AN EXPLORATORY STUDY OF CHANGE IN STUDENT TEACHER BEHAVIOR IN GUIDING LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES

A Report of a Type C Project

by

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This project is recommended for approval by the members of the Students' Project Committee whose individual certificates of approval are on file in the Office of Doctoral Studies.

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CHAPTER I

AN OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this report is to describe a study of change in student teacher behavior in guiding learning opportunities. The study is exploratory in nature and is focused upon eight student teachers. It is an examination of their attitudes toward, understanding of, and ability to implement three educational principles for evidence of change during the period of student teaching.

NEED FOR THE STUDY

Pre-service programs for teacher education have long been based on the assumption that student teaching constitutes a valuable and integral part of the program. Mead states:

> When, where, and how this idea became a practice among teachers is not known. . . . In Germany the elder pupils were being used to teach the younger pupils in the sixteenth century. . . . Teachers' guilds were founded in Munich, Frankfort, Nuremburg, and Augsburg about 1600. No person who was not a master could keep school for the teaching of the elementary subjects. . . .
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> In the 1800's France and Prussia took over the training school idea. . . .
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> The first state normal schools in the United States were those at Lexington, Borre, and Bridgewater, Massachusetts. They had laboratory schools for teacher preparation as early as 1839.[1]

A survey of the current literature, however, reveals a mass of conflicting statements regarding the merits of student teaching. The

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[1] Arthur Raymond Mead, Supervised Student Teaching (New York: Johnson Publishing Company, 1930), pp. 6-10.

statement by Hutchins about the purpose of education is fundamental to the beliefs of those individuals who are questioning the long accepted assumption relative to the value of the student teaching experience to prospective teachers. He explains the purpose of education as follows:

> The best division of responsibility between the university and the occupation would be to have the university deal with the intellectual content of the occupation . . . and have the occupation itself take charge of familiarizing its own neophytes with the technical operations they have to learn . . . . The real problem of the university is the problem of purpose. If it undertakes to teach the tricks of some trades, should it not be willing to assume the same responsibility with regard to any other. . . . The efforts of the educational system should be confined to the attempt to promote the intellectual development of the people.[2]

Hutchins did not specifically make the application to the education of teachers, but others have taken the idea as a basis for operation. Woodring suggests:

> Certification in most states requires courses in methods and a period of practice teaching. Whether these should be a part of the undergraduate program is debatable. . . . The best solution, I think, lies in the establishment of a partly paid internship which will replace practice teaching and all courses in methods. . . .
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> The intern can, from the beginning, take full responsibility for a classroom. . . . Responsibility for the intern year will be in the hands of the public schools rather than the colleges. If the intern is paid about two-thirds of the regular starting salary, the portion deducted will be at no added cost to the school. This will give the beginner a far more realistic and satisfactory introduction to his work than the present system of practice teaching.[3]

Bestor also supports the idea that prospective teachers should be educated "on the job." His recommendations are stated in the fol-

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[2]Robert M. Hutchins, The University of Utopia (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1953), pp. 38-41.

[3]Paul Woodring, A Fourth of a Nation (New York: McGraw Hill Book Company, Inc., 1957), p. 193.

lowing words:

> Provision should be made for students without either experience or practice teaching to obtain temporary certificates enabling them to offer instruction in specially designated schools, which would guarantee to give "on the job" training and special guidance and supervision to those without experience. . . . After completing a specified period of teaching under such conditions an instructor should be entitled to a permanent certificate of teaching proficiency. An arrangement of this kind would enable the schools to draw upon a large and brilliant group of liberal arts graduates who are at present excluded from public school employment.[4]

There is also the possibility that legislation may enable prospective teachers to enter the classroom without any professional education. House Bill 763 which was introduced in the Texas House of Representatives during the current session made such a proposal.

