

From Student to Teacher:

THE transition from the role of student to that of teacher is traumatic at best, devastating at worst. Yet it need not be such an unnerving time if arrangements are made to ease the college graduate gently into his new position. Student teaching is one practice designed to smooth the transition, and in many cases it does so effectively; but there is more that might be done, especially by the public school systems.

Preschool orientation for new teachers is often a good example of an opportunity missed. Too frequently, the orientation consists of little more than brief—or even worse, lengthy—speeches of welcome or exhortation, and perhaps a day or two to arrange rooms and meet principals and faculty. Such an orientation does little to help prepare the new teacher to deal with the students or the curriculum. He is left to chart his own course through textbooks and curriculum guides as best he can, with little opportunity, or time, to seek additional help.

The person in possibly the best position to offer help to the novice is the subject area supervisor. The supervisor, presumably an experienced and skillful teacher with knowledge of both the students and the curriculum, and with skill in dealing with teachers, should be able to provide both knowledge and encouragement. He may find, in fact, that his commitment to the improvement of

teaching is best fulfilled through work with new teachers. The young, inexperienced teacher, not yet set in his ways, might well be willing to accept, and even to seek, advice and assistance and thus may be the supervisor's greatest hope for effecting change in the educational system. The receptivity that we would hope for in the novice would simplify the supervisor's task. There are, however, other factors that complicate it.

Difficulties Faced

One of the major difficulties is that the supervisor seldom has time to work as intensively with the beginning teacher as he might wish. The school year opens with a rash of meetings and a long list of obligations and duties that frequently keep supervisors far from the classroom during the first week of school. Under these circumstances, the young teacher is very much on his own. He may have the help of the department chairman and other teachers, but the supervisor's impact on him during this period is likely to be negligible.

If the supervisor does manage to avoid some of the meetings and get into the classroom early in the year, he faces problems of a different sort. He can now work with the teacher, but conditions militate against success. First of all, the teacher is working hard

The Supervisor's Role

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to develop rapport with the students and to earn their respect. To work too closely with the new teacher at this point may be to jeopardize these efforts and risk embarrassing him. Obviously, some observations are expected, even by students, but the frequent visits necessary to effect change in a teacher's methods are likely to unnerve the teacher in front of the people whose confidence he desperately needs. Not all young teachers are made uneasy by the supervisor's visits, of course, but unfortunately those most in need of assistance are often the ones most uncomfortable when the assistance is offered.

The situation is further complicated by the uncertainties that attend any group activity; so the supervisor, should he attempt something like demonstration teaching, risks poor results even if his lesson is good and the class responds well. If the lesson is successful, then the teacher is likely to be embarrassed by the comparison with his own efforts. The supervisor has come into the class, taken over and done well, and then the class returns to the hands of the beginner who may not be able to match the performance of the more experienced educator.

Should the lesson be unsuccessful, then the supervisor has embarrassed himself and perhaps lost the confidence of the teacher. And the lesson might very well fail, since the supervisor is in a new situation, teaching a

class he does not know, a class that is in the process of adjusting to someone else's manner and style. Either success or failure might equally well be attributed to his novelty. In either case, his rapport with the teacher may be damaged, and the teacher's respect for himself and the supervisor may be diminished.

We should also consider the possibility that the supervisor may no longer be the skillful teacher he was, or should have been, before moving into administration. Several years out of the classroom can dull the skills a great deal. Should he try going back into the class as a teacher, he may find the students quite unlike those he faced two to ten years ago, and may discover that his methods are no longer as successful as they once had been.

So the supervisor must face several problems when he deals with the new teacher: first, the difficulty of finding time to work with the teacher; second, the awkwardness of working extensively in the teacher's classroom; and third, the possibility that his own teaching skills may have grown rusty in the years of administration. If the supervisor hopes to provide much assistance during the

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time when student becomes teacher, he must find some way of solving these three problems. One possible solution may lie in a summer workshop designed specifically to bring supervisor and new teachers together in the classroom.

The Supervisor Contributes

The workshop would involve actual work in the classroom for about four weeks during late summer. The supervisor would assume responsibility for planning a unit of instruction, and would plan specific lessons and conduct classes for perhaps the first week, while the new teachers observe. After the class, supervisor and teachers would meet to analyze the lesson. All aspects of the lesson would be discussed: the subject matter, the instructional strategies, the activities in which students participated, the response of students to various techniques, the relationship of the lesson to the one preceding and the one to follow. The supervisor would, in other words, be teaching both students and teachers, spending perhaps an hour in the classroom during the morning, and an hour or two consulting with teachers in the afternoon.

