

The University's Role in the Preservice Education of Teachers

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TEACHER education has, for years, been accused of producing poorly qualified teachers. The current accountability movement has focused additional attention on teacher education programs. Among the loudest critics of teacher training have been the teachers. Their complaints have generally fallen into three categories: irrelevant curriculum; "Mickey Mouse" busywork; lack of sufficient practical experience.

If indeed these criticisms are valid, and more often than not they are, what should the universities be doing to establish a better education program for teachers? Let us start with the statement that education courses are nothing more than mountains of busywork. In reality, this has been true. To the naïve preprofessional, exercises in lesson planning with no opportunity to teach the lessons, or writing term papers about theories of learning which have never been observed in action (unless practiced by pigeons or monkeys), or suggesting solutions to learning problems or discipline problems which are obviously hypothetical, constitutes busywork. Lesson plans need to be used to determine their value. Theories of learning need to be related to observable pupil-teacher be-

havior in order to be meaningful to the inexperienced person. Solutions to learning problems are best proposed as they relate to specific learning environments, and those environments are best analyzed when observed, not imagined.

Consequently, the preservice teacher must be placed into participatory situations; that is, he teaches lessons, he works in classrooms, he tutors children. To wait until senior year student teaching or internship for these participatory experiences is too late. As soon as a student enrolls in "Education 100," he must become involved in his learning. This involvement can be accomplished through microteaching episodes, organized observation and participation in the public schools, volunteer teacher aide programs, or tutoring experiences under the direct supervision of a teacher. The involvement can take place in public or private schools, nursery schools or day care centers, adult education classes or classes at correctional institutions, special education facilities or recreational activities. The concept of busy-

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work activities will dissipate when students are confronted with actual problems in a real world and find reasons for planning lessons or studying learning theories or proposing alternatives for learning.

Participatory Activities

When students are put into participatory activities, part of the problems of irrelevant curriculum and lack of sufficient practical experience will disappear. However, the problems will not be totally eliminated. Public school programs are changing more rapidly than the college training programs designed to produce the teachers to fit into the public schools. For example, open concept schools are founded before teachers are taught how to function in them. Middle schools are being established before training programs are designed to produce middle school teachers. Schools are rapidly becoming immersed in various programs of individualization of curriculum, but little is being done to prepare the preservice teacher to teach in or coordinate such programs. How are the universities supposed to cope with the ever-changing needs of the public schools?

Perhaps the answer lies in the interpretation of "teaching" that has been the foundation of most college and university teacher education programs. Webster defines teaching as showing how to do something, giving instruction, providing knowledge, holding classes. Nowhere does the definition state that teaching must be done by one omniscient individual to a group of 30 students sitting at 30 desks in an unimaginatively decorated room. Yet past programs in teacher education have been built upon this interpretation of teaching.

Tomorrow's teacher cannot be omni-

scient; he will not "live" in *one* classroom; he will have a multitude of resources, human and technical, to help him teach. He will need to be imaginative, flexible, creative, and willing to learn with his students. The program under which these characteristics would develop may be quite different from the traditional teacher education program.

The college classroom should serve as a model of good and innovative teaching. Through example, students should learn how to establish conducive learning environments, how to use multimedia for learning and motivation, how to individualize curriculum, or how to use computer-assisted instruction, or team teaching, or simulation and gaming techniques. Reading about these techniques without experiencing them is not sufficient. All too often, the college professor operates under the adage, "Do as I say, not as I do." Research has indicated that teachers tend to teach the way they have been taught; therefore, the teacher educators must set the stage for learning by practicing what they have previously only talked about. First-hand experiences with simulation techniques, mass media, or computer-assisted instruction might just convince the education student that these are practical and valuable vehicles for learning.

The education student will also need to spend more time in the public schools. Some of this time may be spent vicariously, via video tapes, closed circuit television, or microteaching experiences. However, organized junior year public school placements hold great promise for the future. Students, during their junior year, are placed in the public schools as teacher aides. The placements are frequently changed to provide the student with a variety of experiences. As students progress through the year, their classroom responsibilities increase as they become more and more immersed in the

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teaching-learning experience. While in the schools, the students enroll in various types of education courses designed to serve as resources for learning.

By the time the students reach the traditional senior year internship program, they have already established a repertoire of skills and techniques to use, as well as a better understanding of themselves as teachers. They can then use their senior year experience to perfect skills and to explore, with confidence, other techniques of teaching.

Earlier Exposure

This new movement in teacher education of providing earlier and maximum exposure to the public schools requires unquestionable cooperation between the public schools and the universities. The cooperation is not always easy to achieve; it is dependent upon mutual respect and responsibility of the representatives of both institutions. The universities will need to work closely with the public schools to help teachers develop the skills of supervision they will utilize while working with teacher aides and student teachers. After all, the classroom teacher will be the person most competent to judge the effectiveness of preservice teachers.

Another approach to eliminate the criticism of irrelevant teacher training programs has been the development of performance-based or competency-based education programs. Fundamental to these programs are competencies (knowledge, skills, behaviors) to be developed by the student, criteria for assessment of those competencies, and objective assessment of student performance. The student's rate of progress is determined by his satisfactory demonstration of the required competencies rather than by time or the number of courses he has managed to complete. Performance-based programs put emphasis on terminal behavior rather than entering behavior; therefore, instruction becomes individualized. Students spend a considerable amount of time in the schools, they receive constant feedback on their progress, they learn alternative means by which to

achieve various competencies, they concentrate upon specific teaching skills, and they are held accountable for their performance.

If colleges or universities intend to consider performance-based programs as a means of educating the teacher, they must assume the responsibility for seeking answers

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to the following questions: Who should establish the competencies for teachers—students, teachers, administrators, teacher educators, graduates? How much of the training program should be competency- or performance-based? Will a performance-based program tend to emphasize the cognitive and psychomotor skills at the expense of the affective dimensions of teaching? How much of the performance-based program must take place in the public schools? What will be the cost of performance-based programs, in terms of hardware and manpower? Will the individualization of the program detrimentally affect the social development of the student? Can instruments be developed which will adequately evaluate the various teacher competencies? Who will be responsible for the assessment of the student? If students transfer in or out of the program, how will transfer credit be applied?

Any new program in teacher education will generate questions and problems. These questions and problems should not discourage the universities from experimenting, for experimentation is the key to growth. Regardless of what approach teacher education takes for the future training of teachers, one item is certain—a degree in teacher education should mean more than credits earned in a series of education courses required for certification. The degree should be a guarantee that the holder has demonstrated the requisite skills for teaching. This guarantee can be made only if teacher education programs move from their current passive stage to a newer active stage of development. □

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