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ABSTRACT

An education program designed to provide experiences for graduate students that would prepare them to teach at the college level is described. The practicum courses offered were developed to bring theoretical and practical aspects of undergraduate teacher education into a clear and interacting relationship and to help students in applying what they had learned theoretically to actual and simulated educational situations. Students were assigned to teaching teams responsible for two undergraduate college courses and had direct and regular contact with small groups of students for two semesters. Opportunities were provided for observing teaching in public school classrooms, leading group discussions with their peers, and giving short lectures. The students had close contacts with experienced faculty members who evaluated their work and served as role models. (JD)

An Innovative Program for Training College Teachers

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ABSTRACT

There has been a great deal of dissatisfaction with the quality of teaching in colleges and with the preparation of teachers at this level. In the School of Education at the University of Missouri-Kansas City, an innovative program was designed to help graduate students develop the skills an effective college teacher needs. The goals for the program, which required a year to complete, included the provision of opportunities for reading about, and reflecting on, the nature of teaching; close contact with experienced and competent teachers; experience with planning and teaching a complete college course; opportunities to practice methods of teaching at the college level; and an extended contact in a leadership role with a small group of undergraduate students. An effort to attain these goals was made by assigning graduate students to teaching teams, through which they helped plan and teach two courses. The program was evaluated through extensive interviews with the graduate students, who felt they gained most from contacts with faculty members and undergraduate students; the responsibilities given them in supervision; and the variety of materials with which they became familiar during the year. The negative responses focused on the time the program required.

Social institutions may increase in authority and complexity--they may come to require the expenditures of large sums of money and make use of a variety of human resources--and yet such institutions often rest on basically weak and even false assumptions. In these cases, the weight of authority and tradition, and the aura of respectability which such institutions possess can crumble with surprising ease and, sometimes, a dismaying speed. The vulnerability of one such institution in the United States, that of higher education, was demonstrated (in more ways than one) by the student activists of the sixties. Indeed, a perceptive social critic, Lewis Mumford, considered the possibility of "the moment when the whole system will collapse of its own aimless and insensate productivity."(1) He believed that only "the long process of rethinking our basic premises and refabricating our whole ideological and cultural structure could preserve our colleges and universities."(2)

Since the era of student riots and demonstrations, there has been a great deal of anguished criticism of the basic premises on which colleges and universities have been operating. Certain elements of this criticism have been perceptive; unfortunately, much has been repetitive. The universities have been characterized as blind and deaf bureaucracies, and as institutions subservient to the transient needs of a society dominated by business and the military. The emphasis on the production of research for its own sake, however meaningless and useless such research may be, has also been widely discussed and condemned. The universities have made attempts to answer criticisms of this matter and, in some cases, to remedy the weaknesses implied by such charges.

However, there have been few attempts to deal with one of the most fundamental assumptions attached by the critics: the assumption that if a teacher is acquainted with a body of subject matter, he or she can automatically--and perhaps miraculously--transmit that body of subject matter to students, even though the teacher has never studied the psychology of learning, or examined the teaching methodologies available, or considered the behaviors of individuals and groups. Hollis L. Caswell, formerly president of Teachers College at Columbia University, has stated bluntly:

> One of the most unfortunate aspects of the historical development of American education has been the tendency to separate content and method, often throwing them in opposition to each other. I have observed teaching which was very poor because the teacher did not posses mastery of the subject matter he was trying to teach. I have observed teaching which was equally poor because the teacher did not have command of appropriate methods. Each situation is to be deplored.(3)

The need for improvements in teaching at the college level has been generally recognized, but there have been many more statements of these problems--and genteel shakings of scholarly heads at the shortcomings of colleagues--than positive steps to improve the situation. Many colleges offer courses in teaching at the college level, but frequently students in these courses spend a semester helping a professor grade papers or occasionally presiding over a seminar when the professor is absent. As with apprentice-teaching programs in elementary and secondary

schools, there is often little control over such programs, and what benefits a student receives from them depend on a kind of academic Russian roulette: the choice of the professor with whom the student works.