> An act providing that provisional teacher's certificates entitling the holders thereof to teach in high schools and junior high schools of the State shall be issued to applicants who hold the bachelor's degree from accredited four year institutions of higher education in this State, or any other State of the United States; providing that completion of teacher education courses shall not be made a requisite to the issuance of such certificates; repealing all laws and parts of laws in conflict; and declaring an emergency.[5]

Before a new program is accepted or rejected, evidence concerning the strengths and weaknesses of the program it is replacing is essential. Even though the Ford Foundation has spent immense sums of money promoting experimental programs to provide information about the most effective methods to be used in educating prospective teachers, the Woodring report does not include a description of the study and evalua-

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[4]Arthur Bestor, The Restoration of Learning (New York: Alfred A Knoff, 1955), p. 264.

[5]Texas House of Representatives, House Bill 763 introduced by Maud Issacks, Spring, 1959.

tion of any one of the programs which would be replaced if the experimental programs were to be adopted. Opinion and isolated examples of failure do not provide a sound foundation for judgment.

Opposed to the critics of student teaching are many groups and individuals who argue that student teaching is a vital part of preservice teacher preparation. Armstrong advocates such a program in the following statement:

> The curriculum for teacher education should include a well-organized program of professional laboratory experience. . . . There are some things about children which they (student teachers) need to know and some things about materials of instruction and methods of using them which they need to know; some things about working with other teachers, administrators, and laymen which they need to know. There are some attitudes with reference to all of this which they need to develop. . . . This means that the college teacher should see and direct the students in their laboratory experience just as he does in other experiences.[6]

From the Commission on Mathematics of the College Entrance Board, the statement about the value of student teaching is as follows:

> From the student's point of view, the time spent under the direction of the supervising teacher is of great importance. It is the student's introduction to the "real thing."[7]

The Council on Cooperation in Teacher Education also recommends student teaching:

> Programs to prepare high school teachers should include study in human growth and development and the learning process; in philosophy, history, and sociology as they relate to education; analysis of materials and methods of instruction; and, above all, should

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[6] W. Earl Armstrong, "The Teacher Education Curriculum," Journal of Teacher Education, 8:240, September, 1957.

[7] Commission on Mathematics of the College Entrance Examination Board, The Education of Secondary School Mathematics Teachers (New York: College Entrance Examination Board, 1958), p. 3.

include an imaginative and well administered program of student teaching.[8]

As one considers the suggestion that it is the responsibility of the school to educate its own teachers, the words of Corey might be considered at the same time. He says:

> Until I see evidence that persuades me otherwise, I shall look with a great deal of skepticism on any proposal that we separate the acquisition of knowledge of what to teach from actual field observation and practices that are designed primarily to result in the development of adequate teaching behavior.[9]

Morrill disagrees with Bestor, who advocates allowing liberal arts graduates to begin teaching without either student teaching or experience. He says:

> We are hearing these days a curious disclaimer not found in the training for any other profession--of any relationship between the aims and methods of teaching--the old and outworn assumption that the teacher is born and not made or trained; that a knowledge of subject matter carries the built-in capacity to teach it.[10]

The reasoning of Corey contrasts dramatically with that of Hutchins and Woodring. He writes:

> If you are disposed to believe that the primary if not the exclusive aim of the school is to teach a limited number of important skills or a predetermined body of important subject matter; and those who find this material hard to learn should not go to school very long; and that the boys and girls who do not master the skills and the subject matter as fast as adults believe they should are somehow bad, and teachers should not have to contend with them and

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[8]American Council on Education, Council on Cooperation in Teacher Education, The Preparation of Secondary School Teachers, The Report of a Conference Held at the Princeton Inn, Princeton, New Jersey, September 28-29, 1956 (Washington, D.C.: Council on Cooperation in Teacher Education, 1957), p.3.

[9]Stephen M. Corey, "Controversy in Teacher Education: The Central Issue," Teachers College Record, 59:434, May, 1958.

[10]J. L. Morrill, "Foreward," The Two Ends of the Log, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1958), p. vii.

