

New Roles for the Supervisor of Student Teaching

JAY A. MONSON *
ALDON M. BEBB

PROFESSIONAL literature dealing with student teaching includes a variety of plans and ideas for conducting the program of student teaching, each stipulating its specific theories, objectives, and purposes. Incorporated in these programs are many theories and ideas concerning how the supervisory procedures should be organized and conducted. Yet, amid much disagreement, there is wide agreement, as Conant found in his study of *The Education of American Teachers*, that ". . . before being entrusted with complete control of a public school classroom, a teacher should have had opportunities under close guidance and supervision actually to teach."¹ The student teaching experience is one of the most important, if not the most important single phase in the preparation of the teacher.² There is also agreement that the neophyte should begin to apply his learnings from the college classrooms under the helpful guidance of a well-educated, experienced, and successful teacher. In the history of the development of student teaching, there has never been so much em-

phasis placed on the importance of those who supervise these student teachers and so many innovations in plans for conducting the supervision.

Of all the positions in teacher education today, that of the college supervisor is the one most under attack for being redundant and therefore unnecessary. If some critics of present day teacher education had their way, the role of college supervisor would be eliminated.³ This may be an exaggeration, but there is enough ferment regarding college supervision for teacher educators to take a considered look at the role to see if it is a defensible and necessary position in the program of teacher education, or at least whether a redefinition of the role is needed. What, by definition, is a college supervisor? Is his role important enough to warrant its existence? Can he do something for the student teaching program which the classroom supervising teacher and other school personnel cannot do? Could the classroom teacher incorporate

¹ James B. Conant. *The Education of American Teachers*. New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1963. p. 59.

² National Education Association, National Commission on Teacher Education and Professional Standards. "Who's in Charge Here? Fixing Responsibilities for Student Teaching." Discussion Paper. Washington, D.C.: the Commission, 1966. p. 1.

³ E. Brooks Smith. "The Case for the College Supervisor." *The College Supervisor—Conflict and Challenge*. Forty-Third Yearbook of the Association for Student Teaching. Cedar Falls, Iowa: the Association, 1964. p. 132.

* Jay A. Monson, Assistant Professor of Education, Utah State University, Logan; and Aldon M. Bebb, Director of Elementary Education, Kansas State College at Pittsburg

these functions into his role? Is the financing of proper college supervision, which is one of the most costly aspects of a college program in teacher education, worth the expenditure?

New roles for the college supervisor cannot be viewed without turning attention to the laboratory for teacher education, the public schools. It is a well-established fact that the public schools of America are a definite partner in the plan for teacher training. Statistics reveal that currently more than 150,000 regular classroom teachers cooperate with nearly 1,200 colleges to provide student teaching experiences for more than 200,000 students.⁴

A Joint Project

Recognizing the joint responsibilities for supervising student teachers, a pilot study was initiated aimed at redefining roles of supervising teachers and college supervisors. The pilot study was conducted at the Westfield public schools, New Jersey, in conjunction with the Tri-University Project in Elementary Education at New York University, 1968-69.⁵

The pilot program was based upon certain theoretical assumptions concerning the roles of supervising teachers and college supervisors. These assumptions included the following:

The college supervisor:

—the supervision of student teachers is a time consuming and not a particularly rewarding task.

—the one-to-one relationship demanded by the present scheme of supervision is not the most efficient use of professors' time.

—the college supervisor can be more influential in improving the quality of student teaching experiences by assisting supervising teachers in improving their knowledge and skills.

The supervising teacher:

—is the "key" person in actual "on-the-job" supervision.

⁴ National Education Association, National Commission on Teacher Education and Professional Standards, *op. cit.*

⁵ Sponsored by the U.S. Office of Education, U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare.

—is in the most logical position to provide continuous, specific, and individualized help to the student teacher.

—is a professional person who can acquire skill and understanding in supervision and assume major responsibility for such.

As an outgrowth of these assumptions, a new program was planned in which the college supervisor's role was changed from the traditional "visitor" and "inspector" to that of "teacher" and "invited consultant." As the focal point of the proposed plan, the supervising teacher was encouraged and expected to assume major responsibility for the actual supervision of the student teacher.

It was believed that decentralization of the responsibility for supervision of student teaching would make possible opportunity for better utilization of the college supervisor's training and time, opportunity for in-service growth and increased professionalization for the supervising teachers, and opportunity for more relevant supervision for the student teachers themselves.

The quality of the schools and teachers involved and their cooperation in the development of the program were considered to be "key" factors in the pilot program.

All of the public schools involved were located in the Westfield school district. Each school had been previously involved with student teachers and had worked with universities and colleges in the area on a "service" basis in their student teacher placement programs.

The teachers selected had volunteered to work with student teachers from the Tri-University Project. Each had participated in "traditional type" supervision programs with previous student teachers.

Four major features characterized the uniqueness of the pilot project and distinguished it from the usual program of student teaching supervision.

1. Visits made to the school by the college supervisor for the purpose of observing the student and conferring individually with the supervising teacher were discontinued. However, it was emphasized that college supervisors were to remain "invited consultants" and visit upon re-

quest by either student teacher or supervising teacher.

2. The supervising teacher was given major responsibility for guiding the professional growth of the student teacher. Through seminar training sessions with university professors, supervisory skills were identified, discussed, and simulated.

