

## FIELD SEMINARS FOR STUDENT TEACHERS

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THE public school program to be described here included a seminar for student teachers which was designed to deal with the more general educational problems that cross all subject matter lines. It was intended also to provide close contact among students in all subject areas in order to permit thinking in greater depth about problems common to all.

The seminar was part of a planned total program conducted by the school administrator in charge of student teachers as well as by a member of the college staff. These weekly sessions were carefully planned and evaluated by students and the school-college team. They did not "just happen." The program evolved directly from the stated or hidden needs of the student-teachers and the procedures were ever-changing. Those that will be described were evolutionary and were among those which students and teachers who were "followed-up" the next year ranked as the most helpful to them. Some seminars were primarily diagnostic in function

and were conducted by the student teachers themselves in the absence of any school or college personnel. Others were instructional sessions through which students' problems could begin to be solved and new insights gained, including those which focused on philosophical implications. The development of philosophical guidelines would aid them in making future decisions independently.

### Diagnostic Sessions

The instructional seminars were based on the findings derived from the diagnostic sessions. For example, when the college and school coordinators found a continuing concern with "discipline," it became apparent that anxiety was so great as to block awareness of critical relationships. Students needed to perceive in a great variety of situations the relationship between class management and such factors as the content of the lesson, the teacher's planning, the procedures used, the motivation and readiness of the children for

the topic under study, and the extent of pupil involvement. Therefore, student teachers were asked to observe each other in pairs and to report to peers, in the instructional seminar the following week, those aspects of the observed procedure which encouraged good "discipline."

The variety of aspects which was apparent made it possible for students to form their own generalizations from the insights they gained as a result of the pooling of experiences. It was not necessary for an "authority figure" to review the factors affecting behavior. Students were encouraged to and did take advantage of opportunities to continue to observe each other independently, to help peers in the actual teaching process in the classroom, and to discuss procedures informally without benefit of further status leadership. They evaluated their activities openly, and freely brought to the seminar specific problems they were unable to resolve alone. There grew up among the students a feeling that they could learn from each other.

### Teachers Lead Seminars

Various procedures were used for these sessions, each geared to the problem at hand. For example, one factor implicit in the student teachers' concerns was their inability to "individualize" instruction. Actually, few had seen any phase of the process despite their effective cooperating teachers. Even those cooperating teachers who *did* use a number of individualization procedures were unable to verbalize adequately just what it was they were trying to do and *why*. They needed help in working through for themselves this complex procedure.

One teacher was asked to demonstrate over closed-circuit TV how she managed to individualize her instruction. The lesson was carefully prepared by the teacher with a maximum of assistance from school and college personnel to insure some measure of satisfaction to her and the children. She had only twenty minutes with the children so that in the second half of a forty-minute period she herself could meet with student teachers who had observed her and so that she could conduct the discussion of her lesson. Actually, if student teachers had been able to find space in which to stand in her room during the observation, this would have been preferred. However, twenty-five student teachers make a rather cumbersome number in a classroom where every inch of space is needed for a variety of activities. Also, the staff personnel could now help focus observers' attention on particular aspects of the processes being used.

Wherever feasible, student teachers were taken "en masse" into the classroom for twenty minutes. One such demonstration by another first-year teacher was done in the area of reading with a seventh-grade group of children none of whom had reached the fifth grade norm in reading achievement at the time of entry into grade seven and several of whom had no functional reading power. When the teacher accompanied her twenty observers back into the seminar room, she was literally bombarded with questions both about points on the guide sheet they had been given just prior to entering that classroom and about activities that took place in the classroom.

*Student teacher:* When the children were

sitting two-by-two were they reading to each other?<sup>1</sup>

*Teacher:* Yes. One boy reads a paragraph to another and then his partner reads to him. They read from books they choose.

*Student teacher:* The other boy was following him and he was holding a pencil in his hand and pointing to the words.

*Teacher:* They work together. It makes it easier as far as conducting the class is concerned. One boy in that pair is a better reader than the other, but neither is a *good* reader. He helps him. I'm aware that the child using the pencil is providing a "crutch" which may be a poor procedure. But first things first. I'm watching for an opportunity to help him get along without that pencil. Right now I'll let him keep it for a little while longer. When I think he's ready, I'll decide what needs to be done.