Administrators and faculty members of the School of Education at the University of Missouri-Kansas City were dissatisfied with the course in college teaching offered there and took steps to provide experiences for graduate students which would prepare them more adequately to teach at the college level. The program was based on the following objectives:

1. A student preparing to teach in a college or university should spend some time reflecting on the nature and possibilities of the act of teaching itself. In all the rush and push and constantly generated uncertainties of graduate-level programs, there is little time to stop to think at some depth about the nature of teaching and learning; the relationship between method and content; the interpersonal elements in teaching and learning; and the effects of teaching styles on communication. Indeed, many students at the doctoral level in education have never asked themselves, beyond a superficial level, what would seem to be fundamental questions for any educator: What, for me, are the distinguishing marks of effective teaching? And why?

2. Students preparing to teach at the college level should have contact with competent teachers. In training programs for most professions and occupations, there is an emphasis on role models and on contact with genuinely skilled practitioners. Unfortunately, perhaps because of the emphasis on research in most institutions of higher learning, many students have experienced only mediocre teaching or

worse. The situation has not been helped by the widespread institutional habit of paying lavish lip service to "good teaching" and then neither defining nor rewarding it. Most undergraduate classes are taught by the lecture method, which often covers a multitude of sins: routinized droning from dilapidated notes dogmatic statements and opinions with no encouragement for challenge; a failure to refer to the sources of facts and opinions; and not the slightest hint that there might be other facts and opinions. Indeed, the facts and opinions themselves may be so inextricably mixed that no separation or consideration of sources is possible. Graduate students continue to be exposed to lectures of this kind and also to seminars, which can lead to genuine inquiry but are just as likely to result in vague rap sessions and the earnest expression of shakily supported ideas. In short, students may have little or no experience with the kinds of teaching that stimulate thinking, open the way for considered changes in attitudes and perspectives, or, perhaps most important of all, lead to the formulation of genuine questions and the impulse to find answers to those questions. How can we expect young teachers to provide an atmosphere of intellectual inquiry and of reflection in depth on experiences when they have been influenced by an atmosphere which encourages a dulled acceptance of what is stamped by authority? Too often, the young teacher has been pushed toward an academic opportunism encouraged by the need to answer questions on examinations in rigidly prescribed ways and by the need to appease powerful figures, often by fervently agreeing with them. One of our colleagues seriously stated that there was one word which should be the motto of all graduate students. The word was "Submission!"

What kind of fresh or exciting endeavors can we expect from students who have abjectly followed advice such as this? And who have been in the classes of such advisers?

3. Students preparing to teach at the college level should have direct experience with planning, helping to teach, and evaluating students in a complete college course, under the guidance of experienced and competent teachers. In the typical course in apprentice teaching, students may have direct experience with only part of a course and usually have little opportunity to participate in planning or evaluation. They may not be encouraged to discuss these aspects with the professor teaching the course or to express any doubts they may have about procedures or examinations. Usually, they are expected to fit without reservation or complaint into bits and pieces of a course that is mysteriously and implacably "there," like some brooding Mount Everest. The objective stated above was designed to bring students much closer to the actual development and implementation of a complete course.

4. Students preparing to teach in higher education should have direct experience with several methods of teaching college classes: the lecture and lecture-discussion methods with a large class; the lecture-demonstration with a large class; discussion in small seminar-type groups; and supervision of undergraduate students in field experiences outside the college or university. Students should also become more aware of the effects of method on content, and those of content on method. But students should not just "do" for the sake of "doing"; they should also learn to evaluate what they have done, both formally and informally, and to use judiciously the evaluation of

others. Perhaps the latter can best be accomplished through a series of informal conferences, in which both student and supervisor have opportunities to analyze and explore the student's strengths and weaknesses in an atmosphere which emphasizes a constructive approach and not a harsh negativism.

