A Day in the Life of a Student Teacher Supervisor

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Recently, as part of my work as a university supervisor, I visited a Minnesota high school to observe a student teacher with whom I had been working. She had been assigned a classroom supervisor by the university and he in turn had assigned her to teach aspects of an eleventh grade course in "vocational English." The class was homogeneously grouped on the basis that these were students "just interested in a job when they get out of school; you know, they aren't interested in college," according to the student teacher. In most ways the experience of the day was a typical one for me. In another way, however, it was most significant. The incident I will describe and my conversation with the student teacher following it were stimulants to me, "catalysts" which for me resulted in a great deal of thought and discussion. I talked with the students and student teacher involved and with colleagues as I worked to assess the meaning that these kinds of experiences had for me as an educator of teachers. This paper, then, is an attempt to explicate the outcomes of my consideration of some aspects of the teacher training process.

The day I observed the student teacher, the class was going through a culminating activity in a unit of study on technical writing. The class of thirty had been divided into six groups and given a week to devise and construct an advertisement for any product of their choice. The unit had been introduced through a one-hour talk by the student teacher on effective advertising techniques and had then spent a week in groups putting the ads together with construction paper and pictures from magazines. The completed ads were tacked onto the walls around the room. The day I came to visit, the class activity was to criticize each of the six ads.

As I walked into the class the student teacher whispered to me with a concerned look, "We've had some trouble. One of the ads had a sexual content." She pointed to an ad on the wall, an ad about the size of a large wall calendar. At the top was printed GET AHOLD OF THINGS and at the bottom BUY A SMITH BRAND PLIARS. It was clear that something had been stapled to the ad between the two printed phrases but had been removed.

"What'd they have up there?" I asked.

"A picture of a girl in a bikini."

Oh, I got it. Get ahold of things; then the girl captures your attention with the sexual connotation; then the new meaning as you read on to note the pitch to buy the pliars. Not bad, I thought--maybe a bit sexist, but it seemed to me that the students had put some thought into the work and in fact had created something not different from much commercial advertising. But the picture had been removed by the student teacher after a conference with the classroom supervisor, who thought the inclusion of the picture made the ad pornographic.

The class began to evaluate each ad in turn. As each was discussed there was much bickering among students and a harsh adversarial climate prevailed amid a barrage of accusations and defenses: "I can't make any sense of that ad your group did." "It's better than that thing your group did. You didn't even use any pictures." And so on. The student teacher had quite a difficult time trying to deal with one confrontation in particular between two students who quarreled with one another for several minutes. The student teacher's pleas was "let's be reasonable and stop arguing." At the end of the class discussion of each ad, the student teacher gave her own two to three minute critique, beginning with favorable comments and ending with suggestions as to how the ad might have been more effective.

The offending ad was discussed last. A student had the censored picture on her desk. I saw it was a picture taken from a Sports Illustrated magazine of a young woman modeling a swim suit. "Why was the picture taken down? We got it from the library. How come we can look at it in the library and we can't put it up on the wall?" asked one member of the group who had put the ad together. In response, the student teacher gave a brief talk in defense of the picture's removal. It was offensive to community standards she told them. You just can't do anything you want in school; you have to think of the reaction to the ad from people in town.

The classroom supervisor who had been sitting in the back of the room began to talk bruskly; all eyes turned to him. He spoke for perhaps five minutes. The thrust of his comments was that "you are always going to have somebody over you." Life is a matter of doing what those in charge require of you: "That's the way democracy works. Isn't that right?" he demanded. Many

I wish to acknowledge the contribution of Larry Olds, my colleague at the University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, to the analyses presented in this paper.

students nodded in what I took to be sincerity. "You've got to remember where you are. This town just won't put up with this. We got a letter from a school board member about this." The student teacher waved the letter aloft. "He did say he'd talk to you about it, though," she told the students. The implication, to me at least, was that the letter condemned the ad. The supervisor then announced a film "on the telephone company" to be shown during the next class meeting and dismissed the class. The film was one of those that is distributed by industry for public relations and employee recruitment purposes.

"How'd I do?," the student teacher asked me at our conference which followed the class. I asked her to tell me on what she wanted me to comment. "You know, did I look nervous up there? Did I keep the discussion going all right? Were my evaluations of the ads perceptive, do you think? Was this a good way to teach ad writing?" We spoke for quite a time about these matters, and the "discipline problem" of the arguing students.

