

"Each student is an individual, with his own needs, motives, and problems. . . ."

Student Teaching: The Shakedown Cruise

WILLIAM SEZAK
Professor of Sociology
University of Maine, Orono

IN THE process of formal preparation for the teaching profession in Maine the prospective teacher must eventually face a teaching experience within the classroom(s) of one of the elementary or secondary schools in the state. The student teaching experience occurs during the senior year at the University of Maine, and may occur earlier in the academic program at the state colleges and private institutions of higher learning.

In order to accommodate the student teacher placements it is necessary to have the cooperation of the public school systems in the numerous communities of the state. In addition, it is necessary to make provisions at the University of Maine for implementation of an eight-week student teaching period for each major in this field of concentration.

This is made possible by providing so-called "block courses" which run for two eight-week periods during both semesters of the academic year. For instance, while approximately one-half of the teacher preparatory students (seniors) are at their student teaching assignments during the first eight weeks

of each semester, the other half are enrolled in "block courses" on campus. When the first eight-week period ends, those completing the student teaching assignment return to campus, enrolling in the same or similar eight-week courses that were available to those who are setting forth for their eight-week student teaching experience during the second half of the semester.

During the past several years one of the "block courses" available has been Sociology of Education. Without describing the nature of the course itself, there is one "exercise" that is revealing of the variety of experiences the student teacher becomes exposed to. This exercise reveals many interesting reactions to the "teaching" situation as viewed for the first time from the perspective of the student teacher. After returning to campus life, and having adjusted somewhat to the routine of attending classes, they are requested to write short statements concerning their reaction to student teaching.

Instructions are in the form of suggestions, relating to broad practice teaching experiences such as association with fellow teachers, convictions gained

from the teaching experience, problems that became significant during this period, and roles expected of student teachers by fellow teachers, administrators, and students. Not all of the above-mentioned suggestions are referred to by the students, but the statements made are surely worth sharing with those in the teaching profession as well as with those who may be considering teaching as their professional field of endeavor.

As an "apprentice," the student teacher reacts to given situations in the school and classroom in a variety of ways. The reader will find many interesting statements, anonymously presented, pertaining to those experiences uncovered during the initial confrontation with pupils and fellow teachers.

Observant Participants

The following statements indicate an ability on the part of student teachers to be observant participants in the ongoing interactive relationships to be found within the complex school compound. Also, the experienced teacher, in reading these "mini-testimonials," might very well reflect on the meaningfulness of the observations offered here.

The student teaching experience can be of great value to prospective teachers, affording the students an opportunity to reflect on the decision to enter the teaching profession.

This writer's comments will be limited to those that further emphasize or clarify the issues and feelings emanating from the following selected statements. Also, it will be the writer's purpose to provide a flow of continuity in the arrangement of topical areas. However, this will be done arbitrarily.

Therefore, the categories will be rather broad and certainly not exclusive (or inclusive) in the illustrations that have been selected. It must be made clear that the statements herein reproduced do not consist of a consensus of observations, but rather give unique individual responses to the conditions that were observed and reacted to in the variety of placements within the state. Furthermore, at the risk of being redundant, the statements relate to experiences and reactions that had a particular impact on the individual student teachers.

An area of concern that appears quite frequently is that of discipline. The discipline referred to in the following statements involves those actions that disrupt the educative process, not the "discipline" that is the formal teaching-learning process in the school that leads to achievement and intellectual development. Evidence of differential experience and observation is well indicated by the following pair of statements.

Students in secondary schools prefer the teacher who has constant control over the class. They idolize the feeling of security gained by participating in a teacher-controlled session.

The teacher is no longer the God of the class. The students are able to turn us on and off like a TV set. Their reaction to scolding is often a sassy remark or some other hostile action.

Other student teachers offer the following in respect to discipline:

Disciplinary measures that rely on sarcasm are not effective and should not be used.

One aspect of my teaching that hindered

me was the fact that I was not forceful enough. This is something that I shall remember when I begin teaching next fall. Discipline is of greatest importance; without it there can be no learning.

My first teaching experience was a very discouraging one. My students found humor in something I had said to them. The class broke into gales of laughter which I could not control. My first experience turned into pure bedlam, and as you can imagine I went home quite discouraged. But, every day became progressively better.

A question: How effective is detention as a disciplinary action?

Do you believe it is possible for a teacher to lose her class in the area of discipline in the very first three days of the school year? During my student teaching experience I had a long conversation with a teacher concerning discipline. It was her opinion that if a teacher does not set her standards of discipline in the very first day of school she will lose control and respect of the pupils, and will not be able to regain it.

Discipline was one aspect of teaching that really scared me. I have never respected any teacher who did not command discipline in his or her classes. In an unruly atmosphere students learn little when they could be gaining so much from a challenging teacher. If I can't command discipline and respect in my classes I shall not teach.

Need for Discipline

In addition to the preceding responses, student teachers submitted numerous anecdotal statements relating to specific instances of classroom misbehavior on the part of students. In spite of the evidence that discipline lurks as a problem in the minds of student teachers, there seems to be a great enthusiasm to become a good teacher and make a contribution to the teaching

profession. This is particularly indicated in the following statements that relate to interactive experiences within the school building. The interactional and associational relationships illustrated below include teachers and students.

Some of the children began to look on me not only as their teacher, but as their friend. Also, some of them were eager to share their "treasured" secrets with me.

I did get to know some of the students very well during my practice teaching period. The longer I knew them, the more interested and concerned I became. A person cannot teach without being subjective about the students. If this subjectivity, this sincere interest in each student, is balanced by an objective evaluation, then, and only then (I believe), can students really be taught.

