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ABSTRACT

Field based preservice teacher education (FBPTE) is a total university effort, not simply a program of roles to be played by professional educators. It is an optimal mix of early and continuous developmental experiences, sequenced to meet the attitudinal and skill development needs of preservice teachers that occur in realistic educational settings with children. These experiences for preservice teachers are cooperatively planned and evaluated by teachers, administrators, parents, professional educators, and scholars from the various disciplines. In establishing and maintaining an FBPTE program, the university faculties assume eight responsibilities: (1) to identify a rationale for establishing an FBPTE program; (2) to design a program sequence; (3) to identify and select a variety of learning experiences; (4) to design field experiences; (5) to identify sites and participating field agents; (6) to try-evaluate (continous evaluation throughout the program development stages); (7) to provide participant payoff; and (8) to protect the faculty (to be aware of the time/energy factor because FBTE programs are more time and energy consuming than traditional programs). (MM)

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Role of the University In Field Based Preservice Teacher Education

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My presentation* will focus on the role of the University in field based preservice teacher education. While most of my comments will be directed toward the role of professional educators in establishing and maintaining field based programs, I shall not avoid the issue implied in my title--that field based teacher education should, in fact, be a total university effort and not simply a role to be played by professional educators. Permit me to begin by stipulating a definition of field based preservice teacher education. FBPTE is an optimal mix of early and continuous developmental experiences that occur in realistic educational settings with children. They are cooperatively planned for preservice teachers and evaluated by teachers, administrators, parents, professional educators, and scholars from the disciplines. My definition contains two major points. First, the experiences are developmental, which implies that they are arranged in an optimal sequence patterned to meet the attitudinal and skill development needs of preservice teachers. And second, they are cooperatively planned by teachers, professional educators, and in the case of science teachers, scientists. With this definition in mind, let's continue with descriptions of the roles of university faculties in establishing and maintaining FBPTE.

Role 1. Identify the Rationale

The first role is identifying a rationale for establishing a FBPTE program. In my own experience our rationale for proceeding stemmed from a growing dissatisfaction with our existing program and a belief that a FBPTE program would eliminate, or at least reduce, the magnitude of some of these problems. For example:

1. Effective teachers are committed to improving their teaching. We simply were not convinced that all or even a majority of our teachers were committed. Why? All reasons were never identified, but one reason that we could eliminate was obvious. Our teachers usually did not find out what teaching was all about until it was too late for them to change their majors. It was obvious that one function of early experience should be to help students decide if teaching is, for the student, a desirable goal.

2. Scientists, professional educators, and science teachers have a unique contribution that they can make to the development of the science teacher. A lack of cooperation among the three major contributors to the developing teacher was evident. We simply did not communicate, and at times I suspect we interferred with each other's attempts to do a better job.

3. Learning how to teach is a developmental process that should be sequenced to accommodate the developmental needs of the student. Useful information and skills are retained. Our

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programs tended to provide students answers to questions before the questions were asked, before the answers were useful. We felt that early experience would help a student generate questions thereby making much of our "good" knowledge useful.

Prior to introducing FBPTE, our programs contained three independent thrusts: liberal arts, professional education courses and teaching practice. Very little time or energy was devoted to helping the student discover the relationships among scientific knowledge, teaching theory, and teaching practice. We felt that a cooperative program of early and continuous experience would help connect these three most significant dimensions.

Role 2. Design a Program Sequence

One could argue that professional educators, scientists, and practicing teachers should share equally in planning a field-based program. If it is to become a cooperative venture, early involvement of all actors is essential. However, it is absolutely essential to remember that there is only one person who is making his full-time living as a teacher educator. The scientist must also prepare scientists and conduct his own research and the teacher has 100-200 teaching problems of his/her own to face each day. The responsibility for program design and accountability for program failure must be assumed by the professional educator. The responsible professional educator must clarify the theoretical basis for the program, develop a skeletal outline of a desired sequence, identify scientist and teacher colleagues who may wish to join the effort and plan an economical means to incorporate their thinking. We don't really know enough to develop a perfect program, but we know enough to recognize unique contributions each can make, the value of compromise, and the need to develop evolutionary programs sensitive to the needs of all concerned.

Role 3. Identify and Select a Variety of Learning Experiences

The functions of the second role are designing a model and convincing colleagues of its value and their value. There is no shortage of persons at the university or in the school who want to do valuable things. Hence, if the professional educator does a good job designing and defending a model, he will find numerous colleagues ready to assist in its implementation. Role 3 may begin with a brainstorming session devoted to identifying every possible experience that may be desirable for a preservice teacher. These should be no holds barred sessions governed by only one rule--No one can ask, "Is it practical?" The second step, selecting field experiences, involves deciding what we, meaning the team, can and want to do. Then, finally, the professional educator may once again assert leadership in clearing away the administrivia, thereby permitting the initiation of the evolutionary process of creating viable field experiences for the preservice teacher.

Role 4. Design Field Experiences

The brainstorming role (Role 3) will usually generate more field experience ideas than can be put into any two or three programs, but they exist only as ideas and considerable development time is needed to translate the ideas into work sheets or guidelines for the student observers and a teacher's guide for the field agent. One of the things we discovered early was that teachers and other field agents wanted to know explicitly what was being expected of the student and if the field agents are to play a role, they want explicit directions. These work sheets generally must go through several stages of development to discover if students can perform the defined tasks, to discover if students find doing so beneficial and to allow the field agents the opportunity to review and evaluate the efforts. Generally, the preparation of worksheets and teacher's guides is performed by the professional educator, but occasionally a teacher or scientist will assume the responsibility. As a program evolves, you will tend to encourage many persons to participate in development efforts. If you are the professional educator, you are once again reminded that you are the only person whose main responsibility is teacher training. Accept all the help you can get; encourage participation but be careful never to assign a task to another that is more properly completed by you.

