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ABSTRACT

Student teaching may be defined as a complex intermingling of roles and institutions. Few, however, would dispute that the core of student teaching is that unique relationship which occurs between two persons--the student teacher and the cooperating teacher. This relationship may be explored by examining two alternative models for matching student teachers and cooperating teachers. The first model aims at some predetermined change by arranging a match based on a specified degree of disparity between two persons whereas the second model suggests a match which seeks congruency in a relationship. Based upon these two models, the alternative of mutual-choice placement is recommended. In addition to providing the opportunity for model synthesis or selection, mutual-choice placement maximizes the decision making process for those persons most involved--the student teacher and the cooperating teacher. (Author)

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A Humanistic Approach to Student Teaching Assignments

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Mutual-Choice Placement--

A Humanistic Approach to Student Teaching Assignments

Student teaching may be defined as a complex intermingling of roles and institutions. Few, however, would dispute that the essential core of student teaching is that unique, one-of-a-kind relationship which occurs between two persons--the student teacher and the cooperating teacher. This relationship may be explored by examining two alternative models for matching student teachers and cooperating teachers. The first model aims at some predetermined change by arranging a match based on a specified degree of disparity between two persons whereas the second model suggests a match which seeks congruency in a relationship.

Based upon these two models, the alternative of mutual-choice placement is recommended. In addition to providing the opportunity for model synthesis or selection, mutual-choice placement maximizes the decision-making process for those persons most involved--the student teacher and the cooperating teacher.

Mutual-Choice Placement--A Humanistic Approach to
Student Teaching Assignments

Student teaching may be defined as a complex intermingling of roles and institutions. Few, however, would dispute that the essential core of student teaching is that unique, one-of-a-kind relationship which occurs between two persons--the student teacher and the cooperating teacher. This relationship will be further explored by:

- A. examining alternative models for matching student teachers and cooperating teachers,
- B. examining one approach which has the potential to synthesize the alternative models.

Alternative Models for Pair Formation

The general matching models of Hunt¹ will be adapted as models for matching student teachers and cooperating teachers. These models include:

1. matching based on a specified disparity between pair members,
2. matching based on compatibility between pair members.

Underlying each model is an alternative psychological orientation. The first alternative appears to offer a disequilibrium which must be overcome in order to achieve the goal of the partnership, whereas, the second tends to build a positively reinforcing pair partnership.

The first model for pair formation aims at some predetermined

change by arranging a match based on a specified degree of disparity between two persons. If one considers that the bulk of research on student teaching has centered on the changes in the student teachers' attitudes about themselves,² the first matching model appears to be quite tenable.

Both Price and Taylor,³ for example, have reported that student teachers' attitudes (as measured by the Minnesota Teacher Attitude Inventory) were changed in the direction of their cooperating teachers. Thus, if changes in student teachers' attitudes are to be encouraged in some predetermined direction, then it would appear that cooperating teachers need to be selected who have those attitudes toward which a student teacher should move.

However, such a simplistic relationship between cause and effect is repudiated in the research of Jack and Theodore Greenstein,⁴ who reported that student teachers were significantly more authoritarian and Machiavellian at the end of their student teaching than at the beginning of student teaching. A third finding in their research is that Dogmatism scores remained unchanged for the student teachers. When one considers that the cooperating teachers in the study were, as a group, significantly less authoritarian, less Machiavellian, and more open-minded than the student teachers, then one is forced to conclude that the disparity model falls short of its goal.

Hunt's⁵ second model for pair formation aims at immediate functional objectives or satisfaction and suggests a match in terms of congruence, fit or no disparity between persons. In reality, a

"perfect fit" is not possible due to other attitudes, personality dispositions; backgrounds, and the general school setting which add disequilibrium. However, if the congruence of certain crucial factors can be held constant, it may be more accurate to describe the match in terms of "best-fit" as opposed to "perfect-fit."

