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ABSTRACT

Throughout the 19th and 20th centuries, the field experience component has generally been acknowledged as a key element in teacher preparation. This paper places inquiry into field experiences into an historical and critical context, raising questions about assumptions that are generally taken for granted. Field experience in teacher education is explored in the context of the professionalization of teaching. It is argued that the process of professionalization with its emphasis on the development of scientific and neutral skills, methods, and knowledge resulted in an over-emphasis on instruction in technique and method. Field experiences, then, were generally embedded in programs which emphasized the development of technical skills, rather than reflection on theory in practice and alternative possibilities. It is suggested that most of these experiences were probably not at variance with the technocratic assumptions found in teacher education programs, nor with the expectations of professionalization and the role of the teacher as they have been defined in the 20th century. It is noted that these traditions raise questions about the assumptions that underlie the rhetoric of early field experiences and the effects on current practice should be examined. (JD)

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An Historical Analysis of Early Field Experiences

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AN HISTORICAL ANALYSIS OF EARLY FIELD EXPERIENCES

Field experiences have long been an important part of teacher preparation; indeed, they pre-date the formal institutionalization of teacher education programs (Hughes, 1982; Johnson, 1967). At one time teacher training was, simply, "field experience" or apprenticeship. In Europe during the Middle Ages an aspiring teacher served with a "master" teacher, in much the same way other trades were learned. Later in England, and in the United States as well, a monitorial method known as the Lancaster System was developed. This system depended upon older students who served as tutors and monitors for the younger ones (Brauner, 1964). Older students became teachers' assistants with the possibility of eventually being hired as teachers themselves. Classroom instruction was thus combined with teacher training.

As will be described below, by the nineteenth century teacher education took on institutional forms and field experiences remained an important part of preparing to teach. To this day, there has been little questioning of the need for field experiences of some sort; this seems to be the one aspect of teacher preparation "on which there is general agreement" (Conant, 1963). It would be difficult to have a program today, or a suggestion for a program, which did not include field experiences. The concept of early experiences for pre-service teachers holds a good deal of commonsense appeal. If one is to learn about schools, about teaching and learning, then one ought to have the opportunity to observe in real classrooms and to apply theoretical knowledge in real situations. But the meaning of these field experiences must be seen in the context of the teacher education programs of which they are a part

and in the still broader socio-historical context of which teacher education programs are a part. The impact of and understandings about, pre-service experiences in schools, and with young people, are derive in part, from other activities and ideas experienced in a teacher education program and from society's view more generally of the role of the teacher and the occupation of teaching.

This paper examines the development of field experiences in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in the United States. Although student teaching as a culminating experience has dominated teacher education programs and literature, this paper focuses on practices in and rhetoric about field experiences more generally. I will argue that the rhetoric about field experiences has not necessarily been consistent with the overall practices of teacher education programs, nor with society's expectations of teachers. I will suggest that in any critical examination of teacher preparation we cannot take the rhetoric of programs for-granted, nor can we look at any one segment of a program without seeing it in the context of the whole. And "the whole" includes the historical traditions in which such programs are embedded. We must remember that every occupation, every profession, has a history and these historical traditions, as well as those of the larger culture, influence the life and work of those operating within them (Kliebard and Franklin, 1983). Teacher education programs embody a set of collective traditions; to view these programs only with the eye of the present, obscures both the roots and the meanings of current forms.

The Normal School

In the early years of the nineteenth century, teaching was not considered a full-time or long term occupation; rather, it was something to

do before entering another profession or while not involved in another occupation. Teachers learned their skills on the job or, as discussed earlier, as monitors in schools modeled after the Lancaster system. Prior to the Civil War, teachers' institutes played a major role in the professional development of teachers (Mattingly, 1975). Begun as "Circuit schools" in the 1830's, these institutes brought educational methods to practicing teachers, few of whom had had any formal preparation. Thus on-the-job training was supplemented by attendance at an institute and supervision by the institute's agents during the school year.

Originally thought of as vehicles for the "awakening" of an individual's potential, by the 1850's teachers institutes were attempting to bring to teachers effective methods of instruction (Mattingly, 1975). It was not assumed, however, that learning the mechanics of teaching would be a mechanistic process. It was hoped that teachers would emulate the model teaching they observed at the institutes. It was assumed, however, that good techniques were means to enable the teacher to be both moral and professional, not just be ends in themselves.

