

An Emergency Teacher Program in the Elementary Grades

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Faced with a shortage of qualified elementary teachers, the Minneapolis schools developed an emergency program which has paid rich dividends. Ruby D. Dahlin is personnel assistant, Minneapolis Public Schools, Minneapolis, Minnesota.

IN THE spring of 1949, it became evident that the Minneapolis Public Schools would open in September of that year without enough qualified teachers for the elementary schools. A sufficient number of substitutes with regular certification was not available. Some means would have to be devised to meet the needs of the elementary school children of Minneapolis.

It was suggested that people with bachelor of arts degrees from liberal arts colleges might be trained on the job for elementary school teaching. The plan was submitted to the Minnesota State Department of Education to secure its cooperation in granting emergency permits and also to the College of Education of the University of Minnesota, which agreed to set up a training program and curriculum which when completed would qualify the participants for regular certification.

The requirements for teachers under the emergency program were specifically stated. A candidate must be a citizen of the United States, he must be less than 40 years of age and hold a Bachelor's degree from an accredited college. He must be willing to take the required college work which would consist of 9 quarter hours of elementary education

to be completed before August 1949, six hours to be in child growth and development and the teaching of elementary school reading; and he should complete 27 quarter hours of class work before September 1950. By September 1951 he must have achieved a major in elementary education.

A classroom teacher was to be appointed to coordinate the entire program. It was stipulated that this person should have educational qualifications required of an instructor at the University in order that she might direct the seminar which would be required of all candidates.

RECRUITMENTS

Posters and letters were sent to Eastern and Midwestern colleges announcing the program. Applications for teaching positions in grades two through six were processed. Those applicants with superior recommendations and high scholastic averages were interviewed. Interviewers were looking for people with friendly, warm, vibrant personalities, with many interests, and with extensive cultural and educational experience. Positions were offered to candidates whose recommendations indicated an ability to adjust easily, a willingness

to profit by suggestions, and a genuine interest in children and in teaching.

By the middle of July offers had been sent to 31 candidates. School assignments were made as soon as possible in order to give the prospective teacher an opportunity to examine the textbooks and materials of the grade level at which he was to teach. No one was assigned to grade one inasmuch as it was felt that a more definite technical training was required for the period of introduction to systematic reading than would be necessary at the later levels.

GUIDANCE

The responsibilities of the classroom teacher who coordinated the emergency program were to give classroom demonstrations in the areas requested by the teacher; to give constructive help in teaching techniques and practices through conferences and observations; to assist in classroom organization and arrangement; to plan observation lessons that the teachers might attend; and to keep accurate records of each visit, recording strengths and weaknesses, teacher reactions to suggestions, guidance given, and the results of the conferences with the principals.

Early in the fall, principals in buildings to which teachers on emergency permit were assigned met with the assistant superintendent in charge of elementary schools and with the helping teacher. At that time the principals were notified of the responsibilities of the helping teacher, given general information about the emergency program and an opportunity to discuss the principal's role in the training of the teachers. From the discussion it was determined that the principals would be

responsible for giving information about building philosophy and policies, organization and routine procedures, and the teaching materials that were available in the building and in the community. They were to provide the teacher with the proper courses of study and guides and with textbooks and materials. They were to give instruction in the testing program, in reporting to parents, in the keeping of records, and in the completing of necessary forms. They were to assist the helping teacher in following through with suggestions given by the helping teacher and by discussing with the classroom teacher the daily planning and the long-range planning necessary for efficient classroom instruction.

Consultants in the special fields, such as art, music, physical education, and handwriting, agreed to give precedence to teachers on emergency permit.

The helping teacher scheduled conferences with every teacher during the first week of school, before the opening of schools to the children. The teachers were eager and enthusiastic to meet the children, but much anxiety was felt as to what activities were to be carried on during the first weeks. Almost without exception the teachers felt they would have no difficulty with classroom control, but this became, however, one of the hardest factors to achieve. Many difficulties arose due to lack of knowledge of standards of work and behavior at various grade levels and for individual children; to unfamiliarity with subject matter; and to insufficient training in techniques and practices usually employed in the elementary school.