5. Students preparing to teach at the college level should have extended contact in a leadership role with a small group of undergraduate students, both in a formal classroom setting and in educational situations outside the college or university. The role of human interrelationships in teaching has only been tentatively explored, and some educators feel they have given the subject its due if they make hoary references to Mark Hopkins and his charge astride the other end of the log. But teaching is generally not done on logs nor in such isolation; it implies groups of students who presumably are placed in situations in which what they learn (and what they do with what they learn) are of major concern. The graduate student needs to find ways to open up a genuine dialogue with students, and he or she needs to learn how students react to various situations; how they tend to approach problems; what concerns them (and why); and how a teacher can bring a group together in a common search for a deeper understanding of what has happened and is occuring now, and what these things might mean.

Admittedly, these are comprehensive and difficult goals. It is easy to state objectives with a noble ring to them; it is less easy to define and begin to attain them. Perhaps a major reason for the failure of many educational enterprises in that they engender the proliferation of respectable but unattainable goals, which provide a sharp contrast

to the comparative feebleness of the efforts to reach them. The program in the School of Education at the University of Missouri-Kansas City was made attainable in part through the general design and framework of two undergraduate courses, to which all graduate assistants were assigned and which provided the substance of their training as prospective college teachers. It may be well to begin an outline of the program with a brief description of these courses.

The two courses, Seminar Practicum I and Seminar Practicum II, were developed as a result of a grant to the School of Education from the Fund for the Advancement of Education. They were designed to bring theoretical and practical aspects of undergraduate teacher education into a clear (and interacting) kind of relationship, and to help students in applying what they had learned theoretically to actual and simulated educational situations. The courses were planned to follow introductory classes in educational psychology and the social and philosophical foundations of education.

The first of these courses, Seminar Practicum I, was centered around six school observations, in which students spent half a day or more in schools selected to represent a cross-section of education in the community. Closely related to these observations were a series of readings, discussions, and activities in the university classroom

The second course, Seminar Practicum II, designed to follow the observation experiences, required that university students spend several hours a week for a semester in a school or community agency, working directly with one or more students, often in a tutoring role or as a teacher's aid. As in the first Practicum, activities at the university

were closely related to--and supportive of--the students' field experiences.

The two Practicum courses (each had more than one section) were taught by teaching teams made up of from two to four regular faculty members. An effort was made to provide one staff member for every ten students enrolled in the courses. Because of the vagaries of enrollment and staff assignments, the desirable staff-student ratio was not always possible. However, the administration and the staff gave priority to a major goal of the program: that every undergraduate student, at some point in his or her education, should have opportunities for close intellectual and personal contact with a university staff member. (It might be of interest that during the period of student unrest, a reporter from Fortune magazine examined this particular program as an example of one with which students expressed great satisfaction.)

To provide a comprehensive and organized experience in college teaching, all graduate assistants (the number varied from ten to eighteen a year), were required to spend one-half of their work time, or ten hours a week, in one of these courses each semester, as a member of a teaching team. The team-teaching aspect of these courses allowed the graduate assistant to observe and work closely with experienced teachers and also to assume responsibilities gradually. Ideally, a graduate assistant would be assigned to the school observation courses the first semester and to the field experience course in the second, but this was not always possible.

How the program actually worked will be described below, in terms of each objective and the experiences related to it. The objectives are

not discrete entities and have elements that are interrelated, but hopefully a sense of the organization and atmosphere of the program will become apparent as objectives are related to what actually happened.

The first objective concerned the need for a student preparing to teach at the college level to spend time in reflecting on the nature of teaching and its relationship to learning; on modes and styles of teaching; and on the roles a teacher might play in the lives of students. Even more important, a graduate student needs to consider which of these roles are desirable and possible, and in what circumstances.