I found the interaction between students and faculty to be extremely good. The students felt free to discuss any problem with the teachers; and the teachers, in turn, were very willing to listen and help.

I discovered how eager children are to talk about themselves and have the teacher interested in them. I also found that they are keenly interested in the teacher's personal experiences. They want to know about him as a person.

In my classroom we were at times able to establish something different from the mere student-teacher relationship. Certain projects encouraged a collaborating attitude or feeling. The inter-class relationships were varied, subtle, and often a surprise. I tried to find out what made this class function as a group by various activities. It made an interesting study of how we learn.

I was very pleased because the teachers at the school treated me as a fellow teacher and not as a student. I was respected as an equal.

It is really amazing how becoming a teacher and associating with experienced teachers in the school situation makes me a part of the professional world.

It is not difficult to come to the conclusion that the teaching experience takes on many proportions and that no two teachers will react in the same way to a particular situation or event. It is certainly an oversimplification to state that recognition must be given to the complexity of individual personalities that combine to establish the "teaching situation." Evidence of this is well illustrated by the following observations.

The students were communicative and responsive to the best of their abilities in my classes. They respond to humor, new ways of learning, and above all, patience.

The dividing line between where my authority ended and where my supervising teacher's began was often tested by the students as they would play "one against the other" for privileges.

How friendly to be with students after student teaching has been a question in my mind. I am now receiving many letters from former pupils and do not know what to write in return, or whether to write or not to write.

I found that there was too little time in the school day to give individual attention not only to slow learners who need help, but to fast learners who need something challenging and creative. Because of the drill we had to go through with slow learners, the faster learners were rapidly becoming bored.

Each class does seem to have its own personality. One class I had, a bright group, was quite inquisitive and rather enjoyed coming to class. A larger group, about the same intelligence level, was more quiet and tended to slight their homework because

they figured other students in the class would answer all the questions.

Evaluative Reactions

Turning to a general area of student teaching, the following statements speak for themselves as personal evaluative reactions to the practice teaching experience.

Now that practice teaching is over, I look back and realize that I did a lot of growing up in eight weeks. I can better control my emotions and better accept my position as disciplinarian. I have gained understanding. I am still idealistic, but I have learned to live with partial failure while striving for greater success. I still want more than mediocrity, and wonder "Is my progress enough?" I know that the only way to find out is to give myself a year or two to try my wings. I am not complaining, because teaching has proved to be the challenge that I want.

One of the greatest experiences of my college career was my student teaching. I felt that I was actually doing the one thing in my life I most want to do—teach.

Briefly, I enjoyed practice teaching. This surprised me because I was not sure before this experience that I wanted to go into teaching. Most of all, I enjoyed working with children.

The school staff was a delight to work with. Congenial and always willing to help, they made my eight weeks go by very rapidly. Generally, I would say that my expectations concerning student teaching were more than realized. I felt sure that I would have a good experience, but I never imagined how good.

In my teaching experience I considered my attitude to be one of the most important factors in that it would be reflected by the students. I tried to create an atmosphere in which the students could freely express

their ideas and opinions. They could ask questions and expect answers. I exhausted all my energies each day in trying to get the students to analyze, criticize, and create. Often I felt exhilarated at what I thought "a job well done."

The only thing that I do not like about student teaching is the letdown afterwards. The way I feel, once you are out teaching you want to stay there. And I do miss all those children—even the troublemakers.

Practice teaching was the most interesting and rewarding experience in my life. In my preparation for teaching, it was the most educational of any encounter I have had. Being in the actual teaching situation gave me more insight into the professional aspects of teaching than any previous experience. Student teaching provided an opportunity to evaluate my previous ideas and convictions about the field.

Student teaching is probably going to be one of the dominant influences on my future, more than it will influence many others. My reason for drawing these conclusions stems from the fact that student teaching has restored my faith in the teaching profession. The courses in methods of teaching were not a waste, as I thought they were before practice teaching.

Now that I have completed my student teaching period, I find that I am looking forward with great anticipation to obtaining my first teaching position. Student teaching was a tremendous experience. My critic teacher and college supervisor were very effective in guiding me, especially at times when the going seemed to be a little rough.

I have so many wonderful memories of the time that I spent practice teaching that I could almost write a book. Needless to say, I loved practice teaching. Never before have I had such a feeling of being somebody really important, and doing something equally important. I cannot wait until I get my own class.

From my teaching experience in high school, I have found that I definitely want to teach!

I think that a great deal of my practice teaching enjoyment was due to the friendly atmosphere of the school. All the teachers accepted me as a member of the faculty, and did all that they could to make me feel at home.

This presentation touches the surface of the many experiences that student teaching offers the prospective teacher in the State of Maine. It is an important segment of the formal preparation for the senior at this university who has chosen teaching as his professional field of endeavor.

The value of student teaching, as reflected in these statements, is indisputable. It permits an experience that cannot be gained under any other circumstance, and firms up one's attitudes, feelings, and convictions in respect to the teaching profession.

It is more than rewarding to realize that practically all students returning from their student teaching assignments are favorably stimulated by the experience, and look forward, with anticipation, to becoming full-fledged members of the teaching profession. Those who have found the student teaching experience not to their liking, and these are few in number, should be encouraged to find a profession more suitable to their temperament.

Bringing this to a close, I do so with a statement that is well put by a student teacher:

Perhaps more than anything else, my student teaching reinforced the belief that each student is an individual, with his own needs, motives, and problems. ❧

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