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CHANGING EMPHASIS IN STUDENT TEACHING

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Student teaching is now receiving major emphasis as a recognized activity in teacher education. Conant reinforces this fact in his study on teacher preparation by stating that "the one indisputably essential element in professional education is practice teaching."¹ University of Massachusetts students invariably indicate that student teaching is the most valuable experience in professional education. Other references in the professional literature seem rather clear on this point. Student teaching is a relevant experience for prospective teachers.

If we accept the premise that student teaching is the more relevant activity for prospective teachers it is imperative that we focus our attention on critically examining the program. What do we expect from students in student teaching? Are the outcomes in student teaching consistent with our objectives? Can the student teaching experience be more relevant and more sensitive to the revolutionary changes taking place in education? Traditionally, undergraduate teacher education programs consisted of rather specific university requirements interspersed with professional education courses. Frequently the education courses would be offered

¹James B. Conant, The Education of American Teachers, New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co., 1963, p. 142.

only in the junior or senior year culminating in student teaching. Many scholars are criticizing this sequence of course requirements because it separates theory and practice in an artificial manner. Scholars are also critical of the student teaching phase of teacher education. They suggest modifications to traditional programs of teacher education-student teaching in particular-and present documented evidence to support their positions.

The purpose of this article is to present the position taken by authorities in this area and to discuss some of the implications of these proposals. The focus of the article includes both elementary and secondary teacher education, with relevance for vocational agriculture. Student teaching or professional laboratory experiences will be considered as the period of guided teaching during which the student takes increasing responsibility for the work with a given group of learners over a period of consecutive weeks. A cooperating teacher is defined as one who teaches children or youth and who supervises student teaching. The university supervisor is the college representative who is responsible for supervising a student teacher or a group of student teachers.

Robert E. Bills, Dean of the School of Education, University of Alabama, in a paper presented at a recent Association for Student Teaching National Workshop, brought out some penetrating issues in student teaching.² He suggested that the key to successful student teaching experiences is to provide an atmosphere free from threat, an atmosphere conducive to changes in behavior, one in which the prospective teacher is aware of the need to change. Bills observed that many student teaching programs in America, if evaluated in this context would be considered deficient because: 1) teacher approval and institutional grading requirements thwart freedom; 2) student teachers are frequently evaluated on the basis of successfully mastering the recipes provided by the classroom teacher or university supervisor; and 3) the classroom environment in which the professional laboratory experience occurs is more likely to reflect rigidity rather than flexibility. Bills concludes that "an essential to be sought from student teaching is openness to experience."³

²Robert E. Bills, Dean, School of Education, University of Alabama. "The Education of Teachers: Knowing and Being", Keynote Address, 20th Summer Workshop, The Association for Student Teaching, Wisconsin State University, Oshkosh 1965.

³Ibid.

Arthur Combs⁴ supports many of the concepts presented by Bills pointing out the inadequacies of the "competencies" approach to teacher education. He believes that it is fallacious to assume that the methods of experts either can or should be taught directly to beginners. Instead, Combs argues for the "self as instrument" concept in teacher education. The student must discover what instructional procedures will work for him. Teaching methodology becomes an exploration of purposes, techniques, self, and subject matter encountered in a broad spectrum calling for a laboratory approach to student teaching. Prospective teachers explore, evaluate, try out, and discover materials and methodology used by successful teachers. Student laboratory experiences are placed throughout the professional program rather than concentrated at the end of it.

Fred T. Wilhelms, Associate Secretary of the National Association of Secondary School Principals, reports an experiment in teacher education.⁵ The traditional pre-set curriculum was eliminated. Continuing seminars were conducted in conjunction with planned teaching experiences in the classroom. Sensitivity training similar to the T-group plan of the National Training Laboratories was emphasized. The seminar provided opportunities for students to explore teaching together, to accept personal responsibility for their experiences in student teaching, and to study themselves and others in becoming teachers.

Each of the aforementioned men has expressed concern with the status of many programs of student teaching. Each of these authorities is extremely critical of the pre-set curriculum and the "competencies" approach in teacher education. In particular they argue for an environmental setting for student teaching free from threat; and they are in agreement that the students in teaching must discover, experiment, try out, and learn what works for them in the classroom. Implicit in the concerns expressed by these experienced authorities in teacher education is their concept of teaching. Teaching involves more than presenting subject matter or imparting facts and information. Teaching is both an art and a science. Subject matter is not

⁴Arthur W. Combs. The Professional Education of Teachers, Boston. Allyn and Bacon, 1964.

⁵Fred T. Wilhelms, Associate Secretary, the National Association of Secondary School Principals, "A Challenge to Teacher Education," Address, 20th Summer Workshop, The Association for Student Teaching, Wisconsin State University, Oshkosh, 1965.

separated from methodology, rather, subject matter (content) and professional subject matter (methodology) are inseparable because methodology is the utilization and application of content.

Sydney J. Harris expresses his ideas concerning the teachers needed for our schools. He describes the "authentic" teacher.⁶

"A person is either himself or not himself, is either rooted in his existence, or is a fabrication; has either found his humanhood or is still playing with masks and roles and status symbols. And nobody is more aware of this difference (although unconsciously) than a child. Only an authentic person can evoke a good response in the core of the other person. Only a person is resonant to person.

Knowledge is not enough. Technique is not enough. Mere experience is not enough. This is the mystery at the heart of the teaching process; and the same mystery is at the heart of the healing process. Each is an art more than a science or a skill--and the art is at bottom the ability to 'tune in to the other's wavelength.'

And this ability is not possessed by those who have failed to come to terms with their own individuated person no matter what other talents they possess. Until they have liberated themselves (not completely, but mostly) from what is artificial and unauthentic within themselves, they cannot communicate with, counsel, or control others."

