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Training for Education Equity: A "Common" Response

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Teacher educators are beginning to realize that providing educational equity for the large number of diverse cultural groups in American society requires more than the addition or modification of existing courses such as ethnic history or minority studies.¹ Eliminating discrimination and offering equal educational opportunities require that teacher training institutions create not just a neutral, but a positive and dynamic atmosphere toward the minority learner and community.² Further impetus has been given by the new standards from the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education which state "multicultural education is viewed as an intervention and an ongoing assessment process to help institutions and individuals become more responsive to the human condition, individual cultural integrity, and cultural pluralism in society."³ Thus, although teacher education faces a clear charge, what remains is the selection of a course of action to meet that charge.

This article describes a path followed by the College of Education at The Ohio State University in attending to the issues in multicultural education and educational equity. Several programmatic and organizational elements are offered and discussed. They are not presented as "savior steps" but rather as suggestions found workable and successful at a large public institution with a commitment to teacher education.

In contrast to the prevalent "specialists" and competencies orientation of many teacher educators, the College of Education at The Ohio State University has instituted a program with a generalist's

perspective. Philosophically, this is a basic statement about the existence of a set of "common" experiences, "common" understandings, and "common" values which can best be provided through a centralized core program. It is a review of the "common" elements that follows.

Background

Changes in teacher preparation programs at The Ohio State University were motivated, in part, by Ohio's State Board of Education which in 1974 mandated new requirements, reflecting the multicultural concerns for teacher certification in all colleges and universities in Ohio. At that time faculty members within the College of Education began to work towards institutional restructuring.

The college created a Teacher Education Redesign Advisory Committee (TERAC) to review the twenty-three teacher preparation programs and develop strategies for complying with newly prescribed State Standards. TERAC conducted an extensive study which included an evaluation of existing teacher preparation programs at the University. This study included critiques of these programs by faculty members, students, alumni, and school personnel. As a consequence of this process, TERAC recommended an introductory experience for preservice teachers which necessitated a college-wide restructuring of undergraduate teacher education.

This experience, the Professional Introduction to Education, replaced several courses in general methods and educational psychology while adopting components in multicultural and human relations education. The program provided initial exposure to an array of curricular areas mandated by the State Standards, such as human relations, classroom management, sociology of education, and human development, as well as experience in urban and either rural or suburban settings.

As currently constituted, the Professional Introduction program involves roughly one-half of a teacher

candidate's course work during two consecutive quarters of the sophomore year, including clinical activities (simulations, role-plays, etc.) and field experiences (observations, interviews, and teaching) in settings with diverse populations. The hoped-for product is a teacher candidate versed in basic human relations and teaching skills, and capable of delivering an instructional program which addresses multicultural viewpoints and the acceptance of diverse learning styles.

In order to facilitate the interdisciplinarian nature of the program, several unique organizational elements were instituted. Three elements of The Ohio State University Professional Introduction to Education program are listed below:

1. The establishment of an interdisciplinary faculty team to design and teach a common core program (interdisciplinary element).
2. The commitment of a majority of a student's time for two consecutive quarters early in the professional program (block element).
3. The pooling of all teacher candidates in a common, cross-college core requirement (common element).

The establishment of an interdisciplinary team brought faculty members from several departments into the development and implementation of the Professional Introduction program.⁴ Previously, core courses were taught in separate departments by their respective professors or graduate teaching associates. Thus, normal organizational structures worked against communication and uniformity among core elements of the previous undergraduate program. In addition, broad knowledge and experiential differences existed among teacher candidates of the various certification programs.

