DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 096 244 SP 008 359

AUTHOR Trueblood, Cecil R.; Shrigley, Robert L.
TITLE A Model for Organizing a Pre-Student Teaching Field Experience for Elementary Education Majors.
INSTITUTION Pennsylvania State Univ., University Park. Coll. of Education.
NOTE 20p.

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.75 HC-$1.50 PLUS POSTAGE
DESCRIPTORS *Education Majors; *Elementary Grades; *Field Experience Programs; Observational Learning; *Program Evaluation; Public School Teachers; Small Group Instruction; *Surveys; Teaching Techniques

ABSTRACT

This report summarizes the results of a pre-student teaching field experience for elementary education majors at Pennsylvania State University. A program was organized in which public school teachers agreed to work with students to provide on-the-spot tutorial instruction regarding the teaching technique they employed, to provide the opportunity for students to collect data for discussion in their methods courses, and to give some opportunity for the college student to direct small-group instruction in science, mathematics, and other areas. This paper, based on a question-answer format, answers questions in the areas of program organization and administration and organization of guidance units. The results of an opinionnaire designed to evaluate the field experiences are discussed and presented in six tables, and 11 concluding statements are listed. A four-item bibliography is included. (PD)

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A MODEL FOR ORGANIZING A PRE-STUDENT TEACHING FIELD EXPERIENCE FOR ELEMENTARY EDUCATION MAJORS

By

Cecil R. Trueblood

&

Robert L. Shrigley

Both authors are Associate Professors in Elementary Education at The Pennsylvania State University, University Park, Pennsylvania. 16802

INTRODUCTION

During the last decade students have suggested, urged and demanded that University curriculums be changed and teacher education students have been no exception. They, have spoken out in a loud, and sometimes not too refined voice, for a "relevant education."

Many teacher educators dismissed these requests and demands for change as the irresponsibility of youth or as idealism stemming from inexperience. For others the overnight adoption of paper models was offered as an antidote. In the latter instance, the rhetoric more often than not has far outrun federal or university funding and implementation. The actual program changes, if any, were interpretations of what teacher educators thought students meant by relevant education.

The Elementary Education Faculty of The Pennsylvania State University, in cooperation with the local public schools, responded to students requests for relevancy by first listening carefully to the prospective teachers' comments when asked--"What do you mean by relevant education?" They found elementary education majors expressing these concerns:

(1) Will children respect and listen to me?

(2) Can I get along with the persons in control of the educational establishment?

(3) What competencies do I bring to the teaching profession?

(4) Can I relate to the individual needs of young children?

A careful analysis of the students' responses revealed two self-oriented themes:

(1) a desire to learn how to relate affectively and cognitively to young children in the public school mileu.

(2) a personal need to gain confidence in their ability to survive in the elementary school classroom.

In short, our students seem to be agreeing with Howard (1965) who writes that the most important role transfer task for an education major is to learn to feel like a teacher.

Surprisingly, there seemed to be little concern expressed by education majors for involving students in cognitive learning tasks. Rather, they seemed anxious about their ability to affectively relate to pupils. This observation corresponds closely to Aspy's (1969) comments concerning the data of Sorensen and Helpert. Aspy asserts that there is a need for teacher preparation institutions to bring students to the student teaching experience feeling comfortable enough with themselves to learn something more than mere survival.

Aspy makes these three proposals for teacher preparation:

(1) It should provide experiences that allow the candidate to gain confidence in his ability to survive.

(2) It should provide supervised teaching experiences before the trainee begins student teaching.

(3) It should provide an opportunity for a tutorial relationship between students of teaching and teacher trainers.

The same rationale and concern for early and sustained classroom experiences for persons preparing to teach has been expressed by Combs (1965) and by those institutions which developed the ten model teacher education programs supported by USOE (Monson 1969).

In the report that follows, the authors wish to summarize the results of a pre-student teaching field experience for elementary education majors at The Pennsylvania State University the incorporated the Aspy proposals.

