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ABSTRACT

This paper records the experiences of two teacher educators at a small liberal arts college who attempted to deliver instruction in ways that were designed to meet the needs of individual preservice students. The program was individualized for the students in three ways: (1) the pace of instruction was matched with the abilities of individual students; (2) meaningful clinical experiences were designed and delivered throughout the four-year undergraduate programs; and (3) effective teaching practices were modeled in the professional education courses. Certain innovations were based upon current research on effective teaching. Central to the program was an integrated methods course and courses in elementary reading and diagnostic/remedial reading. Teacher educators, preservice teachers, and public school personnel worked together intensively in field experiences in the schools. The program modifications were seen as a successful attempt at incorporating effective teaching methods into higher education classrooms. (JD)

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Effective Teaching and the Teaching of Teachers:
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Susan Ferrell & Aimee Howley

Theoretical Perspective

Teacher educators all over the country seem to be grappling with the problem of how to improve the quality of teachers. The recent Holmes and Carnegie reports, for example, set forth goals for this improvement effort: (1) recruit academically talented students into teacher education programs and (2) improve programs for educating teachers. Although most teacher educators endorse these goals, some doubt their feasibility. The literature in the field offers many different, and sometimes conflicting, suggestions about how to accomplish these aims of teacher education.

Some teacher educators, for example, doubt that more talented students will be recruited into the profession. Recent studies of college freshman show that only 4% plan to enter teacher education programs. This figure contrasts sharply with the 1966 figure of 21.7% (Dollar, 1983). Among college students, those who enter teacher education programs tend to be less talented than those who enter other programs (Vance & Schlechty, 1982). Perhaps conditions in schools must change before academically talented students will choose to become teachers.

Teacher education programs may also need to change in order to attract and retain brighter students (see, e.g., Hopfengardner, Lasley, & Joseph, 1983). The Holmes and Carnegie reports suggest many modifications in teacher education programs: increases in the length of study, changes in the sequence of classroom and clinical experiences, and changes in the content of programs. These recommendations, however, do not seem to address the needs of the bright undergraduate and graduate students whom the programs hope to attract. Such students probably will want to progress more rapidly through programs. While pursuing accelerated study in academic subjects, these bright students will also need relevant instruction in the methods of teaching.

Even when teacher education programs make serious efforts to recruit more capable students, in reality they may still attract a sizable number of underprepared students. Can teacher education programs meet the needs of these students? Such students may need more time to complete their programs; they may need special help with their areas of academic weakness; they may need extensive coaching in the behaviors that constitute effective performance in the classroom.

The Holmes and Carnegie reports do not seem to address these concerns either. Missing from the reports are recommendations for ways to relate programs to the characteristics of the individuals whom they serve. The omission is perplexing, especially since advocates of effective teaching in public schools are showing increased concern for the individual needs of students (see, e.g., Waxman, Wang, Anderson, & Walberg, 1985).

The Holmes and Carnegie reports both recommend five years of college preparation for teachers. This preparation would consist of four years of study in a liberal arts field and one year of professional training and supervised clinical practice. The approach makes two assumptions about the nature of those who enter teacher education programs. These assumptions are (1) that all such students will need the same amount of time to complete a liberal arts major, and (2) that all such students will need the same amount of time to acquire skills in the practice of teaching. Lock-step programs of this sort cannot possibly meet the needs of all students. Like lock-step programs in public schools, they are likely to alienate the most capable students and to frustrate the least capable.

Even more variable than the length of time needed for students to acquire sufficient knowledge of subject matter is the length of time needed for them to learn to perform the skills of teaching. Some may teach lessons quite well even as freshmen. Others may require four or five years of guided practice in order to master a repertoire of teaching behaviors (see, e.g., Laman & Reeves, 1983).

The Holmes and Carnegie recommendations involve one additional assumption: that being a student in a liberal arts college is good preparation for being a teacher in public school. This assumption may not be warranted. College instruction in the liberal arts may actually condition poor teaching because college faculty often do not model effective techniques of instruction. Although a teacher must possess a great deal of knowledge about a subject in order to teach it, this knowledge is not enough. The teacher must also know how to use effective instructional techniques in order for students to learn. Basing pedagogy on one kind of knowledge without the other may well result in mediocre teaching and learning.