Secondly, teacher candidates were involved in a block program which integrated field and clinical work

with traditional campus instruction (such as lecture and discussion) for an intensive period. That is, all candidates, regardless of interests or certification area, suffered and laughed together. It is believed that such a "block" experience will break down the "Berlin Wall" between elementary and secondary teacher education and instruction. Further, this change provides more time to impact the teacher candidates' attitudes toward differing pupil populations while integrating theory and educational practice.⁵ The structure and time allows teacher candidates the opportunity to taste and reflect upon the realities of teaching while supervised and counseled by professionals. Thus, the Professional Introduction program offers an opportunity to explore the theory and realities of teaching at a point in the university sequence when a change of mind does not leave the student on the university steps, degree in hand, career undecided. The program intentionally raises issues which will test the mettle of career decisions.

A third element brings candidates from all preservice teacher certification programs together in a common experience. This change enables a teacher candidate to interact with teacher candidates from other specializations and exposes them to faculty perspectives other than those in their specific program areas. Thus, candidates get the opportunity to develop skills that enhance their working effectiveness with a broad spectrum of pupils.

These three organizational elements enabled the college to make significant steps towards creating an experience which would ensure that all teacher candidates participate in a consistently orchestrated set of experiences involving diverse cultural perspectives and student populations. The bottom line is a systematic opportunity for preservice teachers to examine their personal values in light of career realities and professional responsibilities.

Table 1 summarizes the three organizational elements discussed in this section, and the resulting properties of the Professional Introduction program

which promote the development of a culturally pluralistic perspective among teacher candidates. The remainder of this paper focuses on a single organizational element: The Common Experience.

The Common Experience

The common experience within the Professional Introduction program refers to the involvement of all teacher candidates across university teacher certification programs in a similar set of experiences which promotes knowledge, skills, and values relative to the teaching task. This article particularly focuses on the ability to promote multicultural perspectives.

Previously, teacher candidates participated in twenty-three separate teacher education programs, each of which had distinct missions, resources, and varying commitments to the notion of preparing teachers to provide educational equity. It was impossible to assess the relative success of the various programs at meeting college-wide missions. In order to ensure each teacher candidate an adequate background in this area, the college centralized this responsibility with the Professional Introduction program, thus providing a shared experience for all teacher candidates, regardless of the certification program in which they were enrolled.

The common experience fosters four properties that promote the development of culturally pluralistic viewpoints among teacher candidates:

1. The promotion of interaction and shared experiences between teacher candidates of diverse backgrounds and perspectives.
2. The enhanced value for educational equity via field research and training.
3. A multicultural/pluralistic perspective for integrating all future university courses and training.

4. A knowledge and experience base in diverse educational settings from which educational decision making can be made in future professional arenas.

Each property is supported by instructional activities within the Professional Introduction program which enable the teacher candidate to test theory in a real setting. Several activities are listed below:

In class - lectures and discussions regarding issues relevant to cultural differences are drawn from diverse disciplines and experiences: e.g., human development, Black Studies, sociology of education, interviews and discussions with community members, professionals, and public school pupils' personal values towards educational and cultural concerns.

In laboratory experiences - teacher candidates role-play representatives of differing racial, ethnic, social and sex groups and demonstrate behaviors of accepting and valuing diverse beliefs. Such opportunities allow the teacher candidate to switch from teacher to student roles.

In the field - teacher candidates interview pupils and teachers in a variety of ethnic, social, racial, and cultural settings regarding beliefs about school, family, and self. This is in addition to designing, teaching, and evaluating lessons in diverse cultural and social school settings.

One activity which illustrates how the Professional Introduction program moves from rhetoric to reality follows:

Each teacher candidate assumes the responsibilities of preparing and teaching a week-long unit in a local school during the second quarter of the program. The schools in which the preservice teachers are