In developing authentic teachers it becomes essential to look for certain elements in the student teaching experience. The student teacher has a positive regard for himself as a person, his self perception is wholesome based upon his conception of his world and those about him. These perceptions are reinforced by the cooperating teacher. The student teacher and cooperating teacher are learners in teaching. Each is sensitive to the needs of the other and to the needs of the students. They make a sincere effort to come to grips with the personal meaning of behavior in the classroom. They perceive pupils as unique human beings and discover alternatives in guiding the learning process.

⁶J. A. Battle and Robert J. Shannon, The New Idea in Education, New York: Harper and Row, 1968, p. 17.

There is a high level of interaction in the classroom between students with their teacher and the student teacher. Pupils seek answers to questions they feel are of importance to them. Teachers and student teachers listen carefully and make suggestions. Experiences are shared in the group. Students see their learning experiences become meaningful in their world.

The best teaching is that which develops superior thinking in the learners--students become self-learners. Such learning experiences are characterized by an emphatic understanding and a genuineness of purpose and regard for the viewpoints of others stimulated by the teacher. Student teachers gain insights and knowledge in self-perception. They perceive how their personality affects the behavior of the learners. By analyzing and synthesizing this feedback they discover new understandings in becoming.

The implications of these concepts could have far-reaching effects upon teacher education. A changed emphasis in student teaching calls for a laboratory approach. Seminars in methodology provide opportunities to focus on the problems encountered in the classroom. Such an approach does not preclude the desirability of offering professional education courses prior to the professional laboratory experiences. Some prior experience in a classroom setting as a laboratory section of such a course might be essential.

A changed emphasis in student teaching implies consideration for a longer professional laboratory experience than provided by most traditional programs. There seems to be a growing concern within the profession that a full semester (fifteen weeks) in teaching is a necessity. Some authorities are recommending teaching internships of a full school year preceded by an experience in student teaching. Implementing these recommendations presents many variables though it is possible that student teachers can be in the classroom for a longer period of time without a continuous sequence.

This approach in teacher education would call for a high degree of cooperative relationships between the public schools and the college or university. Common elements in the philosophical framework for the education of teachers accepted and understood by each institution are a must. One of these elements concerns the extension of university classrooms to the public schools. Each institution is actively involved and committed to educating prospective teachers. The respective roles involved in meeting program objectives are understood. The triad in teacher education--student teacher, cooperating teacher, and university supervisor--becomes of paramount significance. Alternative ways of strengthening this triad must be found.

Another implication of this approach to student teaching is the supervisory activities. Highly qualified, experienced, understanding individuals with leadership potential are needed in this phase of the program. Their focus must be on the results of teaching; the manner in which the student teacher's behavior affects the behavior of the students in the classroom. Supervisors concentrate on "how student teachers feel, think, believe about themselves, their students, their purposes, and the subject matter they are charged with teaching."⁷ University supervisors guide student teachers, assist cooperating teachers, conduct workshops for agricultural teachers, and act as a resource person to the school.

The changed emphasis in student teaching requires superior cooperating teachers. Experienced classroom teachers certified by the college or university to supervise and work with student teachers are needed--cooperating teachers who are willing to share their teaching experiences with a student in teaching and willing to encourage the student to critically examine his teaching. They also become involved with the seminar methodology course work during student teaching.

The pre-set curriculum sequences and course requirements need to be re-evaluated. A degree of flexibility in the curriculum offerings is required making possible a wide variety of courses, seminars, laboratory experiences, micro teaching, and modules of activities in meaningful sequences. Prospective teachers come together to discuss, to question, and to evaluate what is experienced in becoming teachers.

None of the aforementioned problems and implications seem insurmountable. They can be solved by cooperating institutions in teacher education if the challenge is accepted. In line with this changed emphasis in student teaching a program proposal for implementation at this University was developed. The education of vocational agriculture teachers at the University of Massachusetts will continue as a section of the secondary teacher education program. Prospective agriculture teachers major in a subject area in the College of Agriculture and receive a B.S. degree. They complete the education psychology course in the College of Arts and Sciences, the methodology and foundations courses, and the professional laboratory experiences courses in the School of Education.

⁷Arthur W. Combs, Op. Cit., p. 107.

This program calls for completion of pre-professional laboratory experience in a vocational agriculture classroom prior to the end of the junior year. Participatory experiences in the classroom include some directed observation of the instructional activities, teaching individuals, advising students, and conducting occupational placement and/or on-farm instruction. Students earn fifteen credit modules or one credit hour for their pre-professional laboratory experience.

Subsequent to the pre-professional laboratory experience, prospective agricultural teachers complete one course in principles and practices in vocational education. They have the option of completing a full semester of student teaching or a full year (paid) apprentice teaching experience. A seminar approach to special methodology in teaching agriculture in conjunction with classroom teaching is offered for either alternative to student teaching. A laboratory section in micro-teaching is also included as part of the methodology course.

Hopefully this program provides some flexibility for the students. They need only to complete the pre-professional laboratory experience and one other professional education course prior to student teaching. Alternatives in the professional laboratory experiences are provided the students. They will have an exposure to a vocational agriculture classroom prior to student teaching and the methodology of teaching is combined with their teaching experiences.

Opportunities are also provided the students to experiment, to try out, and to discover teaching prior to student teaching. Finally, it should be pointed out that the program is a section of the secondary teacher education program. Prospective agriculture teachers have contacts with other prospective secondary education teachers. An institutional approach is emphasized in the education of teachers.

The need for superior teachers in classrooms at all levels including agriculture teachers throughout the country is imperative. Much of the present unrest in our schools is related in some way to teaching and learning. "Authentic" teachers are what is needed if the "New Idea in Education" becomes a reality. Student teaching can and must play a very important role in educating this kind of teacher.

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