One alternative for teacher education programs is to look to the research on "effective teaching" for suggestions. Aimed primarily at examining and subsequently modifying the teaching behaviors of public school educators, this area of study suggests methods by which teachers can systematically improve students' achievement. These methods of effective teaching can be used in higher education as well as in public school programs (see, e.g., Hanna & McGill, 1985; Rodriguez, 1985). When used in teacher education programs, these methods should result in two outcomes. First, they should produce teachers who have the knowledge and skills to perform their jobs com-

petently. Second, by providing beginning teachers with a model of effective practice, they should increase the use of effective instructional methods in public school classrooms.

This paper records the experiences of two teacher educators at a small liberal arts college who attempted to deliver instruction in ways that were designed to meet the needs of individual students. We attempted to individualize teacher education in three ways: (1) to match the pace of instruction with the abilities of individual students, (2) to design and deliver meaningful clinical experiences throughout the four-year undergraduate program, and (3) to model effective teaching practices in our professional education courses. We found these methods to be instrumental in the preparation of competent teachers.

The Effective Teaching Project

The University of Charleston is a private, liberal arts college with an enrollment of approximately 1200 students, a sizable percentage of whom are over twenty-five years old. The department of education, with ninety-six students enrolled in elementary and secondary programs, has three and one-half faculty members to deliver coursework and to direct student teaching.

The education students that we worked with were fairly typical of those from other colleges of education: they scored at approximately the forty-sixth percentile on the ACT and SAT, an average that masks a wide range of abilities and skills. Looking beyond academic competence, the students' backgrounds were varied. While some students were admitted into teacher education with no prior experience with children, others had had considerable experience. Some had worked as teacher aides in summer programs; in several cases, our students had worked as teachers in public and private schools. Still other of the students had raised families and were returning to college to complete an education begun much earlier. With such variability, the faculty felt that an adjustment in the delivery of courses was warranted; flexibility was necessary to meet the needs of all students. It was obvious that the lock-step approach, often ineffective in addressing more than the general scope of skills and concepts, did not allow for individual differences.

In a recent article exploring thoughts on teacher preparation programs in the twenty-first century, Tetenbaum and Mulkeen (1986) proposed a model for teacher education based upon recent reform suggestions. The first feature of their model addressed the need for on-site, field-based training of pre-service and in-service teaching personnel. The second feature was an extension of the first: it spoke to the development of a problem-centered instructional program emphasizing the use of theory and skills to solve actual classroom problems of teaching and learning.

Though the article by Tetenbaum and Mulkeen was published after we implemented our project, the authors reinforced our thoughts concerning teacher education: 1) our students needed the immediate experience of applying the skills and strategies presented to them; and 2) we, as faculty, needed to model the teaching strategies that we taught. Our efforts then were directed toward providing meaningful instruction within a realistic classroom setting.

In order to accomplish this, we decided to increase our students' time within public school classrooms--focusing on both a quantitative and a qualitative change. Additionally, we thought it necessary to provide the students more direct guidance while they were in the schools. In the past, students had been assigned to schools for observations beginning during their freshman year, but these were not closely supervised by college personnel. The thrust of these earlier experiences was more passive than active--more for observation than for structured teaching.

As the first step in making changes in the field experience requirement, we contacted the principal of a local inner-city elementary school that served a varied socioeconomic population of approximately 300 pupils. This school, Chamberlain Elementary, had been particularly receptive to our teacher education students in the past and had requested that more students be assigned there for field experiences and for student teaching. After conferring with the principal and later with six teachers who volunteered to assist in the project, we determined that initial efforts would begin with three of our courses--an integrated methods course and two reading courses.

Integrated Methods Course

We combined several specific courses to form a generic, integrated methods block. Pre-service teachers took this block for a maximum of seven credit hours; the total number of credits varied according to the number of specializations in the students' particular programs of study. During the semester in which they were enrolled in the methods course, education students moved from the observation of specific teaching behaviors within the public school classroom to the performance of these behaviors within the same settings.

The faculty developed two instructional modules to reinforce work in this course. The first, a Classroom Observation Module, contained a series of readings related to effective teaching practices and observation guides and worksheets that extended information found in the readings. Included were such topics as time-on-task, disruptive student behavior, student interaction, student-teacher interaction, grouping strategies, questioning strategies, and other areas directly applicable to classroom management. The modules allowed students to complete self-paced observation activities. Faculty members monitored students' progress and provided additional information to clarify con-

cepts. After mastering the concepts found within the first module--the time needed for mastery varied according to the students' abilities and experiences--students moved to the next phase of the course.