1. ORGANIZATION AND ADMINISTRATION

The participation of public school teachers in a pre-student teaching field experience presented the university faculty with several problems whose solutions ultimately structured the type of field experience that could be provided. By reflecting upon these problems and their resolution the authors hope to give some perspective to educators who might wish to inaugurate a similar field experience. Therefore, a rhetorical question format was chosen to focus on these problems and their solutions.

1. How and under what conditions might the public schools participate in a pre-student teaching experience?

Upon contacting the local schools, we found most elementary teachers were ready and willing to work directly with our elementary education majors thus providing the tutorial relationship between students of teaching and teacher trainers as suggested by Aspy. The public school teachers did stipulate, however, that the student should participate in the classroom for a complete day instead of a patchwork of class periods each week. In return for the students' services, the teachers agreed to (1) provide on-the-spot tutorial instruction regarding the teaching technique they employed, (2) provide the opportunity for

students to collect data for discussion in their methods courses, and (3) give some opportunity for the college student to direct small group instruction in science, mathematics, and other areas.

2. How can students' course schedules be organized to allow participation in a field experience?

Two terms prior to student teaching in their junior year, Penn State students register in a common block of professional courses: teaching of mathematics, teaching of science and field experience. This block of courses, especially the field experience component, provides an opportunity for elementary education majors to earn credit for learning how to perform the general duties and responsibilities of a classroom teacher and some of the professional tasks related to teaching mathematics and science, while, at the same time, providing the classroom teacher with high quality teacher-aide services.

Placing the participants in a block of professional courses facilitated the scheduling of a weekly all-day visit in the local elementary school classroom. On either Tuesday or Thursday each week for a ten-week term, 90 or more elementary education majors (here-in-after referred to as "participants") were transported to ten elementary schools on buses provided by the local school system.

3. How can a large number of students be assigned and introduced into the various elementary schools in an efficient and acceptable manner?

During the first large group on-campus meeting of the term, each student received his school assignment. In this meeting the general nature of the field experience and related expectations were described. Immediately following the mass meeting a representative from each school building (usually the principal) met with the students assigned to his building. The principal was responsible for assigning each participant

to a classroom teacher according to the participants' grade level request.

4. What formative evaluation is needed to monitor a field experience organized to meet the expressed needs of teacher education students?

Since the program was organized to meet the student's expressed needs, it was decided that their perceptions and opinions, in addition to those of the classroom teachers, should become the focus of our initial evaluation efforts. Therefore, the opinions of the participants and the classroom teachers were obtained by administering an opinionaire (See Table 1) to each group. The items for the opinionaire were designed to obtain answers to these questions:

(1) Was the supporting administrative organization and information dispersal viewed as adequate?

(2) How effectively were the graduate students, who served as counselors, communicate with the participants and classroom teachers?

(3) How did the participants and teachers view the attempt made to intergrate the method courses with the field experience?

(4) Did the participant provide satisfactory teacher-aide services in return for the guidance and experiences provided by the classroom teachers?

(5) Did the field experience meet the needs expressed by our students? e.g. self-confidence, self-identification, relating method to classroom reality, etc.

The decision to delay assessment of specific behavioral competencies was made because we did not know, a priori, precisely what classroom tasks the teachers would select for the participants and subsequently how the classroom experiences could be used by the methods instructor. We viewed the assessment of behavioral competencies as the objective of a second phase. That is, the initial purpose of the field experience was to meet the students' expressed needs. We did not wish to ignore this important aspect of the program by focusing too soon upon specific

behavioral competencies which might be created solely by the university faculty.

5. How was the opinionaire designed?

Table 1 lists the statements administered by the investigators to 62 teachers and 92 participants who were asked to respond anonymously to the statements using one of five choices: strongly agree, agree, uncertain, disagree or strongly disagree. After a frequency count was made of the responses, the data from the strongly agree and agree categories were combined to create one agreement category. The data from the two disagree categories were also combined to form a general disagreement category. Those who responded as uncertain were retained as such. This procedure yielded the percentage of agree (A) - uncertain (U) - disagree (D) responses presented in the tables throughout the report.

