

Teacher Education Centers for Urban Diversity

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NORTHEASTERN Illinois University (UNI) in Chicago has historically been involved in preparing teachers for the city of Chicago through its campus-based program. Members of the elementary education staff felt a strong need to move in new directions. These directions were:

1. In terms of educational principles, teacher preparation needs to be based in schools, involve early practical experiences for the undergraduate, provide a supportive base from which effective development can be facilitated, and equip students with effective strategies that can offer elementary children meaningful learning experiences.

2. In an urban area, such as Chicago, there are a variety of distinct communities, which need teachers who are aware of and sensitive to cultural differences and varying life styles within these communities. The people in these communities include Blacks, Latins, Appalachians, White ethnics; middle, upper, and lower economic classes.

Three teacher education centers have been initiated in Chicago in response to pressing needs in urban education. Pinpointed in these centers is the specific kind of opportunities needed for teachers in certain communities.

Most schools in the Chicago area seemed to be quite willing to cooperate with the teacher preparation process in terms of these general guidelines.

Three teacher education centers were started in September 1971 as a pilot program for a small number of elementary education majors. The first center was located in the suburban area north of Chicago (Suburban Communities Teacher Education Center, SCTEC), the second in a predominantly Black area of the West Side of Chicago (West Side Community Teacher Education Center, WSCTEC), and the third in a multi-ethnic area not far from the university (Cosmopolitan Community Teacher Education Center, CCTEC).

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Although the centers are geared to provide teachers for very different communities, these facilities share some attributes in common. For example: (a) the undergraduates, from the beginning, are involved in elementary classrooms as aides; (b) the instruction through education courses, by and large, takes place in the schools and is directly related to the experiences of the undergraduates; (c) each term the classroom work of the prospective teacher increases in time spent per week and in degree of responsibility; and (d) the university staff are people committed to this type of teacher preparation, who themselves become directly involved in classrooms with children, not only as supervisors, but also as demonstration teachers, aides, and consultants.

The differences of the centers are based upon the particular kind of teacher thought to be most successful in that area, or sometimes upon the expertise of the center staff. For example, the undergraduates recruited

for the predominantly Black West Side area are transfer students from Malcolm X and Kennedy-King Junior Colleges, while for the other two centers regular campus students are recruited (the campus students being predominantly white). It should be noted, however, that white students are attracted to and participate in the West Side center as do Black and Puerto Rican students participate in the other centers.

Another difference is that the Suburban Center invites freshman and sophomore students to engage in early classroom contacts in order to begin making a career decision, while the other two centers recruit primarily juniors and seniors. A third difference is in the way microteaching, a required course for all elementary education majors, is handled. In the Cosmopolitan Center the undergraduates videotape their minilessons in the classrooms where they are aiding and then meet together on campus to analyze the tapes. Ordinarily, taping is done in a room separate

from classrooms where the analysis is also done.

The degree of autonomy allows each center to innovate, while the staff of other centers observes and adopts the innovation as it sees fit. The teacher educators are learning from each other, as are the undergraduates, through this kind of cross-fertilization.

The design of the program concentrates on the urban classroom by focusing on what is currently happening in schools of that particular center. The program is able not only to cover the necessary theoretical foundations of education, but to make those foundations relevant to teaching in the urban schools of Chicago. The staff, through its contacts with the prospective teachers, realizes the need to deal with specific problems (such as racism and Black dialect in the West Side Center) to a much greater degree than would be the case in a campus-based program, in order to provide for the special problems the undergraduates are encountering.

New Teachers Need Support

The program depends very heavily on a concept of maximum support for new teachers. One of the major complaints that most new teachers in urban school systems have voiced is that they are personally unprepared and that they do not receive the proper support from the system as a whole. Through the urban community teacher education centers the apprentice students of teaching receive this support by taking courses as a group, teaching and aiding in schools together, and reflecting upon their experiences in seminar meetings. Consequently, they enter the teaching service with a great deal more confidence in their ability to succeed in urban teaching.

The program bases much of its emphasis on the development of the individual teacher. Thus, a major portion of the student's preparation is directed toward the development of his or her own curriculum for teaching. The program tries to provide for the student a unique flexibility of style and curriculum which will equip him or her to, in turn,

facilitate optimal learning conditions for elementary children. During methods classes, various strategies are presented to the students so that they can pick and choose activities and processes which might work for them. Success in this component of the program depends upon the student's building up a repertoire of effective techniques for interacting with children in the subject areas.

The program goes out of its way to prepare these beginning teachers in effective methods of working within the urban classrooms. Leaders of the program hope that their presence as fresh, dedicated, and well-prepared teachers in a school will have a positive effect on the total staff of that school and will markedly enhance the school's image in attracting other experienced teachers. Furthermore, creation of the Urban Communities Teacher Education Centers gives an opportunity for UNI to develop more effective ways of preparation for *all* of its teacher education students. This is carried out in the notion that what makes for effective teachers in the urban areas will also make for effective teachers anywhere. However, effective teachers are crucial to the very survival of urban youngsters and thus the urban area becomes a top priority for effective teacher education.

Although there are some flaws in the present operations, such as students as aides being placed with poor models of teaching, UNI has been encouraged to move ahead and three new centers (one in the impoverished, multi-ethnic uptown area, another in a Black community, and a bilingual bicultural center in a Latin community) will begin efforts in the academic year of 1973-74. All of this is in the hope that a personalized approach to teacher preparation based in schools in culturally diverse communities will provide a process for educating those desperately needed, competent, urban teachers.

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