

# What Does Today's Teacher Need To Know and To Do?

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ONE of the more important changes occurring in teacher education today is the development of field-centered programs; that is, programs that conduct almost all of their activities on site, using actual school classrooms as laboratories for learning. Such field centers are intended to bridge the gap between theory and practice and to avoid the all-too-common situation in which college methods courses are taught as lecture courses and are separated by a semester or more in time from any actual need to use the ideas developed there in a student teaching situation.

The concept of using actual school classrooms as laboratories for learning how to teach is not new. More than half a century ago John Dewey<sup>1</sup> spelled out the idea in an essay, "The Relation of Theory to Practice in Education," proposing this idea as an alternative to the then current Normal school programs which he compared to apprenticeship training. While laboratory or demonstration schools were quite common in the subsequent decades, they often became isolated physically and intellectually from the realities of the public school environment. Typically, classrooms in local school systems have been used largely for observation and practice teaching;

very seldom have they been the site for conducting the main body of pedagogical instruction in the theory and methods of teaching.

In an effort to bring theory and practice into a closer union, the Tri-University Project in Elementary Education at the University of Washington has developed an Experimental Model for Teacher Education that is field centered. This program conducts all of the professional training in the theory, methods of teaching, and supervised practice at three cooperating elementary schools in the Seattle area. These are the Wing Luke School, a collection of 13 portable units overlooking the huge Boeing plant in the southern part of the city, where there is a high percentage of minority group students; the Decatur School in the northern part of the city, to which some 60 black children from the central area of the city are bussed each day; and the Cedarbrook School in the Shoreline school district, a suburban community north of Seattle.

Placement in different kinds of communities is provided in order to develop prospective teachers who hold a cosmopolitan view—ones who do not perceive as alien those socioeconomic settings unlike their

<sup>1</sup> John Dewey. "The Relation of Theory to Practice in Education." In: National Society for the Scientific Study of Education. Third Yearbook, Part I. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1904. pp. 9-30.

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own. Twenty interns (student teachers) participate in observation and directed teaching at these three sites. Applied seminars and conferences are held at the Decatur School, which is presently the headquarters site for the experimental program.

## An Experimental Model

In order to develop an operational design for this program, the members of the Tri-University planning group posed the question: What knowledge does an intern need to have and what skills must he be able to demonstrate that will make him a competent beginning teacher?

Adapting certain premises developed in an earlier Tri-University Project monograph,<sup>2</sup> a paradigm was developed which

<sup>2</sup> *A Behavioral Approach to the Teaching of Social Studies*. Tri-University Project in Elementary Education (Social Science-Social Studies). Seattle: University of Washington, May 1968.

identified those areas of knowledge and skills that could be best associated with pre-instructional activities, with the actual teaching-learning performance, and with the post-instructional activities (see Figure 1). Each of the components of the paradigm was then translated into a series of broad objectives stated in behavioral terms. These, in turn, were broken down into a set of performance tasks related to the objective, and criterion measures that could be used to evaluate the accomplishment of the objective. Taken together, the entire package of broad objectives, performance tasks, and criterion measures represented a body of knowledge, skills, and basic competencies essential to a beginning teacher.

Although arranged quite differently, this performance-based program included the content material normally found in such courses as educational psychology, testing, methods of teaching, observation, and practice teach-