Collapsing five into three categories had the following rationale: First, we did not wish to make assertions based on a small percentage of responses in some categories. Secondly, at this stage of evaluation of the field experience, we were more interested in the agree - disagree categories than the degree of agreement or disagreement. Seventy percent was established by the investigators as the desired level of agreement on the evaluative statements.

TABLE I

OPINIONAIRE STATEMENTS ADMINISTERED TO THE COOPERATING TEACHERS AND THE PARTICIPANTS

OPINIONAIRE STATEMENTS FOR COOPERATING TEACHERS	OPINIONAIRE STATEMENTS FOR PARTICIPANTS
A. ADMINISTRATION AND ORGANIZATION 1. The procedure for recruiting cooperating teachers is satisfactory. 2. The information regarding the participant program is satisfactory. 3. The procedure for conferencing with and evaluation of participant is satisfactory.	A. ADMINISTRATION AND ORGANIZATION 1. Initial information concerning field experience was adequate. 2. Initial meeting with public school principals facilitated an understanding of the field experience.
B. SUPERVISION OF PARTICIPANTS 1. The counselor was available for assistance at appropriate times. 2. The counselor observed the participant an adequate number of times. 3. The counselor worked well with me.	B. SUPERVISION OF PARTICIPANTS 1. The counselor observed me working at a variety of classroom tasks. 2. The counselor conferred with me when necessary. 3. The counselor and I were able to communicate effectively.
C. PARTICIPANTS' CLASSROOM EXPERIENCE 1. The participant provided me with much assistance in classroom. 2. The participant was capable of handling small group instruction with minimal guidance. 3. The experience prepared the participant for student teaching.	C. PARTICIPANTS' CLASSROOM EXPERIENCE 1. The field experience provided me with a variety of experiences. 2. The experience prepared me for student teaching.

TABLE 1 (Continued)

OPINIONAIRE STATEMENTS FOR COOPERATING TEACHERS	OPINIONAIRE STATEMENTS FOR PARTICIPANTS
D. COORDINATION WITH ON-CAMPUS COURSES	D. COORDINATION WITH ON-CAMPUS COURSES
1. The participant had classroom opportunities to apply teaching strategies from the math methods course.	1. I had the opportunity to transfer teaching strategies from the mathematics methods course.
2. The participant had classroom opportunities to apply teaching strategies from science methods course.	2. I had opportunity to transfer teaching strategies from science methods to the field experience.
	3. The field experience gave more relevancy to the two methods courses.
	4. The two methods courses gave more relevancy to the field experience.
	E. WEEKLY SEMINARS
	1. The seminars provided me with an opportunity to discuss relevant problems in the classroom
	2. The seminars provided me with alternative solutions to classroom problems.

6. How did the teachers and participants view the adequacy of the orientation meetings and written materials?

Many cooperative ventures between the public schools and colleges for the teacher education are probably discontinued because of lack of concern for the perceptions of the various participants relative to what may seem on the surface to be administrative trivia. Therefore, statements were included on the opinionaire to provide feedback relative to student placement and teacher recruitment, the two main populations upon which the success of any field experience depends.

The data in Table 11 presents the reaction of both teachers and participants to the orientation procedures. It shows that only 21 percent of the 92 students were not satisfied with the orientation procedures.

During the seminars, the students agreed that the large group meeting was too impersonal. Therefore the plan has been altered and students now meet on site during their first school day with their assigned building principal. The principal now has the advantage of proximity as well as more time to explain and discuss the nature of his staff and program.

7. Are the classroom teachers satisfied with the way in which they were recruited by the principals?

The approach for recruitment of teachers, which differed from school to school, was viewed as satisfactory by 87 percent of the cooperating teachers.

