

BY RECENT GRADUATES

A Report On The Education Department

By PETER ROBSON

In January of this year, the students of the Education Department began to voice their criticisms of their courses and the professors that taught them. The chief means of making this criticism public was the Dalhousie Gazette. When the various articles appeared, the reaction of the staff did nothing to indicate to the students that their criticisms were in any way wrong. For a period of two weeks, at the height of the "crisis," it was threatened that those students involved would be dismissed from the school. This did not seem at the time to be the reaction of a professionally mature and responsible staff. In time, these threats disappeared, as reason replaced the illogical panic which had appeared directly after the publication of the letters. However, despite the criticisms, very little seems to have been accomplished, it is as if the staff discounted any criticism by students, perhaps on the grounds that because we had never taught, we could not possibly know what was really needed in a professional training course.

To avoid this attitude, I took it upon myself to draw up a short questionnaire and letter. This was sent to three hundred graduates of the Department of Education at Dalhousie, all B.Ed. graduates from the years 1965 through 1967. A total of sixty-six answered, with twenty-eight more returned by the Post Office as undeliverable. The overall results of this questionnaire are included here as Appendix "A", with tabulations based on a total of sixty-four. The remaining two answers are included in toto, as examples of the types of comments which accomplished the answers, and are labelled Appendix "B".

I would like now to turn to the results of each individual question, bringing in some of the comments which accompanied them.

All figures are taken from Appendix "A", and all comments are direct references to one or more of the papers returned. They are not, I stress, personal opinions expressed by myself. If there is any doubt of this, all answers have been kept on file, and I would be pleased to show them to any interested person or group of people.

There is no need to make an involved interpretation of the first question for you. Over seventy-five per cent of the students who had taken the course agreed that the course in History was less than useful. It is not of any apparent value in the practical classroom situation. It was pointed out by several people that although the course was of little use professionally, it was very interesting. Others took a much stronger stand, saying that the course was totally useless, and in fact was even a poor history course. I feel that this difference is due to a difference of professors, a variance in the presentation of the material. At any rate, all agree that the course is of no professional use, and is only valuable as a general education, as interest to the individual mind. It is my conviction, born out by the questionnaire, that if we are being trained for a

profession, then all courses should be of some practical value to that profession. General education can, I think, be left to the individual at this stage of our careers. It seems that this course must be altered drastically before it will have any place in a professional course of any type.

The answers to the second question refer to the course titled, at Dalhousie, Education 101, The Foundations of Education. They are almost as damning as the answers to the first question, as sixty-five per cent of the replies indicate that the course was less than useful. The discussion of the justifications of this course is the same as the discussion which accompanied the first question. It also must be altered drastically.

Next, take a good look at the answers for question three. This question concerns the various methods courses, the ones that are supposed to teach students how to teach. At the secondary level, ninety per cent feel that the course is less than useful. The overall result is that eighty-five per cent of the replies indicated that the course was not satisfactory. What excuse can there be for this? The one course on the curriculum which specifically applies to the practical situation is without a doubt the worst in the department. This course must be changed.

Question four refers to the courses in Educational Psychology. There are two offered, one for students approaching psychology for the first time, and a second for those students who have already had at least one course in the field. The answers are scattered, with a slight overloading toward the bottom of the scale. The comments on this course seem to suggest that the courses are of some value, but that mistakes are being made in the handling and presentation of material. One of the professors in the department has suggested that his course, psychology, should not be given in its present form, but that it should be broken up into several courses. The elementary teachers would take a course in child psychology, while the high school teachers would take a course in adolescent psychology. While realizing that this would require more staff, perhaps part of the problem could be solved by making these courses part of the Psychology Department, which already has a staff qualified to teach these courses.

Question five refers to the course in testing and measurement, with some references made to guidance. Again the answers are scattered, but with a definite overload toward the bottom. Over half feel that the less than useful. I was not able to reach any definite opinion about this course, because very few replies commented on it. They seemed instead to skip over it. I do not know why, but that in itself deserves examination. This course also must be altered, so that it will become more relevant to the students, because the material is so essential to the proper execution of their job.

Questions six and seven speak for themselves. The only specific comment received pertaining to practice teaching was the recurring one that the time spent in the practical classroom situation should be longer. The time this year was increased to one full week in the fall term and three full weeks in the spring term. This is not enough. We should be looking ahead, not backwards thirty years. Why do we not follow the lead of Simon Fraser University, where the practice teaching period is four months? This is just one more course which must be changed before the Education Course at Dalhousie will be at all acceptable.

Question seven refers to the four courses, Education 10, Education 11, Education 12, and Education 13. The replies seem to indicate an even distribution of opinion as to the value of these courses in the practical situation. I would like, at this point, to stress the fact that the course treated most favourably in the replies, that is to say Drama, was this year dropped from the curriculum. We must be careful, when making alterations in the curriculum, not to take such a backward step, but changes must be made.

The results of this survey leave one who is in the Department of Education at Dalhousie as well, undoubtedly, as any student who is considering taking his B. Ed. at this school feeling totally helpless. We are leaving the Department having, perhaps, derived exactly the same benefits, and being no more qualified to teach well, as those who filled out the questionnaire. From their comments, it appears that many of the teachers wish now that they had questioned more openly, and to greater purpose, the courses they were taking. If this is so, then hopefully those students who are planning on becoming a part of the Department will learn this important lesson: the sort of questioning attitude so basic to education, and yet so foreign to those who now inhabit the shacks on the corner of Oxford and Coburg, is essential in the training of a teacher, and it is their duty to ensure that this attitude prevails.