3. Supervising teachers had an opportunity to try immediately, in a real situation, theoretical ideas obtained from the seminars. This practicum or laboratory facet of the study was considered an essential feature.

4. Supervising teachers were given "equal voice" in planning in-service training seminar topics to be covered—the purpose of the seminars being to assist supervising teachers in increasing their effectiveness in supervision of student teachers.

In-service training seminars with supervising teachers were held each Thursday morning for 10 weeks. Arrangements were made by administrators to release supervising teachers from their classroom responsibilities on these mornings.

The seminars focused upon the following topics and problems:

Planning and expectations of roles

Conferencing and role playing

Establishing effective personal and working relationships

Goal setting and behavioral objectives

Questioning and measuring pupil attention

Observing behavior and recording of observation

Self-assessment, helping student teachers assess themselves

Developing bases for evaluation—verbal interaction analysis systems and nonverbal interaction analysis systems

Evaluating student teacher progress.

Student teacher seminars, under the direction of the college professors, were held weekly (and often biweekly) at the district curriculum center. These seminars dealt with methods and curriculum background and applications of such in a school setting. Problems the students faced were discussed and attempts were made to assist them in other concerns as cooperatively determined.

As part of the pilot study, a wide range of activities, experiences, and resources were planned. These included the following:

Lectures, discussions, demonstrations

Simulation, role playing

Use of printed materials—including publications of the Association for Student Teaching, professional magazines and journals, handbooks (student teaching), etc.

Use of video tapes, audio tapes, and slides developed by college supervisors specifically for the pilot study

Videotaping by individual supervising teachers and student teachers (most of the tapes were analyzed by the respective groups)

Evaluative instruments as designed by college supervisors and completed by both the supervising teacher and student teacher groups.

Inasmuch as the pilot program was conducted "on-the-job," it was assumed that the program of supervision would be continuing rather than a sporadic process. The above activities, experiences, and resources were aimed at realization of such a position.

Three non-parametric instruments were developed in an attempt to evaluate the program. These instruments were as follows:

1. An instrument, utilizing the critical-incident technique, was prepared and administered to the supervising teachers both prior to and at the conclusion of the seminar training sessions.

2. A questionnaire was designed to gather further reactions concerning various features of the program from the same group. Open-ended statements were used to allow supervising teachers maximum latitude in expressing reactions. This instrument was also administered prior to and at the conclusion of the seminar sessions. Both of the above-mentioned instruments were answered anonymously, but a four-digit-sequence remembrance-code was used for comparison purposes. It was thought that such a comparison would help determine whether a change had occurred in perceptions of the role of "supervisor of student teachers."

3. A second questionnaire was developed and administered to the student teach-

ers near the end of their student teaching assignment. It also featured anonymity. It attempted to involve the student teachers in making value judgments concerning change and emphasis in the supervision program as a result of the training seminars for supervising teachers.

Overall findings indicated that general reaction to the program by the supervising teachers and student teachers was consistently favorable. There appeared to be general acceptance for the major features of the project, and considerable enthusiasm for certain of these aspects.

Most supervising teachers initially indicated that their sole training for supervising student teachers was having worked previously with student teachers. The reactions of supervising teachers to the seminar training sessions were highly favorable. All were positive in nature and many used words such as "great" and "very worthwhile" in describing the training seminars. Among other specific benefits, they stated that the seminar sessions enabled them to "now enjoy and understand my role as a teacher of teachers," and to "grow professionally." All of the supervising teachers expressed a feeling of personal improvement in their supervisory preparation.

Conclusions determined from data received from administering the four comparative instruments included the following:

1. Supervising teachers were highly favorable toward the seminar training sessions.
2. Supervising teachers reported the sessions to be the first "real" training for working with student teachers.
3. A better understanding of the practice of supervision resulted from the training sessions.
4. An improvement in supervising teacher-student teacher relationships was generally noted.

Several supervising teachers commented that it would have been well to have had the student teachers occasionally participate in the seminar training sessions.

The student teachers reacted favorably

to the pilot study. Most of the student teachers reported no marked changes observed in relationships existing between themselves and their supervising teachers (however, such relationships were initially reported as highly favorable). A general satisfaction with conferences was reported, with several student teachers reporting improvements here as a direct result of the training sessions. □

In summary, the major purpose of this pilot program was to create a new model for the supervision of student teachers. The model was based upon redefinitions of the roles of the public school supervising teacher and the college supervisor in the student teaching program. In this pilot program, the supervising teacher was given major responsibility for guiding the professional growth of the student teacher. College supervisors became consultants and were responsible for in-service training seminars with supervising teachers for the purpose of identifying and acquiring supervisory skills.

As a result of this pilot program, the following conclusions are posited: (a) Supervising teachers can satisfactorily assume major responsibility in student teacher supervision provided they receive training for such. (b) College supervisors, supervising teachers, and student teachers all favor such a supervisory program and the results obtained therefrom. (c) College supervisors can make better utilization of their professional time and training by conducting in-service training sessions for supervising teachers rather than by directly supervising student teachers in classroom situations. (d) By using analysis systems developed to study teaching, supervising teachers can better provide analytical supervision for student teachers, and also can improve their own classroom instruction. (e) An on-site in-service training program provides for an immediate opportunity to try theoretical ideas in a real situation. (f) A college and local school district program of student teacher supervision, cooperatively planned and oriented, results in improved relationships between these two groups and enhances the overall student teaching program. □

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