TABLE 11

RESPONSES OF TEACHERS AND PARTICIPANTS
TO THE ORGANIZATION OF FIELD EXPERIENCE

TEACHERS				PARTICIPANTS			
Statements	A*	U	D	Statements	A	U	D
1. The procedure for recruiting cooperating teachers is satisfactory.	87	13	0	1. Initial information concerning field experience was adequate.	69	10	21
				2. Initial meeting with public school principals facilitated an understanding of the field experience.	70	24	6

*A - agree
U - undecided
D - disagree

11. ORGANIZATION OF GUIDANCE UNITS

The responsibility of the teacher education faculty for the participant was not culminated with the participants' assignment to the public school classroom. Rather, we planned a strong link between the public school and the university through a liaison model which consisted of several small guidance units each headed by a graduate student counselor, which, in turn, were coordinated by a faculty member.

1. How did the liaison model provide guidance and communication link for the participant?

The coordinator for the field experience, a university faculty member, served as the initial university contact to which public school officials turned when problems arose. He worked both in the field and on campus with the participants and counselors.

There were 20 or more participants and a counselor in each guidance unit. The counselor, a graduate student chosen on the basis of his successful teaching, supervisory experience, personal commitment and interpersonal skill at reacting with undergraduate students, represented the university as he observed and counseled the participants.

The counselor traveled weekly to the local schools to visit each participant in his guidance unit. He met with the participants for a weekly seminar and counseled with individuals in the field or at his university office. The counselor was directly responsible for establishing and maintaining communication channels among the participants, cooperating teachers, principals, and university faculty.

2. How did the participants and cooperating teachers rate the effectiveness of the counselors' role in the field?

Only 54 percent of the participants agreed that the counselor observed the participant in a variety of classroom tasks (See Table III). At first examination these data imply that the counselors were performing less than an effective job. However, the investigators believe the participants view the counselor's function as being guidance rather than supervision. We believe the cooperating classroom teacher, in each case a competent professional, can best serve the function of observing and supervising the participant in a diversity of professional tasks. To organize a program of supervision where the counselor played this particular role would in many cases result in the daily schedules of 20 public school classrooms conforming to an itinerary of a single university counselor. For obvious reasons we avoided such a policy. Statements 2 and 3 of Table III better identify the purpose of the counselor and on these criteria the participants rated their counselors very high.

TABLE III

RATING OF THE COUNSELORS
AS VIEWED BY THE COOPERATING TEACHERS AND PARTICIPANTS

TEACHERS				PARTICIPANTS			
Statements	A	U	D	Statements	A	U	D
1. The counselor was available for assistance at appropriate times.	95	5	0	1. The counselor observed me working at a variety of classroom tasks.	54	24	22
2. The counselor observed the participant an adequate number of times.	87	7	6	2. The counselor conferred with me when necessary.	82	2	16
3. The counselor worked well with me.	93	7	0	3. The counselor and I were able to communicate effectively.	91	3	6

The counselor's guidance of the participants in the field was rated high by the cooperating teachers as indicated by their reactions to the three statements listed in Table III. However, only 73 percent of the teachers agreed that the information concerning the field experience was satisfactory (See Table IV). It is likely that the counselors have not viewed the role of information dispersal as an important one.

TABLE IV

RATING OF THE FIELD EXPERIENCE
BY THE COOPERATING TEACHERS

Statements	A	U	D
1. The information regarding the participant program is satisfactory.	73	20	7
2. The procedure for conferencing with and evaluation of participants is satisfactory.	79	9	12

Only 79 percent of the teachers agreed that the procedure for participant evaluation was satisfactory (See Table IV). The report of the evaluation, which the university expects to be in the form of a letter grade, is a joint effort of the participant, counselor and cooperating teacher. The evaluation is based on a list of specific criteria compiled by university and public school officials, which is given to students when they enroll in the field experiences. The grading role played by cooperating teachers seemed a bit unsettling for some.