This aspect of the program had several interrelated emphases. Several weeks before the school year began, the graduate assistant would begin meeting with the teaching team to which he or she was assigned. The coordinator of the Practicum programs was the leader of each team, but otherwise there was no hierarchial ranking, and an effort was made to develop a genuine consensus after open, no-holds-barred kinds of discussions. At the first meeting, the stated objectives of the course would be examined and perhaps modified. Then ways of achieving these goals would be discussed at several meetings which might last a good part of the day. The team would consider past procedures, look at evaluations of the courses by college students from previous semesters, and examine materials used in the past, along with other materials that might be more appropriate.

If a graduate assistant was assigned to the Practicum centered around school observations, he or she would help in drawing up a list of reading assignments that covered a wide range of thought, speculation, application, and questioning in the area of teaching. The assignments

would include abstract and theoretical materials (quotations from some of these are found at the beginning of this paper) and also descriptions of a teacher's life in an actual classroom. Some of the books that have been used are Charles Silberman's Crisis in the Classroom, Neil Postman and Charles Weingartner's Teaching as a Subversive Activity, and, in the experiential area, Esther Rothman's The Angel Inside Went Sour. The teaching team would begin discussing the use and implication of these readings before the semester began.

Each graduate student in this Practicum was assigned a permanent group of ten students for the semester. He or she would go with these students every other week to visit a school and would observe in classrooms with students. The following week, the group would meet with the graduate assistant at the university to discuss the school visit as it was related to the reading assignments. The regular faculty members helped the graduate student in developing questions that would stimulate discussion and, hopefully, would lead toward insights into what a writer was actually communicating and what a teacher was really doing to--and for--students. (What students were doing to teachers would also inevitably become a part of these discussions.)

In the second course, the graduate student supervised a group of ten students who were working as aids or tutors in elementary and secondary schools. The graduate student was assigned a group working in his or her own areas of specialization or experience and was expected to visit regularly the school in which the college students were working. With the help of experienced faculty members, the graduate student dealt directly with a variety of problems in real-life teaching situations and also

began to experience some of the demands of supervision, from helping undergraduate students with their fears and uncertainties to offering criticism in a helpful and beneficial way.

Through these experiences, during a whole school year, prospective college teachers were exposed to theories and hypotheses about teaching, to the evaluation of teachers, and to supervision of tutors and aids in actual classrooms. At the least, they could not plead ignorance of possibilities or actualities, or a lack of opportunities to assume the role of teacher in several kinds of educational settings.

The second goal of the program stressed the need of contact with competent teachers on the part of those preparing to teach. One of the reasons the Practicum classes were selected for the pre-teaching experiences was that the regular Practicum faculty was regarded by the administration as unusually strong with respect to teaching skills. Faculty members in the School of Education have received three university awards for distinguished undergraduate teaching, and two of these were given to full-time members of the Practicum staff. The graduate students had a number of opportunities to watch teachers such as these in the classroom and then to participate in a team evaluation of each class session. In addition, they had many informal contacts with the regular faculty in the program, and a chance to observe how faculty members dealt with the demands and responsibilities of teaching in the highly structured and competitive world of a college faculty.

The third goal contained the statement that students preparing to teach in college should have direct experience with planning, helping

to teach, and evaluating students in a complete college course. Actually, students in the program had such experiences with two complete college courses. The joint planning of these courses with experienced faculty members and the participation in teaching have already been described. In addition, the graduate assistants were also given several kinds of experiences in evaluating the work of students. In the Practicum centered on school observations, the undergraduate students prepared three short papers during the semester. The final paper required a rigorous analysis of a detailed real-life classroom situation, chosen for its complexity and subtle psychological and sociological ramifications. Each graduate assistant read and evaluated the papers written by the ten students with whom he or she was working. Then the graduate student exchanged his set of papers with those of a regular faculty member, and a second independent evaluation was made. The two evaluators discussed the papers, compared grades and comments, and then reached an agreement on a grade for the paper.

In the Practicum which required a field experience, part of the curriculum was concerned with ways of evaluating students and included the construction of short objective tests for use at various levels. The graduate students had an active part in teaching this unit of the curriculum. In addition, they used a form to evaluate the work of their students in schools and community agencies. The form and their evaluations were discussed at length with the director of the Practicum classes, before a letter grade was given.

