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Opportunity Knocks

An "alarming" drop in the number of graduate students pursuing the doctorate in education was reported last year by Maynard Bemis, executive secretary of the professional education fraternity, Phi Delta Kappa. According to the fraternity's study, the number of dissertations underway at U.S. and Canadian institutions dropped from 1,976 in 1959, with 91 institutions reporting, to 1,516 in 1960, with 105 institutions reporting. This is a decrease of around 23 percent despite an increase in the number of institutions cooperating with the study.

Bemis warned that if this trend continues the teacher-preparatory schools and departments will find it increasingly difficult to fill positions on their faculties. Many places, he said, already are employing persons with master's degrees where they formerly required persons with the doctorate. Bemis suggested that graduate students are giving up study for the degree in education in order to take advantage of the generous fellowships in other fields, and he finds such allotment of fellowships unfair.

Now, it is true that in the allotment of fellowships graduate students in education get the short end. In the academic year 1959-60, according to a U.S. Office of Education bulletin, only 5 percent of the fellowships in 139 doctorate-granting institutions went to students in education. But increasing the number of fellowships open to graduate students in education may not achieve the desired effect. The new students pursuing doctorates would not necessarily be drawn from the ranks of those who would otherwise be studying mathematics, science, or the humanities.

From another viewpoint, however, the drop of graduate students in education may be, not a cause for alarm, but the sound of opportunity knocking. There is another solution to the problems posed by this drop. Instead of continuing to place so much reliance on persons with advanced degrees in education, greater use could be made of persons with advanced degrees in other fields. As evidence that this suggestion is not utterly absurd, consider a recent example of cooperation between some colleges of education and some university departments, in this case, astronomy.

One criticism of present teaching is that it is tied too closely to matters of immediate social utility. In elementary school teaching such emphasis has meant building science discussions around such undeniably useful items as the local sewage system. To meet this criticism, a group of education specialists and scholars, in a program at the University of Illinois under a National Science Foundation grant, is developing a little treatise, now in its trial edition, entitled *Charting the Universe*. The purpose of this work is to give children a certain amount of knowledge about astronomy.

The little treatise also attempts to relate astronomy to the child's more immediate environment. Thus, in a discussion of the earth's shape, before considering the evidence afforded by the round shadow that the earth casts on the moon, the work asks—what does a traveler prove when he journeys around the earth without encountering sharp edges? The answer is that the traveler proves that the earth is not a pyramid, a cube, or a pentagonohedron. The traveler does not prove, however, that the earth is a sphere, for a picnicking ant circumnavigating a frankfurter also encounters no sharp edges.—J.T.