The Teacher as a Teacher Educator

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THE Cooperative Program in Urban Teacher Education (CPUTE) is an experimental program within the College of Education, University of Illinois at Chicago Circle. This program represents one attempt to facilitate educational change through the utilization of all talents that can be brought to bear on understanding the role of education today. The teacher candidate, the classroom teacher, the administrator, community persons, and university faculty members are brought together as equal partners in devising, implementing, and evaluating teacher education. Such a program provides the opportunity for the professionally inexperienced to interact with the experienced, the parent with the school personnel and teacher candidates, the school personnel with the university staff, and the concerned community member with the school and university staff. Each contributes his unique frame of reference from which pertinent educational problems can be considered.

CPUTE was developed as a flexible vehicle for exploring new ways of preparing teachers for urban education. It did not function on the premise that it held *the* answer if only the school systems would listen and act accordingly. Its basic assumption is the value of cooperative, broad-based involvement in teacher education by those who are affected by or can affect education.

Background of CPUTE

The theory-practice dichotomy in teacher education has been a problem for some time. The trend is definitely away from theory first, practice afterward. Through exposure to the teaching-learning environment of the classroom, academic course assignments can be played out in the real world. Many arrangements are being tried, for example, early and varied observations of classrooms and teaching styles, internships, student aide programs, and tutoring projects.

In the rush to provide "live" situations for the education students, a number of problems have emerged which have demanded attention. The problems are two-pronged: one involving university-school personnel relationships; the other, philosophic in nature, concerned with conflicting value systems. Avenues for resolving the personnel relationships have been explored, with successful university-school relationship patterns emerging. Yet the philosophical questions loom large, the most fundamental problem being conflicting value systems in a fast-changing technological society.

Conflicting Value Systems

Providing the type of practicum that can meaningfully bridge the theory-practice dichotomy has proven to be merely a surface problem. The real problem has yet to be resolved. The schools today have been described as sterile, irrelevant, meaningless, passé, and, as Skinner has suggested, the very classroom an aversive stimulus. No matter how amiable the relationship between the education students and teachers, or regardless of how much of a partnership exists in developing a teacher education program, what advantage is the practicum experience in the preparation of the education student if the school system is pursuing an "antiseptic curriculum"? It may prove only an exercise in performing the skills associated with an outmoded philosophy of education. How is a teacher education program to help produce teachers who will be able to function effectively in today's world when the models of instruction and the system they represent are not attuned to the demands of the time? Put another way, teacher education programs are preparing teachers for schools presently in operation, schools that are not addressing the teaching-learning process to the changes and challenges in society.

Several routes for resolving the dilemma are being proposed. One group proposes to bypass the established school systems by involving students in store-front schools. Other alternatives to the present public school system have been suggested. The Cooperative Program in Urban Teacher Education has turned to the classroom teacher as the focal point of change.

Teacher as Change Agent

The key to a viable teacher education program is the classroom teacher who is involved in a self-regenerating system and who sees himself as an effective change agent. Technological advance, with its concomitant changes in other aspects of society, can be treated as a challenge rather than a threat only if one has something new to contribute, is encouraged to participate in resolving new problems, or is afforded the opportunity to question cherished values.

To develop and maintain a self-regenerating system, two basic assumptions underlie the program: (a) *broad-based participation* in the teacher education program, and (b) *everyone* in the system is a *learner*. Teacher education can no longer afford the luxury of being a self-contained system. The mere recognition of the need for practicum experience indicates this. More fundamental than this are the value questions that require a dialogue among all sectors. Educational decisions are not the prerogative of university professors or school administrators. Teachers, parents, students of education, the business community, and the children themselves want a decision-making role. One facet of self-regeneration is involvement in decision making. But intelligent decision making is contingent upon knowing how to obtain new information, how to weigh it, and how to act upon it. When all are learners, the need for school personnel and university staff to protect outmoded prerogatives and entrenched positions is reduced.

As it is now conceived by the CPUTE staff, teacher education is the responsibility of the College of Education, the schools, and the community. Initial statements of philosophy and objectives are developed by the new partners as each contributes his perceptions of the role of education. Learning centers are set up in the cooperating schools. The initial statements of philosophy and educational objectives as articulated by the three cooperating bodies are used as the point of departure for the learning center.

Each center individualizes operations on the basis of the needs of a specific community, the children, the school personnel, and the education students. The facilities of both institutions (the local schools and the College of Education) and the community are brought to bear on the teacher education program. The latest instructional software and hardware developed at the university are studied by the learning center members. They apply the instructional tools to the classroom when it is possible. Innovative practices originating in the classrooms are studied and

evaluated. The community contributes a whole range of learning facilities, its stores, streets, alleys, social agencies, and the community organizations.

With teachers as equal partners in the teacher education program, students are finding greater acceptance of their presence in the classroom and around the school building. As new ideas are conceived in the learning center, both students and teachers become principal experimenters. Learning is continuous and everyone is a learner.

Cooperating teachers and administrators are simultaneously pursuing graduate work through the College of Education with faculty members, who are also members of the learning center. What is learned on one level is fed back to another. As an example, community involvement in school decisions has become a volatile issue in several of the learning center schools. Through exploration of community power questions as part of the graduate seminar, not only were new insights gained by the teachers and administrators, but the learning center members were convinced of the necessity of broadening their base of participation.

Teacher candidates assigned to the learning centers are learning to see the realities of the schools. They are also learning how to function effectively in the institution and still be change agents. Their models are the teachers who are learners and decision makers.

Technology and the Classroom Teacher

Technology is essentially neutral. It does not act or respond. It is the way man adapts to the changes resulting from technology that is humanizing or dehumanizing. It is through the process of assisting one another to understand, adjust, and develop further that we can preserve the individual's worth and indirectly his ability to live productively. Further, it is through this process that the supporting institutions of society can be reoriented to serve better its changing needs.

To function effectively in our advanced technological society, one must continuously resolve value questions. If our public schools are to survive as the formal educational institution, then teachers, as the focal point of that institution, must be assisted in value conflict resolution. This calls for being a part of a self-regenerating system. Such a system provides for:

1. A broad base of perceptual inputs

2. Interaction as equal partners with all members of the educational institution

3. A decision-making role in the system

4. Opportunities for being a learner.

A teacher education program concerned merely with theory and/or practice is only toying with surface questions. The real problem is not the amount of practice a teacher education program provides, but the degree to which such a program functions as a self-regenerating system. The Cooperative Program in Urban Teacher Education is such a system.

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