Matching congruently can be considered by examining two alternatives:

- a. matching in order to fill need-dispositions,
- b. matching of two persons who have in common similar attitudes, beliefs, and/or demographic variables.

Matching in order to fill need-dispositions appears to offer a great many implications to the area of student teacher-cooperating teacher assignments. Hunt, for example, has singled out a matching procedure between delinquent youths at different maturity levels and treatment workers having various personality characteristics. According to his findings, "The failure rate for the closely matched groups was 19 percent after fifteen months as compared to the 43 percent for the group who had not been so closely matched, a highly significant difference."⁶

In the field of student teaching assignments, Lamb found that "... independent student teachers dropped markedly in attitudes if placed in high-help situations...."⁷ Neison and Hutcherson⁸ have demonstrated that there is a positive relationship between (a) the grade in student teaching and the compatibility between the two supervisors and (b) the grade in student teaching and the compatibility

of the university supervisor and the student teacher. (Compatibility was measured by the FIRO-B, a sociometric questionnaire.) In summary, pair formation appears to be aided when the needs of both potential pair members are assessed and the assignment is made based on these needs.

Having considered the first alternative of congruent matching, there remains one more alternative to be examined: the matching of two persons who have in common similar attitudes, beliefs, and/or demographic variables. However, conflicting findings appear when examining the matching studies which this model encompasses.

Taylor and Monahan⁹ reported a statistically significant relationship ($p < .05$) between the congruence of educational attitudes among student teachers and cooperating teachers and the evaluation assigned. However, Leslie and Easterly¹⁰ reported very few advantages when matching on selected psychological, attitudinal, and demographic variables. Furthermore, in Leslie's study, a pattern was noted "within the group matched on personality variables in the direction favoring students not matched on personality."¹¹ Using the variables of open-and closed-mindedness, Johnson¹² reported that the similarity between student teachers and cooperating teachers had little effect on the evaluations obtained.

One is confounded by the conflicting information regarding congruent matching. In a broader framework, however, one also realizes the paucity and recency of the concern about pair formation, whether it be in the area of student teacher assignments or a general

concern whenever two people are asked to work together.

Based upon the information at hand, the needs-disposition model appears to offer the greatest potential. And yet, there are practical concerns about a massive assessment program of both student teachers and cooperating teachers prior to student teaching in order that effective matching may occur.

An Alternative Approach to Student Teaching Placement

Mutual-choice placement attempts to bridge the gap between the world of practice and the world of research, theory, and models. Inherent in this approach, is the potential to fill need-dispositions, aim at some predetermined change and/or bring together similar kinds of student teachers and cooperating teachers. This approach to pairing may be defined in the following steps:

1. One or more student teachers are assigned to a particular teacher.
2. During the first one or two weeks of the student teaching semester, each student teacher spends a certain number of days with three teachers in three totally different classroom settings.
3. At the end of the three experiences (the length of time will vary), each student teacher is asked to state his/her preferences regarding a first, second, and third choice among the three teachers.
4. Each cooperating teacher is also asked to state his/her preferences in the same manner.

5. The principal and university supervisor jointly make the assignments based upon the stated preferences of both parties. (In all cases, the confidentiality of rank orderings is preserved.)

From the Fall Semester of 1973 through the Winter Semester of 1976 a total of seventy-one elementary student teachers have been assigned through mutual-choice placement at Oakland University. The first inclination was to use the final grade in student teaching as the criterion variable, since other groups of student teachers were readily available. However, though the final evaluation has been used in other studies, it is less than valid for the following reasons:

1. Without a pre-test, there is no way of determining if one group of student teachers is, as a group, more highly skilled at the beginning of student teaching than another group.
2. University supervisors are joint participants in the evaluative process; therefore, it is quite possible that their influence lessens the possibility that teachers' attitudes may shade the kind of evaluation which is given.
3. Quite possibly, student teachers may unconsciously or consciously modify their behavior in order to conform to their perceptions of the cooperating teachers' expectations.