> that discipline is best engendered in children by imposing on them somewhat fixed and presumably high standards--if you hold these beliefs or others like them, your conclusions about teacher education are almost inevitable. You will conclude that teaching as such is not too complicated, and that almost anyone can do it commendably if he is reasonably bright and a college graduate, and if he knows enough about what he's trying to teach and can make children behave. . . . Believing these things it is easy to contend that so far as the tricks of the trade are concerned, these can best be picked up on the job, working cheek to jowl with the experienced teacher who has herself learned these tricks. . . . Good teaching is of a different order from keeping school. We are certain, too, that the attitudes and practices that distinguish the fine teacher have been learned and can, to a substantial degree, be taught.[11]

Haskew supports Corey's viewpoint when he says:

> It [a good teacher-preparation program] is an arrangement for the educative experience which will be most likely to take a youngster who cannot teach well and turn him into a person who can and does teach well. . . . Good teachers are generally produced by the colleges which produce them on purpose.[12]

Although there is disagreement regarding the merits of student teaching, there is, however, widespread agreement on the following point.

> The business of the school is to help boys and girls to learn. . . . The teacher must be equipped, first, with clear understanding and conviction relating to what he is trying to help children and youth to learn, and second, with equal understanding of conditions which assist boys and girls in learning.[13]

Examination of the divergent opinions indicated above does not bring one closer to reliable evidence for judging whether or not the

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[11]Stephen M. Corey, "Controversy in Teacher Education: The Central Issue," Teachers College Record, 59:437-438, May, 1958.

[12]L. D. Haskew, "America's Design for Good Teacher Preparation," NEA Journal, 48:16, April, 1959.

[13]Florence B. Stratemeyer and Margaret Lindsey, Working with Student Teachers (New York: Bureau of Publications, Teachers College, Columbia University, 1958), p. 53.

nature of the student teaching experience is such that it assists student teachers to gain an "understanding of conditions which assist boys and girls in learning." The need for evidence is, nevertheless, urgent.

Of the 38,800,000 pupils enrolled in elementary and secondary schools in the United States in 1957-58,[14] it is reasonable to assume that many were taught by first year teachers. Further, it is not unreasonable to expect that many of these children had been taught by a succession of teachers who were teaching for the first time. The welfare of these children demands that beginning teachers have the best preparation which it is possible for them to receive and, consequently, that attention be directed toward procuring reliable evidence which will serve as a basis for making any decisions relative to the value of student teaching as a part of that preparation. Since both members of the research team are involved with teacher education--one at the college level with prospective teachers and the other at the in-service level with beginning teachers--they are convinced that more information is needed relative to the education of teachers. They feel both a professional and personal need for this study.

Up to the present time, research along this line has been scant. Weber has made a study of the day by day records of fifteen student teachers during their period of student teaching. He reported that a total of two hundred and seventy-nine activities were encountered by

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[14] U. S. Office of Education, Press Release, August 17, 1957.

the group in one semester.[15] He did not, however, offer any conclusions regarding the effect which these activities had on the student teacher's ability to guide learning opportunities skillfully.

The research team hopes that this study will not only provide new information about what happens to prospective teachers during the period of student teaching but that the techniques used in looking at the problem will be of benefit to further studies.

PURPOSE AND DESIGN OF THE STUDY

The study reported here was set up to test the following three hypotheses:

1. Student teaching contributes to change in student teachers' attitudes toward educational principles central to the guidance of desirable learning opportunities.

2. Student teaching contributes to change in student teachers' understanding of educational principles central to the guidance of desirable learning opportunities.

3. Student teaching contributes to change in student teachers' ability to implement educational principles central to the guidance of desirable learning opportunities.

The design of the study was based in part upon two methodological assumptions. It was assumed that data relative to change in student teachers' attitudes toward and understanding of educational principles could be obtained by (1) conducting interviews with the student teachers at the beginning and the conclusion of the student teaching period and

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[15] R. A. Weber, "Inventory of Student Teaching Activities Encountered During One Semester of Student Teaching," Educational Administration and Supervision, 43:304, May-December, 1957.