As the course progresses, the supervisor would gradually turn the class over to the teachers. He may do this in any of several ways—perhaps by first having them conduct discussions in small groups for part of the period, then slowly allowing them to assume full responsibility for planning and running the class. Again, the teaching would be subjected to discussion by all the participants. Presumably, the threatening aspect of the analysis would be diminished since the supervisor himself had willingly undergone such analysis first. During the first part of the workshop his teaching had been examined and criticized and he had, again presumably, served as a model of good-natured receptivity for others to emulate.

As the course moves from the first week to the last, more and more of the work would fall upon the teachers, so that by the end of the session they would be doing all the teach-

ing and much of the planning. The unit, of course, would have been outlined in advance by the supervisor—the teachers would be unable to participate in the long-range planning. The supervisor would plan all of the first lessons—but by the second week, at least, the teachers may begin to assist him in planning lessons that he will teach. Soon, perhaps by the third week, the roles should reverse, and the supervisor should assist the teachers in planning lessons that they will present. By the fourth week, the teachers would be doing all the planning and teaching, and probably all the analysis of lessons.

A summer program of this sort could contribute much to the solution of the supervisor's problems in helping new teachers. It would, for instance, allow the supervisor to keep his hand in at teaching. He would have a month of it each year—not much, perhaps, but more than most supervisors now have. It would enable him to get to know all the new teachers. He would be working closely with them for a month, observing their teaching, learning some of their weaknesses and some of their strengths, and yet he would not be dealing with them in a threatening situation. Moreover, they would be used to having him and other teachers in the classroom, so they would more likely be receptive to visits later in the year. The relationship between the supervisor and the teacher could become very strong during this session.

The teachers would also have the opportunity to meet other new teachers and to grow accustomed to sharing ideas. They might consequently be less inclined to isolate themselves in their own classrooms later on. They could also become more sensitive to the students they may expect to meet when they begin their regular schedule, and this alone may be valuable enough to justify the program. It is very difficult for a teacher who develops poor relationships with the class at the beginning of the year to recover. In such a program as this one, however, he has an opportunity to make mistakes in August and then to begin again, with a new group of students, in September. He does not have to suffer the consequences of his mistakes for a full year.

The summer session would also provide the school system, after several years of operation, with a good strong core of teachers, prepared not just by the colleges in the general methods of teaching, but also by the supervisor in the details of the system's own curriculum. Such a program could do much to achieve unity of purpose within a school system.

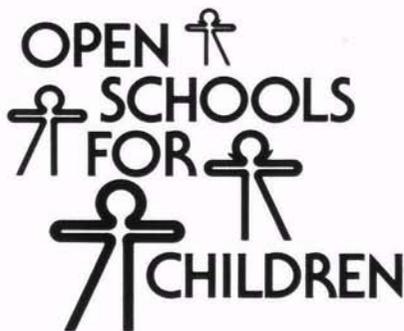
There would be problems, of course. One is money. The school system would have to decide whether the benefits to be derived from the program would be worth the expense of an extra month's salary for the new teachers. In comparison to the extensive training programs in some industries or businesses, however, this month-long workshop is laughably small.

The system would also have to obtain students. The program could be justified as either remedial training for students who had difficulties during the previous year, or as enrichment. The summer school operated at Duke University for the purpose of training Master of Arts in Teaching candidates is such an enrichment program and seems to have no trouble attracting students, although no credit is offered and there is no reward

beyond the activity itself. In any case, the supervisor could design the unit so that it would be suitable for some group of students from the community.

A third problem might be created by the number of teachers involved in such an activity. If a school system hires 30 or 40 new English teachers each year, the supervisor of English will not be able to deal with each one as closely as he would have to in order to make the program successful. If the system is large enough to hire that many new teachers, however, it is large enough to require two or three assistant supervisors who could help with the program. If there are no assistants, the supervisor might find several superior teachers who could be persuaded to assist him.

A program such as the one outlined here might do much to simplify the transition from college to classroom, and might at the same time improve the supervisor's relationship with the novice teacher. It would return the supervisor periodically to the role of teacher, and allow him to work intensively with new teachers in an unthreatening situation. It could yield lasting benefits for his schools. □



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