4. Student teaching evaluations tend to cluster around the high end of most scales instead of the middle, thereby making experimental studies difficult.

For these reasons, the final evaluation, as a criterion variable, was not used. Instead, the attitudes of student teachers and cooperating teachers toward mutual-choice placement were assessed. When responding to a series of open-ended questions concerning mutual-choice placement, all of the student teachers were highly positive in regard to the benefits of this type of placement to them as student teachers. However, four of these same student teachers did express some concern regarding the feelings of cooperating teachers who were not chosen. Of the ninety-one potential cooperating teachers, ninety responded favorably. The one negative response came from a teacher who was not matched with a student teacher and who had not previously had a student teacher. Of the remaining ninety potential cooperating teachers, sixty-seven had worked previously with student teachers who had been assigned using traditional approaches--any approach which does not allow both the student teacher and the cooperating teacher the opportunity to be decision-makers regarding the student teaching assignment. Of these sixty-seven potential cooperating teachers, the unanimous response was that mutual-choice placement was the preferred approach over any and all placement techniques previously used.

By opening the door of decision-making to both involved parties,

mutual-choice placement provides the opportunity for model synthesis or selection. Thus, one partnership may be formed because both parties are able to satisfy each others' needs, while a second partnership may be based on a similarity of educational attitudes. Meantime, a third partnership may be formulated because of a complex mingling of aspects from each of the models. In short, mutual-choice placement maximizes the decision-making process for those persons most involved--the student teacher and the cooperating teacher.

Footnotes

¹David E. Hunt, Matching Models in Education: The Coordination of Teaching Methods with Student Characteristics (Canada: Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, 1971)

²Don Davies, "Student Teaching," Encyclopedia of Educational Research, 4th ed. (1969), p. 1382.

³Robert D. Price, "The Influence of Supervising Teachers," The Journal of Teacher Education, 12, No. 4 (December, 1961), pp. 471-475; Judson H. Taylor, "Some Changes in and Correlates of Attitudinal Profile Similarity between Student Teachers and Supervising Teachers," Diss. Arizona State University, 1969, pp. 42-44.

⁴Jack and Theodore Greenstein, "Belief System Change In Student Teachers," Alternative Approaches to Student Involvement in Teacher Education: Three Research Studies (ATE Research Bulletin, 12, 1973) pp. 1-14.

⁵Hunt, Matching Models in Education.

⁶Hunt, p. 14.

⁷Ronald Wright Lamb, "Factors Affecting Cooperating Teacher Influence upon Student Teacher Attitude and Role Perception," Diss. The University of Arizona, 1970, p. 176.

⁸John A. Nelson, Jr. and Donald E. Hutcherson, "A Pilot Study of the Relationships of Student-Teaching Grades to FIRO Compatibility among the Student Teacher, Supervising Teacher, and University Supervisor," The Journal of Teacher Education, 13, No. 1 (Spring, 1970), pp. 44-46.

⁹Taylor, "Some Changes in ... Attitudinal Profile Similarity ...," and Thomas Owens Monahan, "A Study of the Relationship between Congruence of Educational Attitudes of Supervising Teachers and their Student Teachers and Evaluation," Diss. Columbia University, 1967.

¹⁰Larry L. Leslie, "Matching Student Teachers and Cooperating Teachers: A Fruitful Effort?" The Journal of Teacher Education, 22, No. 3 (Fall, 1971), pp. 303-309; Jean L. Easterly, "The Implications of Matching Student Teachers and Cooperating Teachers on the Basis of Attitudinal Similarities," Diss. The University of Arizona, 1972.

¹¹Leslie, pp. 303-309.

¹²James S. Johnson, "Dogmatism: A Variable in the Prediction of Student Teaching Performance," Contemporary Education, 41, No. 1 (October, 1969), pp. 14-18.