

The doctoral candidates of the sixties and early seventies believed a job would be waiting for them and assumed they would be guaranteed a secure future, said Dr. Max Von Zur Meuhlen, coordinator of research and special projects for Statistics Canada. After all, the Ph.D. student was the prize of every university, and institutions tried to create as many doctoral programs as possible.

"The belief that education is a very sound investment was developed in the 1960's and is very much alive today," said Von Zur Meuhlen.

Recent Canadian and Ontario government studies show people who have their doctorate earn more than those who hold their bachelor or master degrees. The average starting salary for a Ph.D. graduate from Ontario was \$18,000 in 1979 and, at 96.8 per cent, they had the highest employment rate in that year.

But the surveys don't show that within three to five years there will be a vast surplus of Ph.D.'s. According to Dr. Von Zur Meuhlen by 1982 there will be a cumulative surplus of 3,200 Ph.D.'s in Canada.

Some experts anticipated a Ph.D. surplus in most disciplines twenty years ago. But Von Zur Meuhlen said no one was willing to believe the gloomy forecasts.

Since the early sixties, the output of Canadian Ph.D. graduates has increased six-fold, from around 300 to its present level of about 1,800 a year. At the same time, Canadian faculties also grew, from 5,000 professors in 1957 to 35,000 in 1978.

During the expansion years of the university, faculties could absorb large numbers of Ph.D.s. In fact, the 1960 and early 1970s witnessed shortages of qualified academics, forcing Canada to import foreign professors. The job

Only 500 Ph.D.s will receive tenure-stream appointments

market seemed limitless, said Von Zur Meuhlen. He added traditionally about 70 per cent of the Ph.D.s were hired by universities, and the government employed approximately 15 per cent of them.

Things have changed drastically since then, and early gloomy predictions of experts have proven true. Today, 2,000 Ph.D.'s graduate every year from Canadian universities. About 200 are foreign

or students who are taking a leave of absence from their work, so the actual number of Canadian graduates seeking jobs is around 1,800. According to statistics, in the best years, only 500 Ph.D.s will receive tenure-stream appointments and about 75 will get jobs with the federal government. The rest will have to look elsewhere.

Declining enrollment and massive university cutbacks are accepted as the reason for the declining number of university faculty positions available. But other reasons contribute to the dilemma.

Two-thirds of Canada's university teachers are under the age of 44, and the current annual attrition rate (vacancy by death or retirement) of 1.3 per cent is low.

This predominance of young university professors translates into a low rate of retirement and a limited number of replacement positions available in academia.

Consequently, Von Zur Meuhlen said more and more Ph.D.'s are being hired on as part-time or sessional lecturers, often on non-renewable or short-term contracts.

As a result, what North America is witnessing today is a vast nomadic group of disillusioned Ph.D.s in their thirties, peddling their knowledge from university to university, in search of the ever elusive tenure-stream appointment.

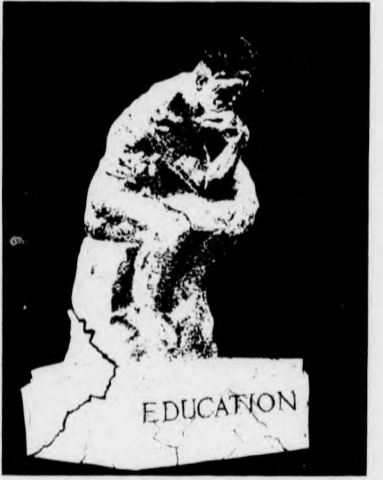
The problem surfaced years ago

in the United States. According to Donald R. Katz, author of a recent article in *Esquire* magazine on the American Ph.D. dilemma, Ph.D.s were once considered "as the most important members of a new technological era...society's only truth tellers, its chief moral officers, the people really in charge."

But today, academic jobs have been wiped out by economic convulsions, a sharp increase in births in one generation followed by a decrease in another, and an era of cost-conscious budgeting.

"There have always been failed academics who roamed from college to college," Katz says, "but among the current army are the brilliant minds of an entire generation of students."

Dr. Von Zur Meuhlen puts some blame on the Ph.D.s themselves



for not properly marketing their skills.

"The Ph.D. candidate, doesn't know how or where to look. He hasn't faced reality yet. The Ph.D., in the past, hasn't considered alternative employment opportunities and didn't develop special skills the government and private sector needed."

He said Ph.D.s should also be more geographically mobile and select disciplines where there is a demand.

von Zur Meuhlen said he is more concerned about the shortages and surpluses in certain disciplines. He said Ph.D.s don't look ahead to potential job prospects.

"That's why you have surpluses in some faculties and, for example, like in business administration or computer science, shortages," he said. There are 150 unfilled positions for management professors across Canada but Canada only produces on the average, 10 to 15 professors a year.

Von Zur Meuhlen is also concerned that universities have, to some extent, raised false expectations for their Ph.D.s. He said universities haven't properly planned their future and haven't informed Ph.D.s about their job prospects. He also said universities have acted in their own self interest encouraging doctoral programs, because the government pays the universities more for their doctorate students than for the others.

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