The second module was entitled the Microteaching Module; its purpose was to provide step-by-step instructions for various microteaching activities. Beginning with formulating and implementing an objective, the students were required to complete a number of tasks, including grouping students for instruction, developing questioning techniques, and monitoring children's progress. Selected microteaching activities were video-taped so that students could evaluate themselves and faculty could evaluate them.

During the methods block, students moved between college and public school classrooms, spending half of the required hours in each setting. Throughout the semester, the clinical experiences at Chamberlain Elementary provided reinforcement for the concepts and skills discussed in the course. In addition, faculty maintained direct contact with education students and conducted individual conferences to discuss student's microteaching experiences. The teachers at Chamberlain also provided feedback to the college students and helped them learn to improve their teaching skills. The interaction between pre-service teachers, college faculty, and classroom teachers was valuable to all parties concerned.

Elementary Reading and Diagnostic/Remedial Reading Courses

Two, 3-credit-hour reading courses were required at the undergraduate level for pre-service teachers in the elementary education program; the first course explored developmental reading instruction and the second focused upon diagnosis and remediation of reading problems. Chamberlain Elementary provided a field-based site for both courses.

The first course in the two-course reading sequence was divided into two phases: (1) an on-campus phase for building basic information about reading instruction and (2) a clinical phase for observation and teaching. Pre-service teachers were first involved in structured observations of regular reading instruction at Chamberlain Elementary; following this, they began instruction with individual pupils or with small groups. The transition time from observation to teaching varied according to the readiness of individual pre-service teachers.

During the pre-service teachers' observations and subsequent teaching, faculty scheduled visits to Chamberlain. These visits enabled faculty to observe the college students and to model teaching strategies that had been presented during the on-campus phase of the class. We found that our modeling of teaching techniques had several benefits: 1) it engaged our students with real problems and real

pupils in the classrooms; 2) it provided our students with visual examples of the teaching behaviors they would later replicate; 3) it broadened faculty experience with public school programs; and 4) it exposed classroom teachers to new teaching techniques. It should be noted that the classroom teachers later requested a workshop in which many of these teaching techniques were discussed.

The second course in the reading sequence was offered the following semester. During this experience, pre-service teachers focused their attention on pupils who had difficulty with reading. After administering a battery of tests to one pupil and interpreting the results, each pre-service teacher developed a case study. The pre-service teachers then began a supervised program of remediation with their pupils. They discussed the progress of their tutoring with the classroom teachers and college faculty members, and incorporated this information into the development of detailed lesson plans. The diagnostic and remedial course provided many of the same benefits as the developmental course--communication between faculty, students, and classroom teachers and experience in real teaching situations with real pupils.

After a very successful year, the project was extended to include student teaching, too. Though we had had student teachers at Chamberlain prior to this project, the experience was restructured to provide the flexibility needed to address the needs of individual student teachers. Student teachers who had prior experience or who showed particular aptitude for teaching were allowed to move more quickly through their program. Other student teachers were required to repeat their experiences or extend the experience until they demonstrated mastery of the required teaching competencies.

With this project we have moved closer to accomplishing our goals; we individualized instruction, provided more relevant clinical experiences, and were able to demonstrate that certain teaching strategies work. The link between the public school classroom and ours was strengthened. Our pre-service teachers were able to apply directly what they learned from us to a real classroom situation. The classroom teachers contributed in meaningful ways to the teacher education process. In turn, they were able to add some new teaching techniques to their repertoires. We, as faculty members, were able to return to public school classrooms and reacquaint ourselves with the opportunities and constraints found there.

Summary

Directed toward improving the quality of teachers, the literature in teacher education offers many suggestions for reform. This brief paper examined the appropriateness of several of the reform recommendations and suggested other modifications to teacher education programs that might be of greater utility. In particular, it described the attempts made to individualize instruction for teacher education majors at a small, liberal arts university.

At the University of Charleston, delivery of instruction to pre-service teachers was altered in three ways: (1) matching the pace of instruction with the abilities of individual students, (2) designing and providing meaningful clinical experience throughout the four-year undergraduate program, and (3) modeling effective teaching practices in the professional education courses. The teacher educators, pre-service teachers, and public school personnel involved in this effort viewed the results very positively. The modifications were a successful attempt at incorporating effective teaching methods into higher education classrooms.

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