3. How did the weekly seminars facilitate an exchange between the field experience and on-campus professional courses?

The participants' field experiences were discussed in a weekly seminar. Much of the group discussion, as well as individual counseling, was drawn from the participants' log, a weekly listing of public school classroom experiences made by each student after his/her day-long visit in the public school classroom. Instructors of methods courses utilized the logs both

as a guide to their on-campus course activities and as a means of evaluating the transfer of teaching ideas by the participants from the college methods classroom to the public school classroom.

4. How did the participants rate the weekly seminar?

As indicated by Statement 1 on Table V, 85 percent agreed that the seminars provided an opportunity to discuss problems relevant to the classroom. The opinionaire indicated that the seminars were weakest in providing alternative solutions to classroom problems. These data may indicate that neither the education faculty nor the counselors emphasize adequately this component of professional training.

TABLE V

RATING OF THE WEEKLY SEMINAR BY PARTICIPANTS

Statements	A	U	D
1. The seminars provided me with an opportunity to discuss relevant problems in the classroom.	85	10	5
2. The seminars provided me with alternative solutions to classroom problems.	65	30	5

III. INTEGRATING STUDENTS' FIELD EXPERIENCE WITH METHODS INSTRUCTION

1. How can a methods course instructor set up an effective liaison with thirty or more public school teachers and integrate the participants' field experiences with methods instruction?

When faced with the problems of integrating the field experience with methods instruction, the university faculty was met with its most

difficult challenge. After trying several alternatives we found that the public school classroom rather than the methods courses should be the focus of practical teaching activities for the participants. The counselor, cooperating teacher, and participant worked as a team to organize the activities in the elementary school classroom. This arrangement facilitated the use of the classroom teacher as a tutor of the participant. It also freed methods instructors to draw upon a variety of classroom experiences given to his students in the public schools.

2. How varied was this source of information for the methods instructors?

Citing some examples of what could and could not be done seems the best way to answer this question. Asking all students to plan and execute a lesson on one specific science topic (i.e. microscopic animal life) brought warranted criticism from the cooperating teachers and placed the participants in a position of some discomfort between the college instructor and classroom teacher.

However, tapping the on-going activity in the classroom as a source of data for analysis and discussion in on-campus courses met with success. Examples of such assignment are:

(1) List and categorize the types of oral questions your teacher asks in science or math class.

(2) Interview several teachers and list their strategies concerning the use of homework in mathematics.

(3) Describe situations that result in discipline problems for the teacher. How were they resolved?

(4) What kinds of drill activities in math class best motivated pupils?

(5) How does scoring pupil's work affect his interest and motivation?

(6) How does the teacher provide for individual differences during activities?

The field experience proved to be an impetus to broaden the exploratory function on the methods course work, giving the participants the opportunity to explore without penalty (no test questions) when they found an area of interest to pursue. In short, the methods instructors found a need to broaden their perspective beyond science - math methods and deal with the whole spectrum of practical problems related to classroom instruction.

3. How have the students and cooperating teachers viewed the interrelationship of their field experience with the two companion methods course?

The field experience provided more opportunities to apply concepts taught in mathematics methods course than it did for the science methods course (See Table VI). There appear to be several explanations for this finding.

TABLE VI

TEACHER AND STUDENT OPINION OF THE METHODS INSTRUCTOR' ABILITY TO COORDINATE THE METHODS COURSE WITH THE FIELD EXPERIENCE

TEACHERS				PARTICIPANTS			
Statements	A	U	D	Statements	A	U	D
1. The participant had classroom opportunities to apply teaching strategies from the math methods course.	79	11	10	1. I had the opportunity to transfer teaching strategies from the math methods course.	78	9	13
2. The participant had classroom opportunities to apply teaching strategies from science methods course.	69	30	1	2. I had opportunity to transfer teaching strategies from science methods course.	48	8	45
				3. The field experience gave more relevancy to the two methods courses.	78	9	13
				4. The two methods courses gave more relevancy to the field experience.	65	13	22

First, science teaching in the local schools appeared to be less visible to the participants than math instruction. Primary grade teachers were legitimately using science interest centers and other non-structured means for teaching science. The correlation of science with other material and the more incidental experiences used by the teachers were not being identified by the participants as science. Much of this type of information was obtained by talking with the participants and teachers and by carefully reading the logs. Here again, the data from the opinionaire provided a clue to where and how the professional course block could be improved.

