

GEOGRAPHIC EDUCATION--A NEW COURSE FOR TEACHERS
IN THE LAND OF THE LONG WHITE CLOUD

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Geography is a major subject in the New Zealand high school curriculum and has been for many years. Even though geography has enjoyed a key position among the school subjects, geographic education as a part of teacher preparation at the university level was introduced for the first time in 1976. Geographic education was included as a part of the post-graduate Diploma in the Social Sciences developed by the Geography Department of Massey University near Palmerston North. The new course shows promise as a model for similar programs that might be developed in other parts of the world and could be of real value in upgrading geographic knowledge among California teachers.

In the New Zealand scheme of things, potential high school teachers are required to obtain a bachelor's degree in a given subject, e.g. geography, before going on to Teacher's College.¹ The teacher's colleges, and even more so the universities, offer post-graduate and undergraduate specialist programs for which a diploma is awarded. Massey University is the only New Zealand university to offer a program of external study by correspondence leading to a diploma. All other universities require on-campus enrollment. The diploma candidates at Massey are required to attend a vacation course of four days duration to bring their work together and, further, must take the same final exams as their equivalent full-time students.

Over the past few years there has been mounting pressure on teachers and upon the institutions of higher learning to

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provide a program for upgrading geographical knowledge and methodology for the inservice secondary teacher. Even though surveys indicate that geography teachers are better qualified on the whole than those in other disciplines, many critics have felt that they have lost contact with the frontiers of geography.² This has been particularly evident in view of the dramatic changes taking place within the discipline over the past decade.

The program designed by the Geography Department at Massey sprang from the expressed need of teachers in the field. The Diploma is open to a variety of occupational fields but for teachers the key course is geographic education. In the first year (1976) numbers were limited to thirty. Teachers attending the vacation school in August indicated that the program had considerable value for them.

Course Outline

Mr. John Renner, Vice-Principal of Palmerston North Teachers' College developed the course outline and had overall responsibility for it. The author was appointed Visiting Teaching Fellow to set up the actual study guides and to be responsible for the day to day administration of the course. The outline is wide ranging and designed to help experienced teachers gain a better appreciation of the underpinnings of teaching geography. The course is laid out to include: Quantification and the Development of Theory in Human Geography; The Changing Nature of Geography and Geographic Education; Curriculum Development and Geography; Geographic Education and Theories of Learning; Assessment and Other Forms of Evaluation; an Analysis of Teaching Strategies in Geography; and Preliminary Investigation of a Personal Teaching Problem in Geography. The first six topics formed the titles for the six major study guides. Each guide was designed as a six week work unit. Each included a general account of major themes, as well as an outline of current trends. Also included in each was an assignment

that requires the student to apply the general principles contained in the guide. There are also six or seven reprints of key articles taken from various sources which help illustrate the subjects under discussion. An attempt was made to include key articles which give either a theoretical or practical illumination to subjects studied. Reference is also made to the required texts for the course. Student reaction indicated success in using the reprints as references for future application.

The Students

The students enrolled in the inaugural course were a cross section of inservice teachers, both men and women. Their ages ranged from the early twenties fresh out of teacher's college to veterans in their fifties with over twenty years experience in the teaching profession. Some of the students are from large city schools while others are from country districts. The geographic spread is the entire country from Auckland in the north to Southland at the tip of South Island.

Preliminary Investigation

The Preliminary Investigation of a Personal Teaching Problem in Geography is a key function of the course. It gives the students an opportunity to apply their new found knowledge in practical classroom situations. Further, such an investigation has the potential of forming the basis of another course in the Diploma program titled "An Approved Research Exercise." The initial group of students was expected to submit topics for approval, and then to complete individual reports by the August vacation course. Subjects picked ranged over a wide field, and proved just as varied in presentation. A great deal of interesting and valuable research was carried out. Some topics included pupil perception of other peoples, the effectiveness of teaching strategies in the classroom, problems of teaching field work, suitability of the present school curriculum, and

pupil response to concept based geography teaching. It is intended that such investigations in the future can form the basis of a publication for teachers of geography. The major strength of such material is that it comes from the classroom teachers with a strong bias to application, sometimes a rather scarce commodity.

The Vacation Course

The Vacation Course was of four days duration and designed to supplement the regular course material. It was organized around four major themes: (1) The changing nature of geography and geographic education; (2) geographic curricula; (3) learning theory and skills; (4) strategies, skills and related assessment. Visiting lecturers were employed to assist with introduction and presentation of materials. The general format was of presentation and feedback.

Conclusion

Too few geographers have adequate training in learning and learning theory; student reaction indicated such a need. The course as presented serves to update teachers' geographical knowledge, improve the theoretical base of their skills and knowledge, and encourages them to think about the theory of their specialist subject. If this has happened, and student response points in that direction, then the course has value to both the present students and to their students in turn.

This program is a unique attempt to marry the university with experienced inservice teachers over a long period with profit to both parties and to the profession as a whole.

NOTES

¹In Australia and New Zealand the Teachers' College is a highly specialized institution, usually apart from the university. It is similar to the institutions of the same name that preceded the present California State College and University system.

²A recent survey was done for the National Geography Curriculum Committee, by Miss A. Jones. Another was carried out by Professor W.B. Johnson and presented as a paper to the Biennial Conference of the New Zealand Geographical Society in Christchurch, 1972.