assigned reflect a variety of multicultural settings; for example, an integrated inner-city junior high; a rural middle school (Appalachian white); a parochial high school (white working class and middle class); and a suburban middle school (white middle class). The teacher candidate's school assignment is largely a function of the candidate's prior practicum experience in schools and in settings involving diverse cultural groups. The long-range goal is to place students in a variety of cultural settings throughout their teacher preparation. Issues of race, sex, ethnicity, and the learning disabled student are faced in the field, then discussed and "processed" in small groups before and after each school visit. These discussions are led by Professional Introduction staff who help candidates clarify their beliefs and identify courses of action appropriate to issues such as stereotyping, prejudice, discrimination, self-fulfilling prophecies, and the processes for providing personal as well as pupil success and satisfaction in teaching in multicultural settings. These concepts are not discussed in isolation. They are directly linked to the other substantive issues in human development, educational psychology, and the sociology of education. More precisely, gaining knowledge of various cultural groups is not a singular focus of the program; instead the program is organized so that issues and concerns about educational equity are integrated into all components (classroom lectures, clinical activities, and field experiences). The Professional Introduction program does not seek to isolate the concerns of educational equity, but instead to enable the teacher candidate to mainstream the needs of individuals within the broader context of program and instructional needs.

A question which seems appropriate at this point is: As the Professional Introduction program goes about deemphasizing instructional units devoted to specific cultural groups, how are the skills and values necessary to work with students from diverse backgrounds developed? An example of the program's approach might be the examination of the conflict between minority pupil learning styles and the

cultural assumptions of the teacher candidates. Phrased as a question: How can teachers create a learning environment supportive for a broad range of pupils? The Professional Introduction program staff is committed to the belief that only exposure and familiarity with various learning styles will create the affective teacher value system essential for developing corresponding learning programs. Thus, it is classroom experiences which provide a reasonable forum for addressing the values and expectations teachers foster to the detriment of minority pupils.

Thus, issues of multicultural education are interwoven with issues of educational psychology and so on. Rather than introducing this notion of diversity of learning styles via a classroom lecture, the teacher candidates become aware of pupil differences through their own experiences with different pupils in local schools. The reinforcement of learnings in the various subject areas are only possible through the interdisciplinary faculty and the blocking of time in the teacher candidates' programs. The participation of all preservice teachers in this interdisciplinary effort provides the only opportunity in the College of Education for a systematic, integrated effort in training people to teach in future multicultural settings.

Conclusions

In part, an innovative program at The Ohio State University which demonstrates how teacher preparation might address the difficult issue of providing educational equity for students of diverse cultural backgrounds has been described. The Professional Introduction program integrates several academic disciplines, as well as a variety of classroom, clinical, and field activities to provide a common experience for all teacher candidates.

Two ingredients of the Professional Introduction program are germane: first, the preparation of teachers for a society which is increasingly stressing the value of diverse cultural patterns cannot be

accomplished by adding a course in ethnic studies to typically overburdened certification programs. Second, in order for teacher candidates to develop a multicultural perspective, issues of multicultural education must permeate all activities (lecture as well as practicum) and be discussed in all instructional units (human development and teaching methods, as well as sociology of education and human relations). It is, then, the structure of the Professional Introduction program which enhances the development of a multicultural perspective on teaching, rather than the specific curricular input.

FOOTNOTES

¹James A. Banks. Teaching Strategies for Ethnic Studies, Second Edition (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, Inc., 1979).

²Geneva Gay. "Curriculum for multicultural education," in Frank H. Klassen and Donna M. Gollnick (Editors), Pluralism and the American Teacher: Issues and Case Studies (Washington, D.C.: Ethnic Heritage Center for Teacher Education, American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education, 1977). Alfred Lightfoot. Urban Education in Social Perspective (Chicago: Rand McNally College Publishing Company, 1978).

³Standards for Accreditation of Teacher Education (Washington, D.C.: National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education, 1977).

⁴A valuable spin-off of this modification lies in its potential for faculty development. As PI faculty are drawn from throughout the college, interactions among the various faculty members enrich their experience, especially in multicultural perspectives. In addition, the heavy laboratory orientation (both clinical and field) allows faculty to continue contact with local schools, or in some cases, to initiate contact.

⁵For a further discussion of the magnitude of time's impact on attitudinal change, see Peter Marris' Loss and Change, Pantheon Books: New York, 1974.