(2) administering an attitude inventory and a "situations" test to the student teachers at the beginning and the conclusion of the student teaching period. It was also assumed that data relative to change in student teachers' ability to implement the educational principles could be obtained by: (1) observing the student teachers at regular intervals during the student teaching period, (2) examining the student teachers' block and daily plans at the conclusion of the student teaching period, and (3) interviewing the supervising teachers and college supervisors at the conclusion of the student teaching period. These methods are described in detail in Chapter III.

In delimiting the study to a manageable latitude three educational principles were selected as being crucial to the guidance of desirable learning opportunities. Although it was never supposed that they constituted a complete list of such principles, it was assumed that the following three must be viewed favorably, understood, and implemented or used by the teacher if learning opportunities under his guidance are to result in effective learning:

1. A desirable learning opportunity is one in which the learner's purposes are recognized and utilized.
2. A desirable learning opportunity is one in which the learner engages in problem solving.
3. A desirable learning opportunity is one in which the learner is assisted to develop and acquire generalizations which can be applied in a variety of life situations.

In testing the aforementioned hypotheses, consideration was limited to these three educational principles.

Some delimitation was also necessary, of course, with regard to the number of student teachers serving as subjects for the study. Because the research team regarded the use of a number of sources of data as a desirable feature, it was decided to use a small number of subjects, i.e., approximately eight. It was deemed preferable, however, that within that number there be representation of students majoring in elementary and secondary education.

Toward the next step of selecting subjects, the purpose and design of the study were explained to the administrative personnel of two different types of institutions preparing teachers. One institution was a large, municipal, multi-purpose college, while the other was solely devoted to the preparation of teachers. At both of these institutions strong interest was expressed in the study and commitments were made to allow students to participate.

At the single-purpose institution, the Assistant Coordinator of Student Teaching selected as possible subjects for the study four students majoring in elementary education. Similarly, at the multi-purpose college, the Coordinator and her staff selected four possible subjects from among students majoring in secondary education. In both cases, the criteria for selection were the same: (1) the selected student was to have a satisfactory record of academic achievement and personal-social adjustment and (2) the student's teaching assignment was to be under the guidance of a supervising teacher designated by the college as being generally (a) supportive of the selected educational principles, (b) willing and able to conduct effective conferences with the student,

and (c) willing to provide opportunity for the student to assume responsibility for guiding learning opportunities.

The good fortune of the research team is recognized in having had the full support and sound judgment of the Coordinator and the Assistant Coordinator at the two colleges. These people made the initial contact with the principals of the two schools to which the selected students were assigned; they made arrangements for the research team to meet with the principals and the supervising teachers to explain the purpose and design of the study as well as to secure their agreement to cooperate in its execution. In addition, the Coordinator and the Assistant Coordinator assumed responsibility for administering an attitude inventory to all student teachers at the colleges both prior to and following the student teaching period. This made it possible for the inventory to be administered under circumstances which tended to decrease its association with the research team by the students serving as subjects for the study; also, the responses from the first administration of the inventory to classmates of the selected students provided data on which an analysis of the items in the inventory was based and which led to the refinement of the instrument. In the case of the multi-purpose college where the students serving as subjects for the study were under the guidance of college supervisors of student teaching, the Coordinator also worked as a liaison between the research team and supervisors until it was possible for each of the supervisors to meet with the research team to discuss the study.

Since the student teaching period at the two colleges did not begin during the same week, it was possible for the research team to

hold an interview with each of the eight selected students during the first day of his student teaching period. It was at that time that the general nature of the study was explained to the students and their agreement to participate was expressed. It was also at that time that the research team was able to begin the process of gathering data.

ORGANIZATION OF THE REPORT

The remainder of the report is divided into four chapters. Chapter II is devoted to a discussion of the three selected educational principles. Chapter III describes the techniques used in gathering the data. In addition, this chapter also explains how the data were analyzed and organized. Chapter IV presents illustrative data relating to two students from the single-purpose college and one student from the multi-purpose college. It also includes descriptions of the two colleges and their programs of student teaching. Chapter V is a statement of the conclusions reached by the research team as well as some recommendations for further studies.