But the real question of the role of field experiences in teacher education could not arise until some institutionalized form of teacher preparation actually preceeded work in the field. The first normal school was established in 1823 in Vermont and the first state supported normal school was begun in Lexington, Massachusetts in 1829. The ideas of the normal school spread, first in the East and later in the Midwest. As an institution for the preparation of teachers, the normal school grew up in close connection with the common school. In the early years, students generally went directly from the common school to a normal school

for teacher training and then back to the common school as teachers The students, often women, were generally people who would otherwise have had little opportunity for continued education or for work in other professions (Borrowman, 1956).

Given such close connection with the common school, it is not surprising that practical experiences of various sorts were included in the training program. In a letter to Henry Barnard (1841), Cyrus Pierce, the founder of the normal school at Lexington, described the model school set up in association with that normal school. The model school was run by normal school students: "In this experimental school, the teachers are expected to apply the principles and methods which they have been taught in the normal school . . ." (Pierce, quoted in Borrowman, 1965, p. 64). Before they actually began teaching, students were expected to sharpen their teachings skills through peer teaching. Furthermore, Pierce expected his own teaching to stand as a model to exemplify theory. Thus prepared, students were permitted to undertake supervised teaching in the model school.

In the years following the establishment of Pierce's school, other normal schools were set up, most with some kind of laboratory school associated with them (Hughes, 1982). The establishment of the New Jersey State Normal and Model School in Trenton in 1855, emphasized and strengthened the model school concept (Habermann and Stinnett, 1973). The amount and kind of practice which took place in these laboratory schools varied considerably. Many included early field experiences which emphasized observation and teaching occasional lessons, perhaps planned by the critic teacher. In some schools, students were allowed greater opportunity for and independence in practice teaching experiences.

Perhaps one of the most influential schools of this period was the Oswego Normal School established by Edward Sheldon in 1861 in Oswego, New York. Sheldon "systematized the practice school routine and made it potentially the heart of the professional sequence" (Borrowman, 1956, p. 67). Influenced by Pestalozzi, Sheldon emphasized the importance of correct methods of teaching. Growing out of this Oswego influence was an emphasis on technique as an end in itself and on the importance of direct practice. By the end of the nineteenth century, there were many normal schools and a variety of philosphies guiding them, but generally they came to be regarded as places for learning technique. Indeed, to many the normal school had become " a symbol of illiberalism and excessive technicalism" (Borrowman, 1965, p. 20). In an essay written in 1904, John Dewey cautioned against this over emphasis on technique.

John Dewey: Apprenticeship vs. Laboratory Experience

In his essay "The Relation of Theory to Practice in Education," John Dewey made the distinction between two types of field experiences. One he called an "apprenticeship" experience. This is an experience which aims to equip prospective teachers with the tools of the trade, it emphasizes proficiency in teaching skills and management. A second type he called the "laboratory" experience. Here "practical work should be pursued primarily with reference to its reaction upon the professional pupil in making him a thoughtful and alert student of education, rather than help him get immediate proficiency" (Dewey, 1965, p. 150). The emphasis in this second type of experience is on reflection and understanding, rather than technical proficiency.

Over attention to skills, argued Dewey, places too much emphasis on what appears "to work," rather than on reflection about broader educational

issues and principles. Emphasis upon proficiency detracts, he claimed, from intelligent reflection based on principles of education. Practical work should allow students of education the opportunity to relate theory to actual children and classrooms; it should not simply be an opportunity to imitate and refine the skills of a master teacher. Such practical work would begin with early field experiences such as observing and assisting the teacher. These experiences would serve as data for reflection. Dewey argued that when students begin actual teaching the supervisor should aim to get them to be self-reflective and to act on their own. Only after a base of theory and reflection has been established should students attend to the more technical points of teaching and management.

The normal school, with its emphasis on technique and method, treated field experiences as apprenticeships. Given the limited time available for teacher preparation, too great an emphasis, Dewey argued, was placed on "what works" and too little on the thoughtful consideration of theory.

Teacher Education in Colleges and Universities

Beginning around the turn of the century, normal schools, in response to demands within the profession for more qualified teachers, began converting to teachers colleges. These colleges generally continued the emphasis on technique and by 1930 Abraham Flexner wrote that although the field of education had begun with great promise, it had "degenerated in the hands of mediocre people with a passion for technical know-how" (Borrowman, 1965, p. 14).

