

Baltimore's adventure in teacher education

PROJECT MISSION

JACK EPSTEIN

**Director of Project Mission, Baltimore
City Public Schools, Baltimore, Maryland**

SEVERAL years ago the inner-city schools of Baltimore City, Maryland, faced a critical shortage of skilled and dedicated teachers. Project Mission was initially conceived as a program designed to attract and to prepare teachers to serve in these schools. Teacher preparation institutions and colleges have traditionally done a commendable job in preparing individuals to teach in middle class schools and in affluent neighborhoods. Apparently they have done less than an adequate job in serving the schools of the urban disadvantaged. This project is an attempt to demonstrate the feasibility of reversing this trend and to determine the possibility of attracting college seniors and graduate students to want to teach in mid-city schools.

Typically, efforts to improve teacher education programs involve dropping or adding courses. In Project Mission, a new approach to teacher education was evolved.

The Department of Education of Baltimore City joined in a partnership, working cooperatively with three colleges—Coppin, Morgan, and Towson State College. The colleges supply the project with students—approximately ten seniors or graduate students from each college—and they, in turn, become our intern teachers. Each college also supplies the project with at least one full-time professor. These are the “resources” of the project, and from them, the program emanates.

For the Inner City

The intern teachers, under the close supervision of the project professors, undergo a vigorous year of professional college work and classroom teaching entirely within the confines of the inner city. A typical day for the intern teacher is divided into two parts: from 8:00 A.M. to 11:30 A.M., he will carry out his teaching responsibilities under the guidance of a master teacher, and from 12:30 to 5:00 P.M., he will take his course work in the very same building in which he is teaching. On several afternoons, from 3:00 to 5:00 P.M., he will conduct tutorial, remedial, or enrichment sessions with his pupils, depending upon their

indicated needs. On Saturdays, he will take small or large groups of children on trips to cultural activities (libraries, museums), on recreational pursuits (hikes, circus, ball games), on visits to the downtown shopping areas (to eat in a restaurant) or other enrichment experiences. From the point of view of the intern teacher, the program thus is a rugged one, requiring devotion, commitment and much hard work.

One of the goals of the program is to prepare teachers so that they will feel competent and secure in knowing how to provide the necessary kinds of programs to meet the educational needs of these environmentally deprived children. Every phase of the program, consequently, is directed toward this goal—the development of understandings and insights into the total life picture of the educationally impoverished child. Stress is accordingly placed on the special learning styles of deprived youngsters; on the ecological, symbiotic and demographic relationships of an urban society, on methods of teaching and materials of instruction especially well suited to inner-city school children; and on the emotional and psychological needs of these young people.

An effective inner-city teacher requires appropriate knowledge, skills and attitudes. The dimension of the teacher education curricular design thus stresses both flexibility and adaptability to the special needs of environmentally impoverished youth.

Project Mission began its work on August 23, 1966 with a three week Orientation Program for intern and cooperating teachers. Jointly funded by the Ford Foundation and the cooperating institutions, the project has now been in operation for a full year.

Implications

What are the implications already in evidence? First, we have found that students can be attracted to work in inner-city schools—students who are eager, dedicated and enthusiastic with the zeal of missionaries. Through close association with the community, much of the initial fear and apprehensiveness of the prospective teacher was alleviated and wholesome attitudes and perceptions were acquired. The experience became a challenging and rewarding one, both professionally and personally, for most of the interns.

Secondly, one of the significant features of the project was the elimination of the artificial dichotomy, both geographical and chronological in nature, which exists between theory and practice in traditional teacher preparation programs. Inter-institutional (classroom and college) feedback is immediate, for the intern relates his experiences in his classroom immediately and directly to the theory which he receives concurrently in his college work. Thus the gap is narrowed and greater awareness of the importance of theory in a functional setting is developed through this pragmatic approach. The resultant modifications, through flexibility of programming, heighten the perspectives and perceptions of both intern and professor.

Another unique innovation is the close cooperation, on the operational level,

between three colleges and a large urban school system. Articulation, to a rather remarkable degree, has been accomplished in uniformity of procedures for registration, course descriptions, grading, and reciprocal library privileges.

Team teaching on a college level is another unusual characteristic of the program. On frequent occasions, several or all of the professors unite to present a multi-disciplinary approach to the solution of a problem. Flexibility of planning and operation facilitate this team teaching approach. Thus, for example, sessions of Social Foundations are joined with those of Psychological Foundations, to carry out certain cooperative research ventures into the influences of environment on learning.

One of the significant discoveries, made early in the operation of the project, was the importance of the role of the cooperating teachers (our master teachers) to the success of the program. It became apparent that the attitudes, skills, the operational procedures of the intern teachers largely mirrored those of the cooperating teachers. Concern was expressed about the need to sensitize the cooperating teachers to the purposes of the project, to the crucial roles they are playing, and frequently to increase their acceptance and understanding of the characteristics of deprived children and to develop greater competence in organizing adequate instructional programs in their classrooms. Institutes, seminars, workshops, and frequent meetings have been held in which the focus has been placed on the enrichment and strengthening of the backgrounds of these cooperating teachers so that their contributions to the training of the intern teachers would be maximal.

The influence of Project Mission on the cooperating schools has been extensive. A faculty could not help but benefit from the many new approaches, the innovative curriculum ideas, the frequent presence of college personnel and resource people of national renown in the school buildings, and the many recently developed instructional texts, materials and machines. On occasion, teachers, who were not part of the project, asked to attend demonstrations, to use new equipment, or to attend institutes or other training sessions.

An additional unique aspect of the project has been the opportunity provided for all participants to observe and work with children of varying school levels. There is no doubt that the insights gained by both elementary and secondary school teachers have helped immeasurably in developing programs in which transition loses its traumatic implications and where the strengths of each are utilized in the programs of the other.

What has become increasingly clear to us is that we are on the horizons of new educational vistas in the field of teacher preparation. When theory is wedded to practice, when students learn to deal effectively with children who are not highly motivated toward school, when curriculum is developed that is relevant to the lives of deprived children, then teacher education becomes effective and the supposed hardships of teaching in inner-city schools vanish. We are a long way from solving the myriad problems encountered, but we are in the laboratory of educational change, and we are moving, hopefully, in the right direction. ☛

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