The course in Education at Dalhousie is, unquestionably, one of the easiest ways yet discovered to add many thousands of dollars to one's lifetime income. This is enough, at present, to mollify many of those disappointed by their year at Dalhousie. But, as this past has shown, the student attitude is changing. The faculty must be prepared to change with it. The changes needed could be easily made if the Department would only look outside itself, at the various systems already in use, and shown to be better than the one at Dal.

There is, of course, already one big change in the works. Education is to become a four year course. This will be of some help to the student. He will no longer have to endure all the terrible courses in one year, but can spread them out. This is not the progress to which I refer. Despite all this, I want to teach.

Please indicate your answer with an 'x' in the appropriate box. Please consider your answers carefully in the light of your teaching experience. Try to evaluate the course and course content, not the individual preference or dislike you may have had for the professor.

- My course in the History of Education was
 - very valuable
 - quite valuable
 - useful
 - slightly useful
 - of no value
- My course in the Philosophy of Education was
 - very valuable
 - quite valuable
 - useful
 - slightly useful
 - of no value
- My course in Methods (Elementary or Secondary) was
 - very valuable
 - quite valuable
 - useful
 - slightly useful
 - of no value
- My course in Educational Psychology was
 - very valuable
 - quite valuable
 - useful
 - slightly useful
 - of no value
- My course in Testing and Measurement was
 - very valuable
 - quite valuable
 - useful
 - slightly useful
 - of no value
- I found the Practice Teaching as set up
 - very valuable
 - quite valuable
 - useful
 - slightly useful
 - of no value
- My course in Art (Music, Drama, P.E.) was
 - very valuable
 - quite valuable
 - useful
 - slightly useful
 - of no value
- In your teaching experience what is the largest single problem you face from day to day. (If you cannot limit it to one then state the two or three most important)
- Were you led to expect this by the Department?
 - yes
 - no
- If not what were you led to expect?
- If you have any further comments which you feel may be of help to us or to the department please state them.
- What grade are you now teaching?
- How many years have you been teaching?

Appendix "A" Statistical Report

1. My course in the History of Education was:

Secondary Level	Primary Level	Combined
(a) 1 2%	0 0%	1 2%
(b) 5 10%	2 13%	7 11%
(c) 6 13%	1 6%	7 11%
(d) 17 36%	3 19%	20 31%
(e) 19 40%	10 63%	29 45%
48	16	64

2. My course in the Philosophy of Education was:

Secondary Level	Primary Level	Combined
(a) 3 6%	1 6%	4 6%
(b) 6 12%	1 6%	7 11%
(c) 10 20%	2 12%	12 19%
(d) 11 24%	3 19%	14 22%
(e) 18 38%	9 57%	27 42%
48	16	64

3. My course in Methods (Elementary or Secondary) was:

Secondary Level	Primary Level	Combined
(a) 2 4%	0 0%	2 3%
(b) 1 2%	1 6%	2 3%
(c) 2 4%	4 25%	6 9%
(d) 20 42%	9 56%	29 45%
(e) 23 48%	2 13%	25 40%
48	16	64

4. My course in Educational Psychology was:

Secondary Level	Primary Level	Combined
(a) 7 15%	0 0%	7 11%
(b) 9 18%	3 19%	12 19%
(c) 8 17%	4 25%	12 19%
(d) 9 18%	8 50%	17 28%
(e) 13 27%	1 6%	14 23%
48	16	64

5. My course in Testing and Measurement was:

Secondary Level	Primary Level	Combined
(a) 6 14%	1 25%	7 15%
(b) 8 18%	1 25%	9 18%
(c) 6 14%	0 0%	6 12%
(d) 17 36%	1 25%	18 37%
(e) 8 18%	1 25%	9 18%
45	4	49

6. I found the Practice Teaching as set up:

Secondary Level	Primary Level	Combined
(a) 8 16%	4 25%	12 19%
(b) 10 20%	5 31%	15 25%
(c) 15 32%	5 31%	20 32%
(d) 12 25%	2 13%	14 22%
(e) 3 7%	0 0%	3 2%
48	16	64

7. My course in Art was:

Secondary Level	Primary Level	Combined
(a) 3 38%	4 50%	7 44%
(b) 0 0	0 0	0 0
(c) 1 12%	3 38%	4 25%
(d) 2 25%	1 12%	3 19%
(e) 2 25%	0 0	2 12%
8	8	16

7. My course in Music was: - One answer only - Primarily level, quite valuable

7. My course in Drama was:

Secondary Level	Primary Level	Combined
(a) 5 63%	0 0	5 56%
(b) 2 25%	0 0	2 22%
(c) 0 0	0 0	0 0
(d) 1 12%	0 0	1 11%
(e) 0 0	1 11%	1 11%
8	1	9

7. My course in P.E. was:

Secondary Level	Primary Level	Combined
(a) 0 0	1 13%	1 13%
(b) 4 58%	0 0	4 50%
(c) 1 14%	0 0	1 13%
(d) 1 14%	0 0	1 12%
(e) 1 14%	0 0	1 12%
7	1	8

7. My course in Art (Music, Drama, P.E.) was (tally of cases where no distinction was made)

Secondary Level	Primary Level	Combined
(a) 3 12%	0 0	3 10%
(b) 4 17%	2 40%	6 20%
(c) 5 21%	3 60%	8 28%
(d) 8 33%	0 0	8 28%
(e) 4 17%	0 0	4 14%
24	5	29

7. My course in Art (Music, Drama, P.E.) was (tally of all courses combined)

Secondary Level	Primary Level	Combined
(a) 11 29%	5 31%	16 25%
(b) 10 21%	3 19%	13 21%
(c) 7 15%	6 38%	13 21%
(d) 12 26%	1 6%	13 21%
(e) 7 15%	1 6%	8 12%
47	16	63