



Student Teachers On Their Own

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THE Occupations Curriculum Center (OCC) of Highland Park, Michigan, is no ordinary secondary school. As its name implies, it is a work/study center and it attempts to personalize the learning process of tenth- and eleventh-grade students for whom the regular high school had no meaning. Conceived in 1967 and receiving Title III funds, OCC seeks to interest and improve the potential or actual high school dropout. It is doing this through a meaningful combination of subjects and opportunities for experiences set in small work groups of six to ten students.

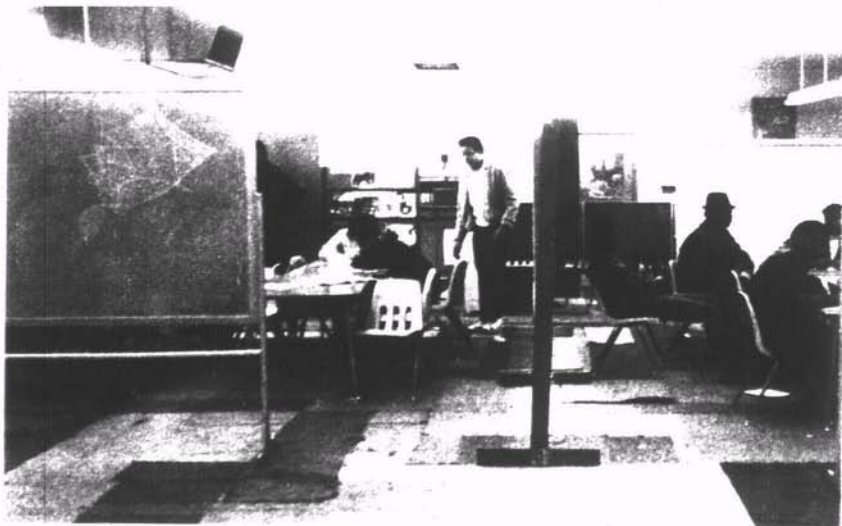
Seventy students, both boys and girls, are guided by a permanent staff of three teachers and a director. These full-time professional people are assisted by student teachers, usually four per quarter, from the Department of General Secondary Education of Wayne State University in Detroit. These student teachers work all day also, which places the pupil-teacher ratio at seven to one. In addition, part-time volunteers and specialists from the Highland Park system come to OCC on a scheduled basis.

The curriculum has two main components, the "academic" and the "correlation" departments. A student spends half the day

developing his skills in math, social studies, and English via the small classes. The other half-day is spent working, either at the school or in the community.

The University and the School

In order to assist in the reduction of class size, as well as to provide a meaningful, confidence-building, student teaching experience, Wayne State University, through its Department of General Secondary Education, has placed 32 student teachers at OCC to date, an average of four per quarter. Staff members in General Secondary Education have found the arrangement most satisfying. Our college supervisor visits often and occasionally teaches classes there. At quarter breaks he assumes the role of a regular teacher, which gives rise to two distinct advantages. The incoming student teachers are invited to come to observe the supervisor and to react to his lessons. They have a supervisor who *does* as well as *tells*. The regular students of OCC also get to know the supervisor well and regard his presence as a common event, not as something to react to artificially when he is observing the student teachers later on.



Student-made panels separate areas for academic learning.

Photos courtesy of the authors

Both the college supervisor and the student teachers attend staff meetings, parent evenings, and extracurricular activities. They are accepted as regular staff members by parents, students, and the regular teaching staff.

The Learning Center

Physically, OCC is divided into two large areas. Occupying the first floor of an old factory, the school has separated the

academic and the correlation or work experiences areas. It is as if a large rectangle were cut in half lengthwise.

Student teachers may select either area, depending on their competencies and inclinations. In either area they find themselves "on their own." This physical arrangement with at least one full-time cooperating teacher in each area provides coverage, while at the same time, due to the arrangements within each section, the student teacher is "alone" with his class.

Individual classes on the academic side are separated only by gaily painted dividers made by the students. The floor is carpeted by swatches of factory remnants, put down by the students. There are no rows of desks, merely chairs and trapezoidal tables, arranged as the need demands. Most classes meet for 45 minutes.

