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A comment on the education dept. by a concerned student

Last March the Gazette published a brief article about the education faculty here at Dalhousie. The tone of the article was somewhat critical. But, surprisingly, it elicited no comment from the university's administration.

Now according to the Gazette's intelligence department, the education faculty this year has discontinued assigning prospective high school teachers such irrelevant and exasperating projects as gold fish raising, post card collecting, and other forms of scissors and past work.

We would like to think that the article had something to do with the dropping of these projects.

Nevertheless, the lamentable intellectual dishes served up in the education department remains as insipid as ever — to delight some of the students there and to the regret of others.

Consequently, we would like to draw attention to an article entitled "How not to teach teachers" by James D. Koorner appearing in the highly regarded monthly, "The Atlantic." We quote here part of two paragraphs:

"The education courses themselves deserve their ill repute. Most of them are indeed purile, repetitious, dull, and ambiguous — incontestably. Two factors make them this way: the limitations of the instructor, and the limitations of the subject matter that has been remorselessly fragmented, subdivided, and inflated, and that in many cases was not adequate in its uninflated state . . .

"The principal subject of the

professional curriculum-teaching methods, practice teaching, and the educational aspects of history, philosophy, and psychology—are almost never taught and the text books almost never written by persons who are themselves trained historians, philosophers, psychologists, or even proven experts in teaching."

We strongly recommend the article to any student planning to enter education next year, not only at Dalhousie but at any teacher training institution in the country. The above quotation is not only applicable to Dalhousie. It applies to all similar faculties between the Pacific and Atlantic.

A war between the academic professors and the professional educators has been simmering for some years now. But alas only simmering. We have been told by several academic professors on the campus, "We don't think too much about what they're doing down there in education."

The war never explodes, however, lest someone's sensibilities be offended.

And the boredom and drudgery goes on and on and on at the corner of Oxford Street and Coburg Road.

And astute students hearing criticism like this—it's everywhere—steer clear of education. Some not so astute hear "it's a cinch but a grind" and graduate with the vaunted mystical powers of a B.Ed. And then university professors ask every year, "Why can't these freshmen write or add?"

Could they themselves be responsible?

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Taste, Not Morals

Sir:

Mr. Wilson's letter in your last issue prompts me to remark that I read filth because I like it: it's simply a question of taste, not of morals.

I should add that I object to being classified as a 'dirty' Liberal — I'm not a Liberal at all.

Sincerely,

William H. James

On Hearing Irving Layton

My mother

My father

Are savages.

My brother is a barbarian.

Only our dog is civilized,

And even he whines in his sleep.

David A. Griffin

Congratulations

Sir:

I would like to use your letters column to make public my congratulations to the Students Council for bringing Irving Layton to Dalhousie.

Well done.

Sincerely,

Ray Smith

Thank You

Sir:

I would like to thank all the Dalhousie students who assisted me in the production of the CJCH 'On Campus' program. In an effort of this sort it takes many individuals to work together if the project is to be successful. I entered this endeavour in good faith and sincerely thank those who assisted me.

Sincerely,

Mike Miller

EDITORIAL:

ON THE EDUCATION DEPARTMENT

Education is a matter which concerns us all intimately, and the problem of training teachers to take positions in Canada's schools is becoming more and more pressing.

Since the possession of a diploma or degree in education has almost become a prerequisite for teachers in most parts of the country, the institutions offering such diplomas and degrees have been coming under increasing scrutiny—and apparently have not been standing up too well under the examination. Dalhousie has a department of education, but many talented students with whom we have talked have expressed extreme dissatisfaction with the operation and curriculum of the department.

In another column on this page we have printed an article by a concerned ex-education student who has given some thought to the problems. While we have not had any direct association with the department of education at Dalhousie, we have come to the conclusion that there must be something lacking in the courses offered if so many students express so much dissatisfaction.

A number of students—some with masters degrees, but who are forced to take the B.Ed because of provincial requirements—have made the comment that you can only pass the education courses well if you are a semi-moron. Any thinking students become so bored and demoralized at having to take courses in child testing, school art and teaching methods as presented by the department that their marks suffer. As a result students with masters degrees have been known to fail courses or else give up the whole idea of getting a B.Ed.

A large part of the problem appears to stem from the fact that the provincial department of education exerts considerable influence over the operation of the education department on campuses in the province. This might not take the form of direct intervention, but the standards set by the provincial department must inevitably be reflected in the standards set in the training schools. Added to this is the unfortunate state of affairs where a teacher's salary is geared to the teaching licence he or she hold.

It is not unfair to say that the standards set by the government department are in many cases far too low. How many French teachers in Nova Scotia are bilingual? Very few—and most people seem quite happy that this is the case, or at least they have not expressed any grave concern.

We talked with a high school principal not long ago about science teachers and he told us a story that would be funny if it was not so pathetic. He had asked for a science teacher and a young lady duly appeared before him to take the job. Unfortunately, she had never had any experience whatsoever in laboratory work, and the principal admitted to us that after he had taken the girl to the lab and shown her what to do for her first class he returned to his office and prayed that the building would not explode during the next hour. And this sort of thing is apparently prevalent throughout the province.

Another problem brought forth with regard to training schools is the fact that education students spend too much time studying teaching methods and child testing and so on, while having little opportunity to further their knowledge in the subjects they intend to teach.

Dr. Hilda Neatby, in her book on education 'So little for the mind', quotes an American educator as saying: "A great many educators have felt for a long time that emphasis on teaching techniques has gotten out of hand in this country. Under-graduates who plan to enter the teaching profession have been spending an increasing amount of time on the sort of subjects that are facetiously referred to as 'blackboard engineering' . . . In some cases they spent more time studying teaching than they did studying the subject they would be called upon to teach."

While this was a comment on education in the United States, it is apparently equally applicable to Canada. Students attending the department of education at Dalhousie have told us that they appreciate the value of learning methods of teaching—but instead they spend much of their time on carrying out useless projects and drawing posters. The content of the courses as far as they are concerned is nil. Some go as far as to say that they would gain more by attending the Provincial Normal College at Truro than by taking the courses at Dalhousie because the Normal College at least allows prospective teachers more practical training.

This situation exists right across Canada, and Dalhousie has by no means the worst education department. It is apparently the practice of some teaching schools in Nova Scotia to offer education degrees which are not worth the paper they are printed on—except for the fact that anyone holding an education degree gets a substantial salary increase.

We are concerned with this matter because it is something that should be concerning us all. Canadians cannot afford to have their children taught by second and third rate teachers—academic failures—and something must be done to improve teaching standards. If the initiative does not come from provincial education departments, we suggest that reputable departments of education in universities across the country should step into the breach, and if the administrators of these schools fail to realize this they are doing Canada a grave disservice.

ATTEND THE MUSICAL AND THE COUNCIL
FORMAL THIS WEEK.