The fourth objective stipulated the need on the part of those preparing to teach in college to have direct experiences with several basic

methods of teaching. The experiences with discussions in small groups and with supervision of field experiences have been described above. The lecturing assignments were generally handled in the following way. Regular faculty members gave formal lectures to the whole class at the beginning of each semester, while the graduate assistants began by participating in lecture-demonstrations. For example, after visits to inner-city schools, there might be a demonstration for the whole class of alternative methods to those observed in the schools. Each faculty member and graduate assistant would present and demonstrate one such method, such as the Bereiter-Engelmann approach-or a method using language forms familiar to the child. Later in the semester after introductory experiences such as these, a graduate student might give several short formal lectures. This would depend in part on the background and abilities of the student.

The length of time spent in the program--an entire academic year--provided many opportunities for the practice and development of teaching skills and the correction of weaknesses. Many apprenticeship programs are probably too short to provide for the guided practice of skills that are better learned before the teacher faces his own classes, especially if these are made up of skeptical and candid college students.

The last objective provided for an extended contact in a leadership role with a group of undergraduate students. The group of ten with which each graduate assistant worked for a semester (and then with a second group for the remainder of the year) has already been described. The graduate assistants were encouraged to listen to their students, in

more than a superficial way; to observe the dynamics of the student group; and to deal with the problem of the indifferent, "I've got to take this course so I'll grit my teeth" kind of student. Such students are frequently found in schools of education, particularly among those who are primarily interested in the liberal arts and are taking education courses in case they might be driven to teaching. The graduate assistant was asked to help these students become aware of the essential--indeed, the indispensable--role a teacher can play in the life of an individual and of a society. Hopefully, through guiding others, the graduate students would become more aware of these things themselves and would realize that genuine teaching is much more than a casual encounter or a repetitive chore.

An evaluation of the program was begun through extensive interviews with each of the graduate assistants at the end of the school year. The students felt they had most benefited from the class contacts with faculty members and undergraduate students; from the responsibilities given them in supervision; and from the materials used in the courses, with which they were largely unfamiliar. Their major complaint was about the amount of work involved, though some were beginning to realize the time and effort a commitment to teaching would require.

Unfortunately, a large-scale evaluation of the program was not possible as, after three years, financial pressures resulted in the elimination of most graduate assistantships in the School of Education. For the faculty members involved, perhaps the most significant result of the program was an increasing realization that the preparation of college teachers can,

and should, include a wider variety of experiences than is generally required; that sufficient time should be allowed for the practice and development of instructional skills; and that apprenticeship experiences can have a greater meaning and a more lasting effect if they are provided in an atmosphere of reflection about the nature of teaching and about the people who teach and learn. Such a program, too, can indicate some of the possibilities of an organized set of experiences for the prospective teacher, rather than the haphazard, hit-or-miss kind of preparation which can lead to the futile games played in too many classrooms and the kind of education which touches and reaches no one, neither teacher nor students.

"I am beginning to know what I am doing," one of the graduate assistants said in her final interview. And, more importantly, she added: "Not just what I am doing, but why."

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

An innovative program for the preparation of college teachers was developed at the University of Missouri-Kansas City. Graduate students were assigned to teaching teams responsible for two undergraduate courses and had direct and regular contact with small groups of students for two semesters. A wide range of opportunities was provided for observing teaching, leading group discussions and giving short lectures. The graduate students had close contacts with experienced faculty members, who evaluated their work and served as role models. In interviews, students expressed satisfaction with their relationships to faculty members and undergraduate students, with the responsibilities in supervision given to them, and with the variety of materials they encountered.

References

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(2) Ibid.

(3) Caswell, Hollis L., "The Nature of Good Teaching," in Raubinger, Frederick M. and Rowe, Harold G., op. cit., p. 389.