At the same time, the basis of education science began to shift from rationalism to empiricism (Borrowman, 1956). Advances in statistics and behavioristic psychology, particularly the work of Edward Thorndike, provided the foundation for an empirical approach to education. The work of

J.B. Watson and later B.F. Skinner lay the foundation for a behavioral approach to teaching (Woodring, 1975). Quantitative studies gained popularity and, while these provided reliable information, they also tended to create a sense of over-confidence. All teaching problems, it seemed, had technical solutions and these lay in the development of particular traits and skills as discovered and systematized by educational researchers. Educator's concerns were increasingly focused on the systematization of rules based upon a growing body of scientific research. Indeed, a "science of education," in the universities, began to develop and to become the basis for educator's claims of professionalization (Adler, in press) and for teacher preparation curriculum.

By the mid-twentieth century, most teachers colleges had become all purpose colleges and teacher education came to be lodged in departments and schools of education within broad purpose institutions of higher education (Haberman and Stinnett, 1973). The functions of educational research, training for educational leadership, and teacher training came more and more to be housed under one roof. Universities, meanwhile, had moved away from the early liberal arts ideal toward a greater stress on functional course work and the research ideal (Bledstein, 1976) and hence were able to absorb the relatively new mandate for professional training. But this did not necessarily move teacher preparation programs away from the normal school emphasis on technical education. Undergirded now with the authority of scientific research, teacher preparation programs continued to emphasize the development of skills and technique.

At the same time, however, there were pulls toward the "laboratory" notion of field experiences. During the late 1800's, some teacher educators, influenced by G. Stanley Hall, developed an interest in "child study"

(Johnson, 1967). This interest prompted teacher educators to increase emphasis on "observation" as part of the early field experience. The observation experience was intended to help pre-service teachers become more familiar with the learner and the learning process.

By the 1930's, there was an increasing emphasis on the role of the social sciences and social issues in teacher education (Borrowman, 1956). The professional sequence for pre-service teachers began to include "foundations" courses. These, it was hoped, would provide future teachers with a broader perspective on teaching and with a more theoretical foundation for their work. Such theory courses, however, did not win wide spread support; although included in professional preparation, scientific and technical courses generally continued to be seen as more useful and therefore more important (Borrowman, 1956; Popkewitz, 1979).

Meanwhile, the emphasis on field experiences, including those prior to student teaching, remained strong in elementary school teacher education programs and was incorporated into the education of secondary school teachers. Early field experiences included opportunities for direct experiences with children through observation of and participation in community organizations such as Scouts and 4-H (Hughes, 1982).

By the mid-twentieth century, public schools replaced model schools as the primary sites of field experiences thus providing "a more realistic environment for practice" (Hughes, 1982). Educators continued to support the expansion of direct experiences in classrooms. Many agreed with James Conant (1963) that field experiences, including student teaching, were the most important component of teacher preparation programs.

Field Experiences and The Professionalization of Teaching

The rhetoric supporting these expanded field experiences seemed to suggest that Dewey's advice had been heeded and early field experiences become laboratory, rather than apprentice, experiences. Direct experiences were intended to "give meaning to ideas and concepts" (National Education Association, quoted in Hughes, 1972). Early field experiences increasingly included the observing and assisting, which Dewey advocated, in an effort to unite theory and practice.

As the twentieth century progressed, field experiences were increasingly described in "laboratory" terms. But, as I argued earlier, the experiences themselves were generally embedded in programs which emphasized the development of technical skills based on the scientific findings of educational research, rather than reflection on theory and alternatives. This itself makes the apparent laboratory orientation of early field experience a problematic issue. Although the rhetoric of field experiences reflected a Deweyian influenced, it remains questionable whether actual practice followed an apprenticeship or laboratory model. Indeed, it has been argued that field experiences have emphasized "fitting in," seeing "what works," and having students assume "docile accepting and conforming behavior" (Kaltsounis and Nelson, 1968).

In addition to raising questions about the actual practice of early field experiences in the context of the teacher education programs of which they were a part, it is also necessary to raise these questions in the context of the historic social role of the teacher and the process of the professionalization of teaching. I argue that the emphasis on technical skills found in many teacher preparation programs was a reflection of a technocratic view of teaching and a technocratic conception of professionalization.