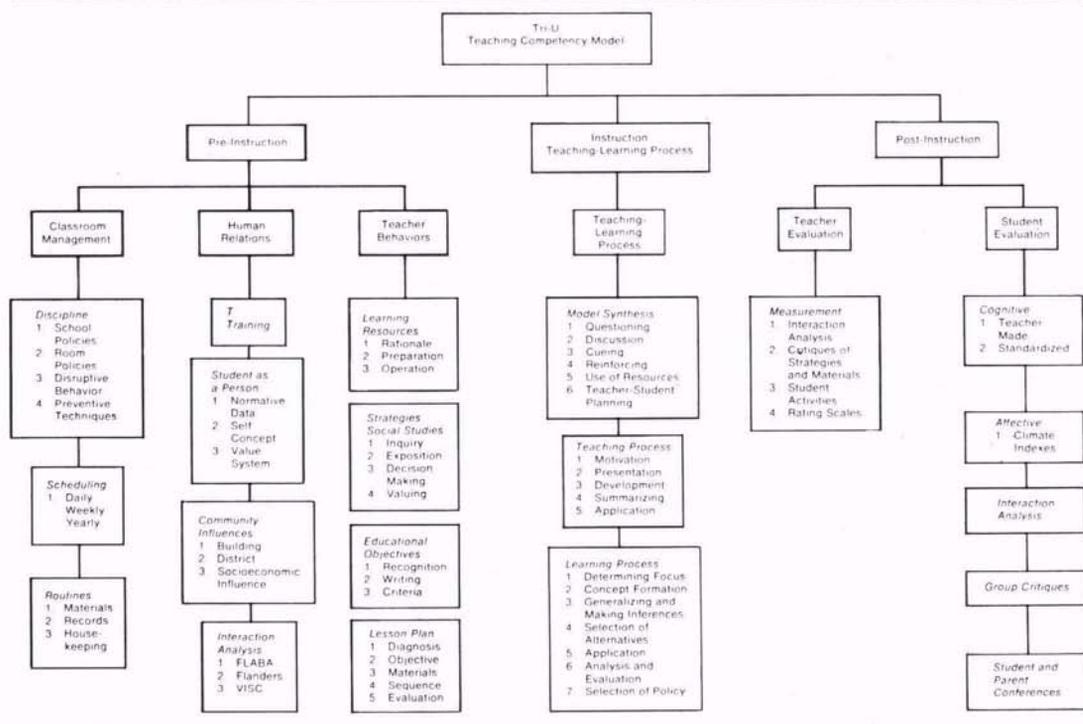


Figure 1. Tri-U Teaching Competency Model

ing. What makes this program different from the traditional approach is that applied seminars dealing with various aspects of theory and methods of instruction (called "input sessions") can be followed by immediate application periods that are used for observation, data gathering on children's learning, or supervised teaching of various kinds such as tutoring, micro-teaching, and small or large group instruction with children in the cooperating school. Since the entire program, including the applied seminars, is conducted in the cooperating schools, it is also very easy to "borrow" a small group of children for demonstration teaching in the seminar room, or for one of the staff members to demonstrate a technique while the interns watch via closed circuit TV.

### Implications of a Field-Based Model

Certain consequences should be expected when a college implements a teacher education program that is field and performance based. Interns who are involved in classrooms at the same time they are receiving instruction quickly become acutely aware of their own deficiencies. They place rigorous demands on the instruction they receive. If such instruction is perceived as not applicable in their own classroom setting, students quickly make that clear. The setting alone does not allow instructors to say, "Try this out next quarter—I'm sure it will work for you." Interns are in a posture that demands that they make things work now. They have little tolerance, and justifiably so, for professorial pontification of "ivory-towered methods."

Optimally, methods input should be followed by demonstration, evaluation, more input, intern application, and feedback. This cycle is illustrated in Figure 2.

It should also be made clear that a performance-based program has certain implications as well. Stating what precise behavior is expected of teachers serves to make educators far more accountable. They are in a position to claim that the prospective teachers did indeed demonstrate certain skills in class-

room management, diagnosis of reading, or inquiry strategies. However, such goals are highly prescriptive. Interns have perceived them as restrictive and have demonstrated resistance to having their behavior shaped in some specific ways.

Two conditions may mediate against this concern. First, interns may be allowed to substitute alternate performance objectives that are educationally sound. Second, they can be encouraged to develop alternate ways of reaching prescribed objectives. In these ways prospective teachers are not simply shaped into identical molds. Rather, their individuality is preserved along with the professional integrity of the teacher education program.

Taken as a whole, the field-centered and task-oriented program provides an excellent opportunity for acquiring the needed knowledge and demonstrating increasing competencies in those skills essential for the beginning teacher. More important, the year-long program permits the interns to hold their observations and conclusions as tentative data, with ample time and encouragement provided to gather additional evidence to affirm or deny their hypotheses about how children learn or about how various elements interact when the school is viewed as a social system.

Although such total immersion of interns into the public school setting holds much promise for future practice in teacher education, it is also fraught with many concerns. Practitioners in the public schools differ in ways that are critical for the training of interns. The quality of their instruction, the currency of their training, and their degree of professional commitment represent three

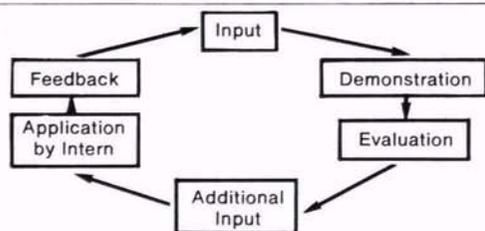


Figure 2. Cycle of a Performance-Based Program

significant variables. They cannot be consistently relied upon to present forward-looking models to prospective teachers. Classroom control and organization too often have higher priority in their view than innovative practices.

