

Most teacher education programs inadequate

By ROBIN POND

Robert Overing, dean of York's faculty of education, has stated that "teacher education programs with which I am familiar seem always to have suffered from a lack of integration and from an inadequate practice component." York's education faculty is attempting to rectify such problems.

Teachers' Colleges like Lakeshore or Ontario College of Education — are one-year post-graduate degree programs. At York prospective teachers work concurrently towards their B.Ed. and their B.A. or B.Sc. In effect, the one-year teaching program is spread out at York over three or four years. The advantages of this arrangement are obvious: student teachers receive much more actual teaching experience, and classroom experience is the most vital part of any teacher-training program. The student teachers spend approximately one day per week plus a period of at least two weeks at the end of each year in the schools. The schools used by York students this year were Etobicoke public and junior high schools.

A student teacher in the three-year program has more time to discover whether he is really suited to be a teacher. Teachers from the one-year program often discover too late that they just aren't cut out to be teachers. Finally, the longer three-year program allows for a greater integration of knowledge. Not only is the classroom experience related to the seminars on education, but as a concurrent program rather than a block of learning followed by a block of teaching, what the student teachers

learn in university is more closely related to what they are teaching in the schools. Also, education students at York (30 this year, hopefully 150 next year,) are required to take relevant psychology courses, and are also urged to take courses in sociology or humanities which deal with some aspect of education. "The application of knowledge to an understanding of the world" is one of the major aims of the faculty.

The type of teacher York wishes to develop is one who will know how to, as Overing says, "improve the instructional environment". Increased student involvement and participation is one of the best ways to achieve this enriched instructional environment.

At a recent education seminar there was a Chinese proverb on the board which read;

"I hear, and I forget.
I see, and I remember.
I do, and I understand."

The idea is — don't just tell the students, show them; or, better yet, get them doing it themselves. And this proverb may be related to the prospective teachers, as well as to their students. You can't tell someone how to teach. The student teachers must observe actual teaching situations; and then they must attempt to teach. And when they run up against a brick wall, then they return to the seminars and, hopefully, they acquire new skills which enable them to cope more effectively.

To improve the instructional environment the teacher must also know how "to work with the community and to make use of the special resources it can provide." This doesn't mean taking lots of field trips to the library, or art gallery, or museum. It means, above all else, that teachers must be prepared to make use of the greatest resource of all — people.

Laura Ford, who is in charge of the practicum division of York's education faculty, has said that a good teacher is, among other things, "a manager of human resources." The teacher of the future must be able to make better use of both the experts within the community and other teachers within the classroom. It is York's belief that the trend in education is towards open area schools and away from the traditional one teacher with one class in one classroom situation. Future schools will have teams of teachers dealing with large numbers of students in one large open area. Thus, teachers will have to be able to work efficiently as a part of a team as well as individually.

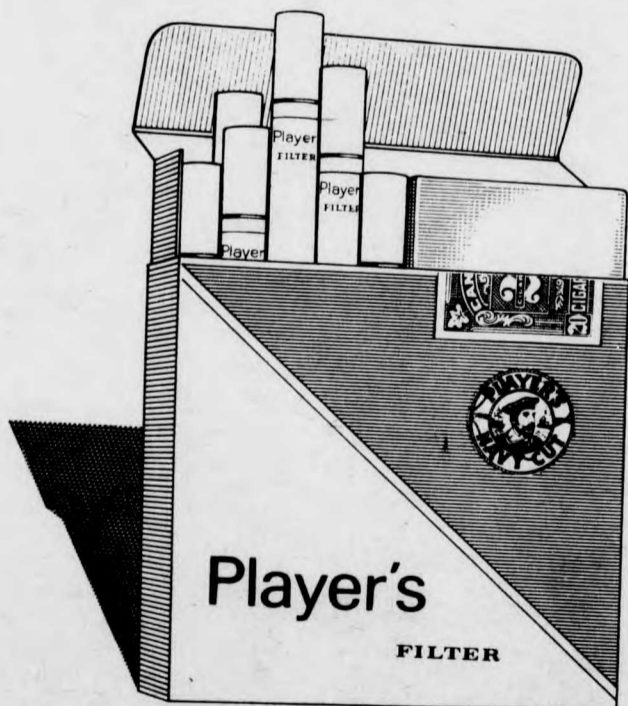
An awareness of other human beings and how they interact is, naturally, at the basis of any good educational system. The faculty of education, therefore, is also trying to create teachers who are more aware of the individual needs of students and better equipped to meet these needs. The education seminars consist mainly of observing and discussing the ways in which children learn — through video-tapes, some discussion of the student teachers' classroom experiences, and presentations on new ways to promote learning by teachers and experts in education — and the student teachers have been

working mainly with small groups or often with just one student. The teachers of the future will be teaching a group of individuals, rather than a class.

Overing told prospective teachers at the beginning of the year that those who needed a lot of structuring should get out of York's faculty of education. For, said Overing, "both our ideas and our mechanisms will change". The more conventional teachers' colleges have a fairly fixed idea of how to create a teacher. They present a more structured and static program. York's faculty of education is constantly refining its methods, trying to find new ways of putting its theory into practice. As Ford says, "how we get there is as important as getting there." The goal of education is basically to "provide the necessary experiences and the necessary resources." How this is done will vary from time to time.

Feedback from the student teachers is also an important part of York's program. Some of the student teachers have complained about being "human guinea pigs"; it is true that some of the faculty's experiments have failed. The video-tapes of public school children in work situations, used by the faculty at the beginning of this year, proved to be useless. Next year the video-taping will be more directed and so, hopefully, more informative. Student teachers stated that they couldn't evaluate exactly how much they'd gotten out of the first year education program. They said that they felt more confident in the classroom. They felt that they were better teachers; "but how much better is impossible to say."

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