

Report of a study of the effects of instructors' communication behavior upon student teachers.

Preservice Education and the Developing Teacher¹

DAN W. ANDERSEN

Associate Professor
Curriculum and Instruction
University of Wisconsin, Madison

M. VERE DeVAULT

Professor
Curriculum and Instruction
University of Wisconsin, Madison

THE question of the effectiveness of a preservice program in developing understandings, attitudes, and skills that will actually be utilized by the student after he becomes a full-time teacher is an intriguing one. Much has been theorized on the subject; little evidence has been forthcoming.

It is reasonable to believe that teacher preparation programs are effective to varying degrees in promoting professional traits and skills necessary for successful classroom teaching. What is not nearly as well understood is the degree of impact that the professional education sequence has had on the practicing teacher. There are those who contend that teachers bear the mark of a particular system of education or show the evidence of having been instructed by an exponent of a particular educational

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point of view. It is well and good to assume that exposure either to a system or to a personality will leave its mark on the aspiring teacher, but does research support us in this contention? Do we even have research that attempts answers to these questions?

Much or most of our research in teacher education has been of the descriptive type. We have been interested in describing what constitutes different educational methods, and we have validated the statistical differences that make up these methods or approaches. The dimensions which researchers have chosen to use in these examinations range from communication behavior of the instructor to episodic descriptions of student activity.

With increased sophistication of instruments for measuring teacher-learning activities, it appears now possible to investigate the relationship and transfer of "learning" an approach in the first case and "teaching" with that approach

in the second case. What evidence do we have that it is indeed possible to observe and measure whether approaches are transmitted from one situation to another?

One of the facets of The Wisconsin Teacher Education Research Project, (5) supported by the National Institute of Mental Health, bears directly on the problem of measuring the impact of university instruction on elementary school instruction. The locus of the Wisconsin study was the elementary teacher education program.

The aspect of this study most directly concerned with the subject of this paper was the investigation of the effects of different instructional approaches upon college students preparing to be elementary school teachers—more specifically: was there an impact of the university instructors' instructional approaches upon the classroom teaching behavior of the students as teachers in elementary classrooms?

Instructional Approaches

Three different instructional approaches were employed in two required courses in the elementary teacher education program at the University of Wisconsin—Education 73, "The Child: His Nature and Needs," and Education 75, "The Nature and Direction of Learning."

Approach I, the "concept-oriented" approach, focused on the development and understanding of principles and concepts derived from the subject matter of Education 73 and 75.

Approach II, the "case-study-oriented" approach, handled the subject matter of Education 73 and 75 from the point of view of its relationship to and

impact on the learning and development of the child as a unique individual; this approach emphasized the use of case studies of children.

Approach III, the "learner-oriented" approach characterized by freedom of expression and self-selected learning, aimed at developing better self-understanding on the part of the students.

The 36 teacher-subjects² whose behavior, perceptions, and attitudes comprised the experimental measures, were studied as they progressed from student teachers in the university to full-time teachers in elementary classrooms. Their attitudes, values, and perceptions were recorded over this period through interviews and questionnaires in order to obtain some understanding of the kinds of individuals they were when they began their training, how they changed during this period, and whether these changes were related to the different instructional approaches which they experienced.

In thinking of these subjects as potential transmitters of any influence experienced at the university level, it was clear that we also needed to study in some systematic way their behavior in the classroom, both during their practice teaching and full-time teaching, since only through their interaction with their pupils would they transmit any effects. Although it is possible to observe and study behavior in many different ways, the communication behavior of the teacher was selected as representing a major part of the significant interaction of teachers with their pupils.

² In the initial sampling there was a total of 90 students randomly assigned to three equal groups. The 36 teacher-subjects represent the sampling population who remained in the study for the entire three years.

Communication Behavior

First it was necessary to authenticate the communication behavior of the university instructors. In Education 73 and Education 75, the regular class sessions (50-minute sessions) of each of the three instructors were routinely tape recorded during the two semesters. Six times during the year, the three instructors were personally observed and their communication categorized by trained observers, using the Fourteen Category Observation Scale (1, 4).

Communication data on the student-subjects were gathered in the following manner. In the curriculum methods course, once during each semester, while working with children in a public school classroom, the teacher-subjects were observed and their communication was categorized by trained observers using the same Fourteen Category Observation Scale as used for the university instructors.

In Student Teaching, two recordings, one early and one late in the semester, of the communication behavior of each teacher-subject were made and analyzed. In the full-time teaching experience, the data collected about the teacher during three visits to the classroom in October, January, and May included three tape recorded observations of his communication behavior.

Analysis was first made of the three different university instructors' communication patterns. Evidence was collected that demonstrated a significant difference between instructional approaches at the college level. The analyses of tape recorded college classes indicated that all three university instructors did actualize the central focus of their respective

approaches through their general communication behavior. The concept-centered approach and the case study approach utilized a total of about 50 percent of the time in giving information and in giving analysis and only 27 and 13 percent respectively, to listening; whereas the learner-centered approach utilized approximately 56 percent of the time in listening and only 15 percent in giving information and in giving analysis combined.

In the concept approach, the instructor gave directions more than in either of the other approaches; in the case study approach the instructor gave information and analysis more than in either of the others; and in the learner-centered approach the instructor listened and gave suggestions more than in either of the other approaches.

Findings were also given as to the impact of the university instructors' instructional approaches on the classroom teaching behavior of the students as teachers in elementary classrooms. There was no evidence that the communication behavior of the students, either during their laboratory experiences as student teachers or during their first year as beginning teachers, was related to the communication behavior of their college instructors in the three experimental treatments.

There was some evidence, however, that the case study and learner-centered approaches did differ from the content-centered approach in their impact on certain personality variables. The two approaches did appear to broaden the range of teachers' tolerable input—i.e., they made teachers more susceptible to emotional awareness and emotional disturbance (2).

Developmental Stages

In attempting to assess these findings, it may be that there are, as Krathwohl and others (3) speculate, developmental stages through which individuals move as they become teachers. There was certain evidence in this study of some slight impact by the institution on the affective awareness of students and a change in communication patterns as preservice and first year experience passed. The trend in the communication pattern for all three groups of teacher-subjects seemed to be toward the cognitive aspects of teaching, and away from the affective aspects which had been emphasized in the teacher education program.

Any lack of consistent communication behavior throughout the observation periods as measured by the instruments may suggest that the student was open for, but not seeking from the institution, ideas about the methodology, technique, and content knowledge. As the student became more involved in teacher behavior, in the context of his first full-time teaching position, his concern was focused on matters other than mental health.

The value position which the institution or an instructor expressed in teaching approach regarding teacher functions (e.g., that mental health of the individual is an important aspect of teaching) appears to have been internalized by his students to a minimal degree. A sequence of compliance with the instructor's methodology and value position while in class, an identification with a preservice experience situation and

with the value position of one's initial teaching situation may have developed.

A further follow-up of these teachers to determine when they establish a consistent behavioral pattern and what seems to be the greatest influence of this pattern might establish several matters. For example, this might reveal the existence of a third stage—internalization of values regarding teaching. This third stage might result in a series of stages which might include compliance at the university level, identification at the early classroom teaching level, and finally, internalization at the level at which the teacher's experience has been extensive enough to provide security for individual development.

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