TOWARDS THE IMPROVEMENT OF ENGLISH TEACHER EDUCATION IN MINNESOTA: CHAPTERS IN A CONTINUING HISTORY

Chapter II. REPORT FROM THE CAMP COURAGE CONFERENCE IN MARCH, 1968

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On March 17, 1968, I joined a group of teachers from the five-state region of Iowa, Minnesota, North Dakota, and Wisconsin, who left their students and their books for the wilds of Camp Courage in Annandale, Minnesota. Representatives of various subject matter areas involved in college and secondary education, we had come to this particular camp at the joint invitation of the Upper Midwest Regional Laboratory and the five-state Association of Student Teaching organizations in order to discuss criteria for guiding teacher preparation. The four days of discussion carried on in this rural and rustic setting demanded psychological as well as physical courage from us participants. Most of us were not prepared for bunk beds or for camp cooking, but, true to our profession, we adjusted easily once we discovered that the workshop would satisfy our occupational interest in ideas.

To be honest, however, I must confess that the first two days of the workshop had us wondering whether or not there would be such intellectual satisfaction. The workshop opened on Sunday night with a presentation of the Stanford University Performance Curriculum for Teacher Education by Dr. James Cooper, a leader in the development of the Stanford program. As Dr. Cooper masterfully described the Stanford program, most of us grew more and more aware of our own uneasiness. The basic premise underlying the Stanford approach to teacher preparation is the belief "that much of teaching consists of acts or behaviors." (See the unpublished article by James M. Cooper, "A Performance Curriculum for Teacher Education, " p. 3.) The program which developed from this belief attempts to train young men and women for the classroom first by identifying certain teacher behaviors which have proven successful in the classroom and then by helping prospective teachers shape their own teaching activities so that they reflect these successful skills. Years in the classroom--both as teachers and students--had taught most of us that a variety of teachers with a variety of teaching styles could be effective. How then could we accept Dr. Cooper and the program he was trying to sell?

As we broke into small groups that evening, those of us in the English group openly analyzed our hesitancy to accept the Stanford program. That session and the one which followed on Monday found us airing our difficulties: "Did we think we could describe what an English teacher needs in regard to the technical skills of teaching?" And if we could, "Would the Stanford list

of such skills include all those needed for the teaching of English?" The hours of discussion spent trying to answer these and similar kinds of questions offered no answers or solutions. In spite of the fact that the discussions did not resolve our dilemma, however, they were probably the most important sessions of the workshop for our particular group. By uniting us at the very beginning against what appeared to be a common enemy, they kept our group from splitting into the conventional divisions of college and secondary. We did not have time to tell the college methods' teacher or the secondary cooperating teacher where he or she had failed. We were too busy trying to discover where Stanford had failed.

On Monday afternoon, we finally gave up our struggles with Stanford theory. By that time we had learned so much from listening to one another that we were willing to let even Stanford have its say. We conceded to Dr. Cooper's request that we take one of the activities described in the Stanford material--the activity of introducing a unit--and that we analyze the criteria listed for this activity against our own experience in the English classroom. The Stanford criteria described the following procedures as appropriate to this activity:

The teacher:

1. Recognizes the importance of the introduction and organizes and times the lesson so other activities do not detract.
2. Arouses student interest in the unit by relating it to other experiences, showing personal enthusiasm, and providing potentially interesting student activities.
3. Ascertains that purposes of the unit are clear to the student.
4. Explains or develops with students their roles in the unit and their responsibilities to the material.
5. Relates the unit to previous units and overall goals for the year.
6. Utilizes instructional materials which enhance introduction activities.
7. Discusses the ways and means for evaluating the unit.

(See the unpublished "Stanford University Performance Criteria in Teaching," p. 5.)

After three or four hours of discussion, we decided to revise the Stanford criteria to the following list:

The teacher:

1. Chooses the best time to introduce the unit.
2. Presents an overview of content.
3. Develops with the students the purposes and goals of the unit and the means of attaining them.
4. Explains unfamiliar terms and new concepts.

