

In My Opinion

The Elementary Teacher

Probably the readership of this journal is largely interested in the secondary schools, but there is a readership also interested in the college and the elementary school levels. But perhaps it behooves our entire readership to be interested in the elementary school for a variety of self-evident reasons.

There are many problems confronting the elementary school teacher who wishes to or is told to teach biology in some meaningful way. In fact, it is hard to picture the elementary curriculum not including biology no matter in how outmoded, disadvantaged, or what have you manner it is.

The first big problem is the teacher and his education. Pre-service education is a notorious flitting from one superficial touch of knowledge to another. What are colleges really doing to teach better biology, with appropriate pedagogical methods, to the elementary teacher? The examples of really innovative and meaningful programs are few indeed. Then, the teacher returns for a fifth year. What happens then? More superficialities? But more importantly, what is being done in in-service programs, and here is where there seems to be real progress. The role of the secondary school biologist and the college professor can be highly important here, and probably requires their initiative to produce useful programs.

The second big problem is the elementary science curriculum. Through NSF help primarily, but with other organizations also, there are curriculum projects, some of which are being used in the classroom already. These all have some common denominators but each has a special flavor of its own. How they mesh with BSCS or other present biological courses of study in the secondary schools should be an interesting problem solving experience for the secondary school teacher. Not much has become visible for the upper elementary grades or junior high school level however.

The third problem is in facilities and equipment, and NDEA has made an indispensable contribution here. But what equipment and facility are needed still rests on what happens in the solution of the first two problems.

And all of this must be predicated in our modern society, with such a high per cent finishing the secondary school, on how all of this produces a good and meaningful science education from K through 12. And perhaps time is the only determinant of whether all these activities produce a really good K-12 program.

But one thing is certain, any improvement of the elementary science instructional program will be best done by the combined efforts of many people, including the secondary school teacher and the college-level biologist and pedagogical expert.

Editor