Many field experiences are designed to either help a person understand teaching or to develop a specific skill. If it is the former, the CHEM study (observe, organize, and wonder why) format is most appropriate. If the object is to provide an opportunity to develop a specific skill, a format such as the following may be useful.

Title

Objective: Develop X Teaching Skill

Rationale: Why and when may this skill be useful?

Performance Standard: What will you be expected to do to demonstrate your competence?

Evaluation: Was it worth it to you? Would you encourage another student to do it?

The students should be encouraged to fill out the evaluations honestly, and they will generally do so if they think that other students will profit from their comments. In my opinion, it is not appropriate to discard a specific experience simply because students don't like it; however, student dislike of an experience is a sign that the worksheet or experience should be revised. The field agent will usually want to see the student worksheet before the activity, and some may even wish to participate in student evaluations. Accept help but protect field agents from overwork.

Role 5. Identify Sites and Parcicipating Field Agents

This step may occur simultaneously with role four or later on. It is treated separately because it involves some distinct steps.

1. Identify sites and potential participating field agents.

2. Visit the sites to evaluate potential.

3. Discuss your purposes and then rationales with the potential field agents.

4. Solicit field agents' support or negotiate their assistance. (This step will be described later).

This role is the most sensitive one you will have to play. This is particularly true if you are poor and unable to pay for the cooperation you desire. However, payment is not nearly as important as open communication with the field agent. When dealing with a field agent, openness is absolutely essential. Carriers of hidden agendas are rarely successful for long. You need to be explicit in describing what you want your students and the field agents to accomplish. It is also important that you avoid arm twisting. You must make the field agent feel as if s/he can say no. Describe your efforts as experimental. Indicate that the field agents may participate in the evaluation if they choose and that their revision is usually appreciated. Be sure you follow through on all promises you make because field agents can communicate news of a broken promise before you can get back to your office.

Role 6. Try-Evaluate

There is probably no need to extole the virtues of continuous evaluation. Hence, I shall only offer a few precautionary remarks.

1. Evaluation in a field based program is not like the traditional course evaluation with which most of us are familiar. A standardized form will not do the job, and you are no longer evaluating only yourself. When you evaluate others you become labeled THE EVALUATOR. Evaluators are an unappreciated lot and they usually remain unappreciated at least until their evaluations reveal that the program is better.

2. If you design evaluation instruments as you build the program, be sure you prepare instruments to evaluate those things that will provide evidence of developing excellence first. Doing this will permit you to start saying "We're good, we just got started, we're going to get better."

3. Always ask the field agents to participate in designing the evaluation instruments. Their involvement need not, and perhaps should not, be extensive. You could involve them first in suggesting what needs to be evaluated and, second, in reviewing a draft of the evaluation instrument(s).

4. Treat all evaluation as formative. Avoid passing out conclusions (judgments) at all costs. Whenever possible, provide the field agents with data and summaries of the data. Encourage them to draw conclusions and to suggest how they think the program should be modified. Remember "best" is a relative term in education. The best can improve - can get better.

5. Do not begin your evaluations with the assumption that you will be able to simply discard field agents whose evaluations indicate they are weak. When you enter a field arrangement, you are more or less pledged to work with the agents you contact as long as they are willing. It is possible to work around a few and some will drop out. Some will become educational problems--your problems.

6. Involve as many persons in your evaluation as possible. Your students, the teachers, their pupils, their administrators, and sometimes parents need to be involved. You at least must be able to prove that your presence in the school is not harmful to its smooth functioning. If you can prove you are appreciated, you are assured of a place next year. This is the burden the professional educator cannot avoid.

Role 7. Provide Participant Payoff

Providing appreciated payoffs to participating teachers will continue to become more problematic. The source of the problem is the fact that the only persons who are consistently rewarded for producing a better teaching program are the professional educators, and even they are not always rewarded as much as colleagues who invest their time in other pursuits. Working with preservice teachers would become a part of the teacher's regular load. That is, the teacher's load would be reduced by the amount of time needed for participating in the FBPTE program. Unfortunately, state legislatures and state departments of education have not rushed forth with allocations to cover the cost of this innovation in spite of their obvious willingness to support its existence by passing legislation mandating early and continuous experience. The question often becomes, "Can FBPTE programs be supported with the blood, sweat and tears of professional educators and dedicated teachers?" Here are a few things you can do that do not appear superficially as budget expenditures that tend to encourage but do not guarantee teacher participation:

1. Involve teachers as decision makers establishing rules and guidelines.

2. Visit field sites often and provide verbal and written reinforcement to the participating teachers on a regular basis.

3. Create opportunities for teachers to earn university or professional growth credit for participating.

4. Involve the preservice teachers in developing materials for teachers.

5. Train your preservice teachers to perform specific tasks for the teacher and make the successful performance of these tasks a program requirement.

6. Include the teachers in your professional development efforts, e.g., invite them to attend seminars, colloquia, and other events sponsored by your department, school or university.

7. Listen carefully to your field agents.

Role 8. Protect your Faculty

FBPTE programs are more time and energy consuming than traditional programs. You must make sure you are aware of the time/energy factor. Commitment to a FBPTE program often cuts into inquiry time. In fact, many faculty will tend to devote a greater than full-time effort to service and teaching simply because their efforts are so obviously needed. If you have not worked in the field you may find this difficult to understand, but the fact is this--FBPTE can be lethal to any faculty member who must publish or perish, - package or pack. But, in spite of all of this, I'm convinced that the field is the place to go with teacher education and if our field faculty are given enough time, they will support this conclusion with a wide assortment of data.