

An Internship Program in Teacher Education

WILLIAM M. ALEXANDER and GUY HILL

One of the most promising developments within recent years in the field of teacher education has been the expansion of internship programs in pre-service training. William M. Alexander, superintendent of the Winnetka, Illinois, public schools (formerly assistant superintendent of the Battle Creek, Michigan, public schools), and Guy Hill, professor of education, Michigan State College, describe the internship program co-sponsored by the Battle Creek schools and Michigan State College in 1948-49 and directed by the authors at that time.

From the Michigan

State College Viewpoint

Teacher education at Michigan State College is moving in the direction of increased professional laboratory experiences as a means of developing teaching competency. Beginning with the winter term, 1948,* internes (college seniors) have been placed in the Battle Creek public schools for these professional experiences. The internes spend the entire twelve-week term in Battle Creek, living there and following the schedule of regularly employed teachers. As of the spring term, 1949, only students preparing for secondary school positions have served as internes. At the college it is believed that young people can become more competent teachers by work-

ing in a school and community situation than by sitting in a classroom. We are especially interested in Battle Creek as a training center because of their democratic philosophy and procedures, be-



Working in the community

*Michigan State College is on the quarter system—the year is divided into fall (September-December), winter (January-March), and spring (April-June) terms.

cause of their willingness to experiment with new ideas, and because of the types of activities with which they are experimenting at present.

From the Internes' Viewpoint

The internes have gone to Battle Creek with "tongue in cheek" but have returned with the conviction that "this is the only way to do it." Some have gone under protest but have returned to thank college officials for the opportunity. Everyone, without exception, has been and is enthusiastic over the program. They have brought back to the students who are to succeed them as internes, glowing reports of their experiences. They have succeeded in increasing the demand almost beyond Battle Creek's capacity to care for them. There were three internes in the winter term of 1948, one during the spring term, eight during the fall term, nineteen during the winter term, 1949, and about forty in the spring term of 1949.

From the Battle Creek Viewpoint

Like other school systems, Battle Creek has experienced extreme difficulty in recent years in maintaining a complete staff of competent, qualified teachers. The various factors universally contributing to the teacher shortage have operated fully here. Furthermore, efforts beginning in 1946 to effect substantial curriculum improvement have been repeatedly blocked by turnover in teaching staffs and by inability to secure beginning teachers whose training includes preparation for modern curriculum practices. Hence the Battle Creek school administration has been greatly interested in participating in a teacher training program which prom-

ises to provide not only more teacher candidates for Battle Creek, but candidates who have been trained, in part at least, in the accepted practices of the system.

Battle Creek administrators also recognize an obligation on the part of school systems to contribute to the improvement of teacher education. For years public school workers have found fault with the products of the teachers colleges, but rarely have they been able to make a positive contribution. Suggestions to the teachers colleges are not enough—actually providing experience in field situations is essential. So in Battle Creek it is felt that any improvement in an interne program may make in teacher education is a desirable contribution to the progress of public education.

Orientation to the Schools

A number of procedures have been followed to acquaint internes with the Battle Creek system. This is begun even prior to actual participation through meetings of prospective internes with those in Battle Creek, through conferences of the former with the college coordinator, and, in some cases, through visitation of the schools by internes-to-be.

At the beginning of the interne quarter a number of steps are taken to build up understanding of the system. The first day or so is spent in the assigned building and is devoted to getting acquainted with the supervising teacher, colleagues, and the building facilities. Then a half-day session is held for internes, supervising teachers, principals, and coordinators to consider common problems. This session for the winter,

quarter, 1949, included: (1) a description of the program by the college coordinator, (2) a discussion period for internes with a representative of the Battle Creek Teachers Association, and (3) a meeting of school groups.

Orientation continues throughout the quarter. During the winter, 1949, a teacher-counselor who had worked with several internes and was a former president of the Battle Creek Teachers Association, held a weekly meeting with internes to discuss their questions concerning the school system. Various school personnel came to these meetings upon invitation of the internes to discuss specific school resources or programs. Tours were arranged to the school camp and other facilities. Throughout each quarter supervising teachers arrange for the internes to visit different schools and classes.

At an evaluation meeting closing the winter term, 1949, internes listed the following as the most valuable phases of the orientation program:

- Seeing work in several schools
- Meeting people gradually, not too many at one time
- Being welcomed to all meetings and programs.

At this meeting several suggestions were also made for improvement of orientation procedures in future quarters:

- Internes from previous quarters should participate in the half-day session at the beginning of the quarter
- All prospective internes should visit the Battle Creek schools *before* the interne quarter
- Internes should be provided more opportunities for use of school and community facilities.

Participation in Teachers' Tasks

These internes are gradually gaining competence in every type of activity in which the supervising teacher engages. We encourage both intensive and extensive experiencing. By intensive is meant those experiences which lead the interne to the assumption of full responsibility for one group of students in a specific situation. That is, they gradually take over the job of teaching one or more groups daily with all that this entails in the total program.

In addition, the internes acquaint themselves with the broad aspects of the total school program by visiting other teachers at all levels—by participating in all types of school activities such as assisting with dramatics, school assemblies, exhibits and demonstrations, student council, homerooms, testing, counseling, and guidance, and by becoming participating members of professional committees.

