

A Year in the Life of a PBTE Teacher

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The student teacher needs much more teaching experience and supervision than he or she is getting; it is important to accomplish this, and it can be done.

AFTER spending several years as a high school teacher, an assistant principal, and a principal of a Junior High School and a Senior High School,¹ I returned to my own college as a Professor of Education to train 38 young people in the teaching process. For 18 years I had been actively engaged in training raw recruits² on the job and in retraining teachers who had had little or no preservice or in-service education. Since the training of teachers was my major interest, and, in my view, the major responsibility of the principal, I did devote a sizable proportion of my time to it.

There was never a year when I was not teaching demonstration lessons, either by the day, or week, or even month, or when I was not holding workshops with teachers

before school, after school, and even on school time. I was also always personally involved with student teachers with the idea of staffing the school. Eventually one-third of our staff consisted of our former student teachers. The pressure of such activities was enormous but I felt satisfaction in giving teacher education a major priority and I consoled myself by thinking that the best place to prepare teachers is on the job by people doing the job and not by the colleges anyway.

When I went back to Brooklyn College in the fall of 1974, I was agreeably surprised to find that there was now a School of Education that was working its way toward a performance based program. The students I had were the first ones coming through a three year sequence of courses. They were in their last year, when they were to begin to teach for the first time. The previous two years of education courses had been spent under the guidance of teams of professors who were out in the Brooklyn public schools observing with them and applying the principles of education, educational psychology.

¹ All but one year in New York City public schools.

² Days of acute teacher shortage.

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guidance, and training in skills to what they were seeing.

Thus they had been thinking of themselves as prospective teachers for two years and had also been critical observers for that length of time. I was able to see the advantage of this fact in my preliminary get-acquainted and planning sessions with them. I spent many hours in thinking through what I knew the schools needed in the way of teachers, what my college students had already been exposed to, and what could possibly be accomplished in only nine hours a week for thirty weeks.

These Were the Objectives

My plan of action included the following ideas:

1. To get to know each prospective teacher as a person as much as he or she would allow—background, hopes, fears, family situation, strengths, weaknesses
2. To help students clarify where they stand on the purpose of schools, why they are teaching, what they actually hope to do independent of anything they hear or see
3. To make each student aware of the “hidden curriculum” of a school
4. To inspire my students with the wonder and excitement of being a teacher
5. To expose them to the whole area of humanistic education enabling them to approach their students in the same way
6. To make every action of mine a model of what a teacher should be and do
7. To make contact with a host school where the principal would want to get involved in teacher training, to get to work closely and regularly with this principal, and also to get to know the capabilities of the school staff and the problems and operation of that school, and to offer my services to that staff
8. To involve my students in the life of that school by helping each one make a contribution to the school that would be used by the staff and its pupils now and in the future. The “final examination” consisted of

two parts: (a) a concrete presentation of such a contribution to the school and (b) a case study of a child who was unappealing to them on original contact and an indication of some ideas about how to handle this child in the regular classroom situation.

9. To teach the fundamentals of lesson planning and to guide the students in their first attempts to put life into these plans

10. To use seminar time for workshops on how to handle discipline problems, how to construct tests, how to interpret school

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records, how to use audiovisual aids, and how to grade pupils

11. To acquaint the students with other approaches to teaching than those they were seeing in the host school and to other kinds of schools as well as to other teacher resources

12. To teach the students ways of “lifting the lesson above the textbook level” and the necessity for so doing

13. To treat my students as if they were indeed already teachers and colleagues

14. To help them in writing résumés and in preparing for job interviews.

Looking back, I feel satisfied that as a principal I would benefit from the exposure and training these students had. However, the students were required by the College to spend only six hours a week in the host school. I think it would have benefited both the prospective teacher and the school more if they had spent all day there and had had their own class.

Ideally, the prospective teachers should



have been exposed to more types of schools, and to different methods than they would find in the New York City public schools. We can argue that it is in these schools that they are most likely to teach. However, I know from my own experience that staying within the bounds of the City is too parochial an existence for new ideas and different ways of doing things. It would have helped to have a program of visiting arranged by the College. Also valuable would have been such a project as suspending all classes for two weeks during a year to enable visitors from various parts of the country to give workshops for our students and staff.³

We cannot expect that preservice education can produce an experienced teacher who, for example, knows how to handle such problems as finding out "where a child is" and "individualizing the instruction to take each student to the next step." The most we can expect—and, indeed, it is a great deal—is that preservice education will inspire excitement and respect for teaching and will give the student the knowledge needed and help him or her to "empathize" with and

"sensitize" pupils, parents, colleagues, and administrators.

We need teachers who are self-revealing, who know how to start where their pupils are, who deal with things pupils care about, and who lift lessons above the textbook level. Our new teachers need to understand the importance of careful planning, good organization, and "following through," of assuming responsibility in keeping records and following school regulations, of guidance functions of teaching, how to plan different types of lessons, how to compose a good test, what a marking system means, and what evaluation should be.

In order to do all this we will have to give the student teacher much more teaching experience and supervision than he or she is getting; it is important to accomplish this, and it can be done. Education must be continued on the job, and the teacher must be involved in this process. The teacher must be helped to recognize what he or she needs to know, be allowed to ask for it, and to have it provided. Therefore, the principal is always going to be concerned with in-service education and much thought and experimentation need to be devoted to it. □

³ Semi-annual Marathons at the University of Massachusetts.

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