### **What Cooperation Is Needed?**

Teachers often remember student teaching as an experience that necessitated pleasing several masters. The implicit or explicit norms of the cooperating classroom teacher probably represent the most influential and threatening master. The university supervisor is perhaps as threatening but appears less frequently and consequently is not a force to contend with on a daily basis. The standards of the student teacher himself, standards that emerge from some interaction between his personal educational experience and professional education courses, represent still another. Student teachers enter the classroom with the hope that they can apply with some success those practices that would meet some of their own standards.

However, an examination of student teaching experiences suggests that only seldom are students allowed to try some of their own ideas in a supportive climate. Regrettably, the cooperating classroom teacher, whose professional experience is often at least three to five years behind her, unwittingly shapes the behavior of the student to that which has "worked for her." Unfortunately, what has "worked for her" represents what her principal and colleagues have reinforced—procedures that are too often administratively efficient but psychologically or academically unsound. Typically, these procedures do not represent the most recent trends in education.

A salient example is provided by a student teacher who felt the library was a place to which a child should be able to go at any time. Committed to a notion that the classroom should provide time for children to read as well as the traditional time spent in instruction of reading, she encouraged her pupils to go to the library independently as they completed a book or decided they would

like to find another one. Quickly she learned that this violated both the schedule of the librarian and the need of the cooperating teacher to conform to the rules. Needless to say, the standards of the student teacher went by the board. This situation clearly demonstrates the propensity for and reinforcement of order that characterize many public schools. This is a condition that works against the development of a unique professional identity on the part of the student teacher. It could well be that this condition serves as a major obstacle to the entry of creative individuals into the public school enterprise.

Resistance to change, unawareness of current trends, and an unwillingness to accept the validity of research evidence are conditions that too often characterize many public school practices. Although some teachers and some administrators are admirably committed to the implementation of research findings, this condition is generally an exception. To provide training settings for the teachers of the 'seventies and 'eighties in schools characterized by the practices of the 'forties and 'fifties is inconsistent at best. The most negative result, however, is that learners and new teachers are denied access to those practices that represent the most advanced educational thinking.<sup>4</sup>

It is indeed regrettable that teacher education institutions are perceived as ivory towers that seldom say anything that has classroom utility. Admittedly, instruction in college methods courses is too often contradictory to the innovative practices being advanced. Too often, college professors lecture, and avoid demonstration and involvement in the classroom setting. However, this does not excuse school teachers and administrators from their responsibility for such innovations. Providing a supportive climate by reinforcing teachers who try to innovate, even if they fail, is a necessary prerequisite to a school that seeks to maintain its currency and professional integrity, and prepare teachers for the last half of the 20th century.

To prepare prospective teachers in an atmosphere that lends itself to the development of a new and innovative breed of teacher makes unique demands of the school

setting. Optimally, faculty members who serve as cooperating classroom teachers should be able to demonstrate most of those competencies that are sought in prospective teachers. In a forward-looking teacher education program, these competencies will reflect recent and research-based learning strategies. Further, this faculty must be supported by an innovation-oriented administration. Such a faculty cannot be continually confronted with a restrictive administration or one which merely sustains and reinforces the status quo. These optimal conditions need not be pipe dreams to committed educators. Neither is the locus of their implementation found in a university laboratory school. Sound teacher education programs need to be centered in schools with realistic communities. The relationship between school and community is far too powerful for this dimension to receive insulation from current social forces.

It appears that the realization of all of these conditions can be best achieved in a

university-operated public school. Teacher education personnel who would represent the managerial level of such an enterprise would demonstrate commitment to a closer relationship between theory and practice, to innovative educational trends, and to supportive administrative practices. The faculty and staff of such a school would be prepared for this setting with planned rotation, perhaps on a two- or three-year cycle, with replacements recruited from local public school faculties to provide an element of continuing in-service training in current practices and research. Only if such conditions are present can programs in teacher education move in ways that will result in a cadre of classroom teachers that departs responsibly from established practices.

It is not suggested that massive action in this direction be taken at once. However, it is strongly encouraged that such experimentation begin. To do otherwise is to abrogate professional accountability for the future. □

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