5. Demonstrates procedures.
6. Introduces and uses relevant instructional and resource material.
7. Relates unit to students' experiences.
8. Tests students' capabilities and responsiveness.
9. Develops students' roles and responsibilities within the unit.
10. Sets up pertinent schedules and routines.
11. Determines the ways and means for evaluating the unit.
12. Determines the ways and means for evaluating the effectiveness of the lesson.

The results of this exercise were not terribly exciting. By adding five procedures to the Stanford list, we may have provided a more comprehensive and precise description of one teaching activity, but the activity itself did not catch our interest or imagination. Perhaps we reacted this way because we knew that units of work had been and would continue to be, more or less effectively, introduced by English teachers, whereas other activities which rightfully belonged in the English classroom might continue to be more or less ignored.

Our earlier discussion of the Stanford material had led most of us to believe that Stanford itself was guilty of ignoring activities essential to the teaching of English. We had feared, for example, that no provision was made in the Stanford program for the teaching of written composition. With such thoughts in our heads, we could hardly be satisfied with limiting ourselves to an analysis of the criteria worked out by Stanford. So as soon as we had completed the assigned task, we moved away from the Stanford program into an area which had more meaning and relevance for us English teachers--the area of written composition.

As we discussed what had worked and what had failed in our own teaching of composition, we began to draw up some guidelines to help the student teacher. The process could have been painful, but, by this time, we respected and trusted one another to such a degree that encouragement rather than pain was the end result. We vied with one another to present our ideas to the scrutiny of the group even though this scrutiny frequently exposed our weaknesses. Such exposure no longer hurt; we had forgotten ourselves in our concern for the prospective English teacher. The college English teacher, who is usually defensive about her lack of secondary teaching experience, was continually turning to the secondary teacher and asking, "Will this work with a class of your students?" The secondary teacher, on the other hand, who is usually sensitive about her lack of academic work, was asking the college teacher to explain such recent developments as the rhetorical method of teaching composition.

Interaction of this kind helped us formulate a set of guide-

lines which we felt would foster better training of English teachers in the area of written composition. (These guidelines were published in the following article: Lucille Duggan and Sister St. Alfred, "Guidelines for Student Teaching: An Adaptation of the Stanford University Performance Criteria in Teaching to an Activity in Language Arts," Minnesota English Journal, IV, April, 1968, 63-69.) Although we realized that these guidelines were neither the first nor the last word on the topic, we knew that they expressed a consensus of experienced high school and college teachers and, for this reason, they could be helpful for student teachers. In spite of our attempt to appraise our work realistically, however, we were somewhat smug in viewing our guidelines as more practical and, therefore, more important than the criteria described in the Stanford program. Fortunately for us, we were not allowed to leave the conference with this illusion. Towards the end of the last session on Wednesday, a member of our group accidentally discovered that some of the procedures we had so painstakingly worked out for our guidelines were listed in the Stanford material. Procedures we had recommended for the student teacher's use during the composing stage of teaching composition, for example, were listed among the Stanford criteria for monitoring in-class assignments. Such a discovery had brought us full circle. The very foe who had forced us to unite in the beginning of the conference was disclosed as a member of our ranks.

Richer for this discovery, we left the wilds of Camp Courage with a new kind of hope. Not only had we overcome the difficulty of approaching the problem of teacher preparation from our individual and, therefore limited, perspectives, but we had also created a kind of harmonious union which encouraged and respected the unavoidable variety of these perspectives.

Chapter III. REPORT FROM THE ENGLISH TEACHER PREPARATION CONFERENCE AT THE COLLEGE OF ST. CATHERINE IN OCTOBER, 1968

By MRS. LUCILLE DUGGAN, Richfield High School

Participants in the MCTE-affiliated Teacher Training Conference met in October, 1968, to consider ways in which all those concerned with the training of English teachers can work together to improve the quality of teacher preparation. Among the forty-three registrants were representatives from the State Department of Education, the University of Minnesota, eight Minnesota colleges, and twenty-six public schools. It was the hope of the planners that discussion in small, cross-level groups could promote understanding of one another's situation, give perspective to the problems of teacher training, and indicate ways in which this group of interested persons could contribute to the solutions of these problems.

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