Modern day conceptions of professionalization may be related to the breakdown of traditional forms of authority such as religion and birthright (Bledstein, 1978: Popkewitz, 1982) and to advances in industrial and corporate capitalism and to cognitive rationality in science (Larson, 1977). The movement toward professionalism was characterized by the development of new criteria for establishing authority and prestige. Just as industrialists and merchants sought to create and control markets for their products, so too did groups offering a service, such as surgeons and attorneys, seek to create and control a commodity and a market. Unlike the product of the industrialist and the merchant, however, what the aspiring professions offered for sale were the services they could render. Thus it became necessary to demonstrate the superiority of one type of service over another. The acquisition of scientific knowledge, and the credentials to demonstrate that one possessed that knowledge, became the new criteria for authority (Bledstein, 1976). Scientific knowledge, with its claims to universal and predictable rules, became the basis for claims to authority, control and power. The knowledge base of the professional had come to be that which is based on the rules, procedures and assumptions of the "scientific method."

The rhetoric of teacher education and professionalization gradually changed from the rhetoric of a calling to that of science. Universities came to be seen as centers for the production of a technology of teaching. Given this technology, it was argued that pre-service teachers could be taught the skills and knowledge of effective teaching. Through a combination of research and training, educators could strive to train teachers who would then be the experts who could practice these skills and implement this knowledge within specific contexts.

The claim of professionalism in the twentieth century, then, has rested primarily upon claims to scientific expertise, to a set of principles to guide planning, teaching and evaluation. The curriculum and methods established through scientific research appear to take teachers beyond individualistic craft into the realm of scientific and neutral skills, methods and knowledge.

But the quest to develop and refine principles of teaching and learning may have had, in practice, the contradictory effect of taking from teachers a part of their craft. The production of knowledge in universities and R & D centers has perhaps bolstered the claim to a cognitive base but, at the same time, it has contributed to a separation of conception from practice (Apple, 1983). Goals, processes and outcomes are defined by people external to the practice of teaching. With the rapid growth of prepackaged curriculum materials, teaching is often reduced to management, to the application of predetermined procedures to obtain predetermined outcomes (Gitlin, 1983). The production of knowledge is centered, not in places of practice, but developed elsewhere and passed on to practitioners. Teachers are expected to apply techniques that are regarded as neutral, objective and beyond human involvement.

The role of the teacher, then, has become managerial rather than reflective. The teacher is expected to implement the research knowledge developed elsewhere. Professionalization, as it has dominantly been defined in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, has done little to enhance the autonomy and power of the teacher. In the twentieth century it has justified a hierarchal status structure within the occupation. This is a structure within which the practitioner, often a woman, has little power and little recognition, while researchers and administrators, often men, in-

creasingly come to control, the knowledge and behaviors of classroom practice. This role definition and view of professionalism does little to empower teachers within the classroom or beyond it. To be a professional is to be non-political and non-controvesial. With the dominance of the technocratic assumptions described, teachers are not encouraged to consider the problems and possibilities of serving as change agents within a school, much less in the larger society. Teachers are still held accountable to community demands, both local and national. Yet both the training and expectations of teachers are apolitical. Pre-service teachers are not, by and large, encouraged to examine schooling or the role of the teacher in political contexts. Teachers are put in positions of relative powerlessness on matters of policy and structure. Again, they are expected to be skillful implementers, not skeptics, change agents or craftspeople.

Given the expectations for teachers and the rhetoric of professionalization which have developed in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, it would be surprising to find that early field experiences, in practice, promoted reflective inquiry into the principles and possibilities of schooling. Beyond the rhetoric of blending theory and practice, one would expect to find that early field experiences within context of teacher education programs which stress mastery of technique, contributed to an emphasis on techniques and method rather than an emphasis on reflection, questioning and possibility.

In sum, despite the Dewey laboratory emphasis found in much of the rhetoric of early field experiences in the twentieth century, we are still left to wonder about the nature of such programs as they were actually implemented. What was the actual effect on the various participants in early field experiences in the normal schools, the teachers colleges, the early

university program? This paper suggests that most of these experiences were probably not at variance with the technocratic assumptions found in many teacher education programs, nor at variance with the expectations of professionalization and the role of the teacher as they have come to defined in the twentieth century.

We continue to ask the same questions of early field experiences as they are implemented today. An understanding of these experiences can be enriched with an understanding of the collective historical tradition from which current practices have emerged. I have suggested that these traditions raise questions about the assumptions which underlie the rhetoric of early field expereinces and should prompt us to look more closely at the effects of current practices.

Notes

By liberal here, I am borrowing Borrowman's (1956) definition as that which gives students a broad perspective of time, community and methodology. It is the attmept to help students see the problems of living in general, and of schooling in particular, in the broadest context.

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