The correlations area is where students receive work experience by working on actual job contracts that the school bids for in competition with the business world. Some typical contracts are: mailings for the Chrysler Corporation, quality control for Precision Spring Company, and color coding of small parts for automobiles. The students are



Small group organization fosters interest in an academic field.

organized in mini-teams with their own foreman and receive \$1.60 per hour while working on the contracts. Students spend the full block of 2½ hours in this area. They also meet in total group to discuss occupational requirements for different areas of the world of work, as well as various aspects of consumer economics. If the student has this work experience in the morning, he goes to the academic side for the afternoon, and the students who were in the academic side in the morning move over to work on the contracts. All students can opt to work on the contracts after school formally ends at 2:30. There are no bells.



A student teacher chats with one of his students.

Supervision of Student Teachers

The cooperating teacher is free to float from one learning group to another. He has time to observe, participate, and discuss presentations or, more accurately, interactions, with individual student teachers. Working with him, the college supervisor does primarily the same things only on a more limited time basis, since he also has 13 other

student teachers placed singly around Detroit in more traditional settings.

Feedback to the student teachers comes from a variety of sources, including the students. Weekly seminars led by the college supervisor, either at OCC or in some other area school, focus upon common problems. The other 13 student teachers are also in

Key

H is High
M is Medium
L is Low

	OCC	Resident Job Corps	"Classical" high school	Comprehen- sive high school	Vocational school
1. Extent of opportunity for being treated as a person, not a number	H	M	L	L	M-H
2. Extent of opportunity for community involvement	H	L	L	L	M-L
3. Extent of possibility for on-the-job experience	H	H	L	L	H
4. Extent of opportunity for a staff acquainted with the newest techniques in urban education	H	H	L	M	H-M
5. Extent of organizational provisions for student-teacher planning	H	M-L	L	M-L	L
6. Extent of opportunity for optimum staff use	H	M	M-L	M-L	H
7. Extent of possibility for heterogeneous student body and faculty	H	M	L	H	M-L
8. Extent of possibility for college preparatory programs	L	L	H	M-H	L

Chart design by John Andes.

Table 1. Occupations Curriculum Center as Compared with Other Attempts at Educating Secondary Pupils

attendance at the seminars, although they are a bit envious at not being able themselves to teach at OCC.

Student teachers at OCC are left pretty much on their own and are free to try things, getting direction only if they request it or if a problem looms that they seem unable to handle by themselves. This freedom is not as wide in scope as it would appear, due to the physical nature of the learning areas. Since there are eight teachers and some 40 students in the same room, no one is really alone.

An unusual arrangement has been made also concerning the marking of the student teachers. If they finish the quarter, that is, if they teach successfully for the required time period, they each receive an A grade. If for some reason a student teacher is unable to complete the quarter, if the supervisors feel that the student is not adjusting well, or if the student himself feels that he is presently incapable of operating in this way, a withdrawal is made and the student will have to try again some other quarter, although not necessarily at OCC. To date we have not lost one.

This automatic A reduces hypocrisy, relieves pressures which drain people, notably student teachers, and promotes an openness in student teacher supervisory staff relations not often found in teacher education



Students work with Chrysler mailings.



Occupational activities include learning to color-code auto parts.

circles. Dialogue follows. True interaction begins.

The Future

It would seem that this type of schooling for secondary or even elementary pupils could be accomplished wherever teacher education colleges are found. It is a perfect marriage for both parties, with the public school benefiting from reduced class size and its concomitant personalized instruction, and the college finding that it has a highly impacted area of practice teaching contacts which cuts down time-consuming travel. The college also can boast of supervisors who still teach secondary school youngsters, who are well known to both students and staff alike, and who have a veritable learning laboratory at their disposal.

The adoption of schools, with real kids in them, not the laboratory school kids on campus, by college departments or joint ventures of several departments, appears to hold much promise for all concerned. Special beneficiaries would be the students themselves and the student teachers.

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