Secondly, the mathematics methods instructors had specifically singled out course objectives that asked the student to gather data for class discussion.

Thirdly, the administrative organization of the professional block placed several members of the mathematics education faculty closer to the field experience than science education faculty. After a member of the science education faculty was assigned to the administrative team, and was given the task of preparing specific observational experiences that focused on science learning, data gathered during more recent terms indicates an improved relationship between the field experience and the science methods course.

The participants' reactions to the field experience would indicate that the relevancy sought by the students is coming more from the field experience to methods courses than the inverse. These data would seem to support our initial decision to make the public school classroom rather than the college classroom the focus of practical teaching activity. Practical experiences are being interpreted and judged "more relevant" by the participants than abstract and theoretical class discussion.

IV. EVALUATION OF DATA FROM OPINIONAIRE

1. Considering 70 percent or greater agreement as desirable, the cooperating teachers in the survey rated as satisfactory:
   (a) the procedure for recruiting cooperating teachers
   (b) the information dispersal for the program
   (c) the procedure of evaluation participants
   (d) the roles played by the counselor
   (e) the participant's opportunity to apply math concepts in the public school classroom
   (f) the teacher-aide assistance provided by the participant
   (g) the participant's handling of small group instruction
   (h) the participant's preparation for student teaching
2. Considering 70 percent or greater agreement as desirable the participants in the survey rated as satisfactory:
   (a) the initial meeting with public school officials
   (b) the availability of the counselor for conferences
   (c) the effectiveness of communication between the participant and counselor
   (d) the opportunity to transfer math concepts from the college methods courses
   (e) the relevance of the field experience provided for the two methods courses.
   (f) the opportunity to experience a variety of professional experiences.
   (g) the experience as adequate preparation for student teaching
   (h) the effectiveness of the seminars in discussing problems relevant to classroom teaching

3. Considering 69 percent (or less) agreement as unsatisfactory, the cooperating teachers rated as unsatisfactory:

   (a) the participant's opportunity to transfer science teaching strategies from methods courses to the elementary classroom (69%)

4. Considering 69 percent (or less) agreement as less than desirable, the participants rated as unsatisfactory:

   (a) the initial information dispersal on the field experience (69%)

   (b) the number of times the counselor observed the participant's performance in the elementary school classroom (54%)

   (c) the opportunity to transfer science teaching strategies from the methods course to the elementary school classroom (48%)

   (d) the relevance provided by the methods courses to the public school classroom (65%)

   (e) the alternate solutions to classroom problems provided by the seminars (65%)

V CONCLUSIONS

1. Elementary education majors respond favorably to a pre-student teaching participation experience in the public school.

2. Planning the participation experience as a part of a block of specific methods courses provides the opportunity for college instructors to better correlate the theoretical with the practical.

3. The public school classroom rather than the methods courses should be the focus and source of practical teaching activities planned with the participants.

4. The cooperating classroom teacher can best serve as the direct supervisor of a participant's professional tasks.

5. The counselor's role should be more a guidance than supervisory role.

6. The small group guidance units serve as a strong link between the university schools.

7. Weekly seminars led by a counselor are an opportunity for participants to discuss practical professional problems.

8. Public relations between school and university is one important role of the counselor.

9. The counseling position can serve as a unique internship for graduate students preparing for leadership positions in the public schools.

10. A coordinator should serve not only as a university contact for public school officials, but an agent in the field who works among participants, school officials and college faculty.

11. A weekly log serves as a source for seminar discussion, individual counseling and guide for on-campus methods instructors.

12. The evaluation of the participant's success, which should be done cooperatively by cooperating teacher, the counselor and coordinator, should be in the form of specific criteria placed into the hands of the participants upon enrollment in the course.

13. The early participatory experience permits time to plan with each student his/her specific student teaching assignment.

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