\* \* \*

*Student teacher:* They don't all read the passages at the same rate. What do you do about the differences?<sup>2</sup>

*Teacher:* Did you see what I did?

*Student teacher:* You were walking around the room.

*Teacher:* Yes. I picked particular children whom I know could never finish on time.

*Coordinator:* And what did you do with them?

*Teacher:* I read with them. They read a little; I read. They read; I read. So, I picked up their "speed" in that way. Also, I helped with vocabulary they can't handle.

*Student teacher:* When you gave them

<sup>1</sup>For further description of procedures used with children who had difficulty in reading, see: Deborah Elkins, *Reading Improvement in the Junior High School*. New York: Bureau of Publications, Teachers College, Columbia University, 1963.

<sup>2</sup>Note: At this point the student teachers were no longer discussing individual reading, but rather the use of a common selection.

all the same story to read, what was your purpose?

*Teacher:* I do that when I'm introducing a particular concept to the whole class, but as you saw, they have their own individually selected books also, usually on the same topic.

*Coordinator:* In other words, she uses some kind of common experience to introduce a new idea, to help the children think along certain new lines. Once they begin to do this, to examine circumstances which will help them evolve a concept, then they use their own individually selected books to examine other circumstances which deepen their perception of that concept.

*Student teacher:* Do you find the few minutes you give to a few students effective?

*Teacher:* Yes. It helps the child know enough so that he can take part in the discussion which will follow. Without that, he cannot feel a part of the group. If he cannot ever take part in the group discussion, if he never has anything to contribute to group knowledge, an important incentive for reading is lost. Also, this cuts down his feelings of frustration.

The principle behind the practice of having the teacher lead the discussion is that he knows best what he is trying to do and can therefore respond to questions more adequately than can anyone else. It is interesting to note the non-threatening questions asked. The students' identification with the teacher only a few months removed from them in length of experience may be part of the picture. There is a feeling that they are seeking more information so that *they* may know how to proceed in attempting to solve the problem of individualization; they are not seeking to put the teacher on the defensive, even though they are fearful and anxious.

Under other circumstances these very students would uncover issues with the unconscious intent to destroy, because they fear they cannot yet tackle such a problem in the classroom, and they seek ways of rejecting even the existence of that problem. In the relaxed atmosphere here, student teachers were able to understand the importance of being ready to accept the concept that teaching always presents problems since it is such a complex endeavor.

### Variety of Procedures

Other processes were also used in these seminars, all of which could be described in as much detail as the previous one. However, a simple listing of a few of the processes may serve here: (a) listening to and discussing recordings<sup>3</sup> of lessons by teachers and by members of their own student teacher group; (b) observing classes in small groups and discussing them in order to gain insights into problems that concerned only a few of the prospective teachers; (c) using resource persons such as the school guidance counselor, administrator, nurse, audio-visual director and parent; (d) examining carefully the problems of members of the student-teacher group as they uncovered such problems in their work with a child whom each met twice a week and who needed special assist-

ance in the student teacher's subject area; (e) observing a peer in small groups or over closed-circuit TV and discussing the observation under the direction of the one who was observed; (f) traveling with a given class for which they were more or less responsible, in order to observe the children as they worked with other teachers in other subject areas, and then discussing "findings"; (g) observing interview techniques as the guidance counselor spoke with children or parents over closed-circuit TV; (h) participating in "team planning" sessions of teachers.

In summary, these seminars were purely student-teacher-problem oriented, gave needed support and instruction at the opportune time, were varied in content and procedure, offered a number of new ways of looking at old and new issues, and built a deeper concept of the oneness of theory and practice. The atmosphere was a comfortable one, so that leadership could develop and even self-examination could take place. Without self-examination learning would be too limited. One student summarized his feelings about himself and his experience:

Somehow, I became a teacher this semester. I *feel* like one. I feel that I know how to do things with children; how to help them learn. I can make up my mind about what they need and I have good evidence for it. And I can plan for the next day, very well, and also see ahead to where I want to go with them and where we want to go together.

<sup>3</sup>Deborah Elkins and Thelma Hickerson. "The Use of the Tape Recorder in Teacher Education." *The Journal of Teacher Education* 15 (4): 432-38; December 1964.



"There is no other source for choice than the choices we have stored within ourselves to make."

—ROSS L. MOONEY (See pages 218-221.)

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