

A Work-Study Exchange for British and American Student Teachers

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THE past 50 years may well be called the era of the nationalization of the American teacher. The social, political, and economic changes which have accompanied the nation's development into what John Kenneth Galbraith calls "The New Industrial State" have led teachers to see themselves more and more as participants in a national educational enterprise rather than as mere public servants of a particular community. Despite the strong elements of local and regional provincialism that remain, today's teachers are increasingly aware that the term "colleague" applies to those in classrooms 2,000 miles away as well as to those two doors down the hall.

Unfortunately, this feeling of comradeship has not yet been extended, to any appreciable degree, beyond our national borders. While American physicians, scientists, and businessmen have been eager to learn from their counterparts in other countries, American educators have remained victims of a form of national egocentricity similar to that which prevailed 50 years ago on the local and regional levels. The common belief is that the rest of the world lags behind America in education, and that concepts and programs from abroad would be ineffective or inappropriate in our schools.

In June 1968 the School of Education of the University of Connecticut and Keswick Hall College of Education in Norwich, England, began an exchange program designed to help overcome this attitude. Basically, the

aim of the program is a twofold attempt to widen the perspectives of future teachers by, first, giving them an intimate, working knowledge of an educational system other than their own, and second, having them reexamine, in the light of this new knowledge and experience, the philosophies, goals, and methods of their native system.

Orientation Period

The American students, mostly undergraduate education majors entering their senior year, arrive in England about June 1 and proceed directly to Keswick Hall College. They spend approximately two weeks at the college attending lectures on various aspects of British life and education. These lectures are intended to serve primarily as an orientation to new surroundings, to acquaint the students with new terminology (for example, that public schools are private and that the Norfolk broads are lakes, not females), and to establish a point of departure for the real learning that is to follow.

An important part of this orientation takes place outside the lecture halls as the American students, housed in "digs" at the college, spend long hours in "bull sessions" with English teachers-in-training, discover

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Exchange students observe varied programs.
Photograph courtesy of the authors

English college life, and are introduced to the conviviality of the English pub. In addition, during these initial weeks the students make some preliminary visits to local schools and nearby places of historical and cultural interest.

Toward the end of the second week the students shift residence, singly or in pairs, from the college to private homes of English families, mostly members of the college staff. In this way the students are able to experience life in an English home and at the same time retain the opportunity to "talk shop" in the evening.

This shift in residence also marks the beginning of the second phase of the program—involvement in actual classroom instruction.

Teacher Aide Period

This phase begins with several days of visits to a variety of English schools, state operated and independent, secondary and elementary. During these visits the students observe different programs, methods, and approaches and talk at length with pupils and teachers. At the conclusion of this series of visits the participants are assigned, in pairs, as teacher aides in local primary schools.

(Because of the heavy schedule of year-end examinations, it is not practical to assign students to secondary schools.) These schools are of the larger, "city" type, enrolling well over 200 pupils.

The students are given every opportunity to participate in the instructional program—working with small groups, tutoring individual pupils, accompanying class trips, and the like. After spending two weeks in these schools, the students are reassigned, again as teacher aides, to small one- or two-room rural schools. Here they spend their final two weeks observing and participating in educational programs in which pupils of widely differing ages and attainments sit side by side in the same room.

Throughout these weeks in which they work in the schools, the students return to the college periodically for seminar sessions in which they discuss their experiences and compare and contrast English and American education. These weeks are also punctuated by trips to different and unusual educational institutions: a fashionable boarding school for girls, "immigrant" schools in Birmingham's slums, Summerhill, experimental and innovative infant schools in Oxfordshire, Cambridge University, and the University of East Anglia, and colleges of education in London and Birmingham.

While occasional weekend excursions are planned, such as trips to Wales or Scotland, most weekends are left free so that students may sightsee as their personal tastes and pocketbooks dictate. Aside from the inevitable trips to London, some of the more affluent participants have managed journeys to such places as Paris, Amsterdam, Dublin, and the Isle of Wight. Others, less ambitious or moneyed, have been content to remain closer to Norwich, touring the local area as guests of their host families or of English students they have met at the college.

Program for English Students

Many of these college friendships are renewed in the fall when a group of students from Keswick Hall and Maria Grey (London) colleges come to Connecticut to participate

in a similar program in American schools. These students are also given a series of orientation lectures at the University, housed with American teachers, and assigned as teacher aides in Connecticut public schools. A basic difference is that, because of currency restrictions placed on English nationals traveling abroad, the English students are paid by the school systems in which they serve as aides. The English students are also provided with a full schedule of social events, sightseeing, and school visits, often as guests of their host families or the University.

By design the program is financially self-sustaining. It does not depend in any way on outside funding. All American participants receive six credits in education (undergraduate or graduate), for which they pay the normal summer session tuition. This money is then used to pay the expenses of the University faculty member who accompanies the group and the English and American lecturers.

Both the American and English students pay their own air fare (at group rates, about \$230 round trip). Thus, the *total* cost, including air fare, to an American student is about \$650, plus whatever he wishes to spend on personal touring, souvenirs, and so forth. Because of the remuneration received from local school districts, the cost to the English students is considerably less.

Evaluation

Thus far the program has been an unqualified success. Not only do those who participated possess an intimate knowledge of English education, but this knowledge has enabled them to see American schools from a new perspective. It is virtually impossible to discuss educational problems with a student who has participated in this program without his interjecting at least one comment, and probably several, that begins, "But in English schools . . ."

Those who have gone on to teach have reported great success in bringing English ideas, approaches, and methods into their classrooms. Our colleagues at Keswick Hall report a similar American influence on their students. Of course this program is but a small beginning. At present only about 30 American students and a like number of English students participate each year. Yet we believe this program demonstrates the validity of international cooperation in education. If the concept can be expanded, if similar programs can be begun in other countries and at other institutions, we may see a rapid erosion of our educational chauvinism, and we may someday be able to look back on the last third of the 20th century as the era of the internationalization of the American teacher. □

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