Study of School and Community

Every effort is made in Battle Creek to provide the interne with an extensive knowledge of the Battle Creek community. They participate in the forums, the recreation, the church activities, and the social and family life of Battle Creek. Such experiences as Cubs' and Brownies' leadership, home visitations, church-school work, school camp and school farm experiences have impressed them with the idea that the community is in reality the school. A community college for Battle Creek has been a vital issue for some time. The internes have participated in the discussion of this subject with parents and lay committees, have influenced the thinking of the total group and, in turn,

have had their own thinking influenced.

In the Parent-Teacher-Student Organizations of the respective schools, the internes have come to grips with the real problems faced by the parents and the teachers relative to the students. In these situations they have gained insight into how individuals can be helped. Finally, the various lecture and concert series of Battle Creek, the art exhibits, and other cultural and recreational activities have contributed to the building of competent, well-rounded prospective teachers.

Guidance of the Interne

Several individuals serve as counselors to the internes during their experience in Battle Creek. Their responsibilities will be only briefly indicated here. The college coordinator counsels the interne on such matters as teaching procedure, assignments within the system, evaluation of performance, getting a teaching job, and college and certification requirements. The supervising teacher is the chief and immediate counselor, and most of the internes' guidance in working with children and colleagues must come from this source. The assistant superintendent represents the school administration and counsels internes on placement for internships, on any difficulties in administrative relationships, and on teaching opportunities within and without the system. School principals have also worked closely with the internes and given guidance on building policies and procedures and other matters. Consultants on the Battle Creek supervisory staff are also frequently turned to for help.

A particularly important and helpful type of guidance was given during the

winter quarter, 1949, by Elwood Bancroft as a representative of the supervising teachers and of the Battle Creek teaching staff. His weekly meetings with the internes were described earlier. In view of the very favorable evaluation given this type of service by the internes, it was hoped to continue this in subsequent quarters.

Internes Evaluate the Program

Much of what we have learned from the interne program comes from the internes themselves. Here are some sample statements from evaluations made by those who have most recently completed the program:

☐ "It's a shame that all prospective teachers do not have this opportunity. None of those taking student teaching for half-days can possibly gain the competence that we are getting here."

☐ "This Battle Creek project is something that everyone should have the opportunity to experience. Never have I gotten so much in so little time."

☐ "Without this experience I could not have made my case study. I'm convinced that we learn to do these things by doing them, and this situation has given me the opportunity to put action to the test."

☐ "I have benefited more from having full responsibility for these boys and girls than I have from all the rest of my college work combined."

☐ "I think living away from college in a different community prepares us for going into any new town to which many of us will have to orient ourselves."

☐ "I feel that I have matured a whole year this term. My whole way of living has been affected. I wish now I could take my three years of college over again."

☐ "I have definitely spent the most valuable term of my college career here in Battle Creek. To me the wide observation, participation, and living in the school and the rest of the community represent

about as close an approximation of the real thing as one can get."

☛ "I have very definitely gained practice in making my own decisions as my supervisor has given me leeway in trying out new ideas. I have learned that it takes patience to watch young people grow."

☛ "I've gained experience in processes that I thought were pure theory."

The chief conclusions we have drawn from a year of experimentation with the interne program in Battle Creek may be summarized as follows:

The interne experience is regarded by internes, college representatives, and Battle Creek teachers and administrators as a much better preparation for teaching than the traditional one or two hours per day of student teaching.

Both the interne experience and the eventual full responsibility of teaching would be substantially improved by changes in the training program at the colleges. For example, Battle Creek internes feel that their pre-interne courses should include experience in building units, making lesson plans, leading group discussion, teaching reading at the secondary level, class management, counseling techniques, and speech. One step in this direction would be more frequent visitation of the internes at work by their college professors in both professional and subject-matter courses.

The planning and direction of the interne program should be a joint undertaking of those responsible for training teachers in the college and those responsible for employing, supervising, and consulting teachers in the system.

Evaluation of the teacher-to-be in terms of competencies in specifically agreed-

upon areas is a sounder approach to evaluation than the attempt to reduce everything to a mark or letter grade.

Expansion Hoped For

After a year of the interne program in Battle Creek, those persons responsible both at Michigan State and at Battle Creek feel that the program is exceedingly promising. Indeed, it is hoped to send increasing numbers of internes to Battle Creek and to provide a resident trainer, jointly employed by the college and the system, whose full time will be devoted to coordinating the Battle Creek interne program. As this expansion is contemplated, it is realized that much more study needs to be given to questions like these:

- How can prospective teachers be adequately screened prior to the internship?
- How can the college program be planned sufficiently early and well to provide the internship opportunity to all prospective teachers?
- How can the internship be directed so that it will be of maximum value to the interne who will *not* subsequently teach in Battle Creek?
- How can the experiences of the internes be most effectively utilized to improve the college training program?
- How can prospective teachers be given earlier and more continuous contact with children at different levels and in different situations?
- How can the pressure of college marks be removed as an obstacle in the interne program?

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