The first weeks were busy ones for the helping teacher and, for a while,

three school visits were made each day in order to give technical assistance and that needed "boost in morale," since by the end of the second week the job loomed large and discouraging for these unprepared teachers. Twenty-nine of the thirty-one candidates weathered the first four months and when the Christmas holidays came everyone, including the helping teacher, was ready for the two week vacation. All returned with renewed determination to succeed in the new profession.

During the year, the helping teacher was always on call for anyone who needed assistance. All her visits to the schools were two or more hours in length. After a visit, a conference was held with the teacher and with the principal. Each principal was notified of the intended visit of the helping teacher. The emergency teacher, too, was informed a day or two in advance of the visit. This was done in order that the teacher might have an opportunity to decide whether the visit would be of benefit at the designated time.

The classroom teacher made use of the helping teacher in whatever way she felt would be of greatest benefit to her. During the first series of visits, it was noted that almost without exception the classroom teacher requested demonstration teaching. As the number of visits increased, the greater majority wished to do the teaching themselves with the helping teacher making suggestions at the end of the visit.

At the end of the year six of the teachers resigned: one to go into business at an increased salary, one to teach at the secondary level, one to go into another area of work, and three to continue their education in order to be-

come qualified. At the end of the first year, seven were rated as strong teachers, one was rated below average, and the remainder were rated as average or better by their respective principals.

IN-SERVICE TRAINING

The University of Minnesota employed the helping teacher to plan a seminar in elementary school practices, stipulating that the course be approved by two professors in the College of Education. The principals, the consultants, the assistant superintendent in charge of elementary education, and the teachers themselves contributed a list of what they considered to be the outstanding problems facing the group. From these various sources and from observation, the helping teacher was able to determine the units which would be most helpful. Units which dealt with classroom control, growth and development of children, individual differences, the curriculum, the techniques employed in working with children, materials and resources available in the schools, parent-teacher relationships, pupil personnel and adjustment services and teachers' professional relationships were introduced and worked out through much the same methods that are in current use in the elementary school. Motivation for learning was great because of a need which many felt for immediate information. The course was therefore popular and attendance was excellent.

At the beginning of every class period a chance was given for each person to discuss any problem that seemed pertinent to him and to the group. In this way, the teacher gained more security. They discovered that others

were having like problems and they were not alone in their difficulties. They brought in suggestions that the members of the class might carry on in their classrooms. They contributed by way of demonstration, discussion, and explanation. The class took field trips to acquaint themselves with procedures, techniques, and locations. They visited an elementary school building to note assignments, classroom arrangements and materials. Every known method was employed to give actual practice in classroom procedures.

The second year under the emergency program the teachers worked with a student teaching supervisor from the University of Minnesota, inasmuch as their teaching was to be counted for credit for the student teaching requirement. The supervisor conducted during the year one class per week, during which teaching problems were discussed. Refinement of techniques was stressed.

During the second year one teacher resigned to teach elsewhere, one reentered the service of the armed forces, three resigned for marriage, and two for approaching maternity. Two became completely qualified for certification during the year and consequently left the program. Fifteen teachers of the

original thirty-one remained in the system at the beginning of the third year. They are now fully qualified and seven of them are rated as strong or superior teachers.

EVALUATION

Administrative personnel of the Minneapolis school system felt the program was valuable enough to continue for another year. In 1950, twenty-three teachers on emergency permit were employed. A very careful screening process was used with the applicants and during the summer of 1950 a special college course entitled, "The Introduction to the Elementary School" was offered. This course was intensive and practical and was based on a study of the needs that developed from the experiences with the previous group of emergency teachers. During the school year 1951-52, because the Minneapolis Public School System was able to employ a sufficient number of qualified teachers, there was no need for an emergency program. However, many well-trained, interested teachers were obtained for the Minneapolis schools through this program, and our experience with the program has proved that it was a worth-while venture in on-the-job teacher training.

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