I asked her finally about the "censorship issue," as I called it. "Oh, I'm not sure I would have taken that picture down off the wall. But what can I do, it's Mr. ____'s class."

We continued to talk, discussing a number of topics I introduced. It seemed to me that there were many crucial aspects of this learning situation that the student teacher seemed not to take into account in her concerns or analyses. At least they were crucial to me; they were things I thought about and investigated.

To me it was apparent that one function served by this classroom was a sorting function; students were being socialized into subordinate status within society. The lecture on situations always involving "someone over you who you have to obey" was a clear lesson in deference to authority and hierarchical control. The "someone over you" in this case was the school board. In case the point was missed by these students, they were informed that "that's the way democracy works." A neat bit of political socialization into "object" status for these students, objects acted upon rather than "subjects" acting to transform their circumstances.

In most every way in that classroom for that hour, the students had been basically acted upon. The two teachers chose the activity, convened the class, determined the topics and controlled the pace, stood while the students remained seated, controlled information (I later learned that the letter from the school board member had not condemned or prohibited the

xhibition of the ad), were the locus of evaluation, and etermined the direction of student activity. The students ere, and from what I could tell from reviewing the curriculum r the year essentially had been, passive recipients of the ctions of the teachers, acting not from any careful consideration their own purposes but instead at the bidding of those teachers. month after this incident I asked four of these students hether they had read the letter from the school board member. o." Had he visited class? "No." "Why not?" I asked. A nfused look was the reply. "Are you going to try to do ything about the picture being taken down." "We ought to, t we couldn't get anything done." They didn't have control things like that. I think they learned their lessons well.

The promotional film the next day would be a further esson in subordinance, in this case within a conventional rk role. Early in the year, the students had "picked" a cation, became indentified with it, so to speak, for the year. e "jobs," as the students referred to them, included secretary, tewardess, dental assistant, electrician, law enforcement, rsing and carpentry. I need not tell you which were chosen the boys and which by the girls. During the year the stuents gave several five minute speeches on "their" profession, earned to write letters of application, were given instruction a business firm's personnel representative in good interview havior and wrote out responses to mock interview questions, acticed writing business letters and job inquiries, heard alks from military representatives, were visited by represenatives of technical training schools in the area, and engaged a "job for a day" experience. To me, the students were earning, among other things, to be "good workers" who would rade their diligent efforts at whatever task and toward whatver purposes chosen by their employer in return for wages. s presented to these students, work is not something chosen enrich one's life, as consistent with one's purposes, as omething created out of an analysis of one's needs and others' eeds. Work to these students is a matter of choosing "a job" rom the options offered by the work institutions--but only hose options consistent with their status in society. In no ases was a career in the professions--medical doctor, attorney, eacher and the like--or in the arts, or in social or political ction chosen by these students. None of these lessons were xplicit--none appeared in the lesson plans presented to me the student teacher--but to me they were as significant as ny of those stated in the curriculum.

All of this I saw to be taking place in an environment hich was antithetical to the personal liberation of these

students. There were no students in this homogeneously grouped class who saw their life in any major degree differently from those of others. There was not the healthy challenge of diversity of perspective, of divergent purpose, which might tend to challenge and elevate the consciousness of these students. There were no books or information concerning individuals experimenting with their lives. There were no ideas or theories to be used by students to gain a new perspective on what one could do with life. Nothing that I could see promoted the kind of personal introspection or social analysis which might lead to a greater understanding of the political, economic and social context in which these students lived. These students were not taught to communicate or provide each other with critical comments: I did not see the ad evaluation, for example, as a situation helping these students to learn to operate in a climate of respectful mutual help and criticism. It was my view that experiences such as these taught students in subtle ways to be on guard, not to let anybody "put you down," to be wary of each other. Thus, it is my conclusion that they were not challenged to transcent or re-make their circumstances, but rather to accommodate themselves to "their place in society"--as their teachers had accommodated themselves.

I did not expect the student teacher to necessarily agree with all that I thought about the functions being served by the classroom in which she worked. But I did expect her to have thought about the role of the school in the larger social, political, and economic context. I would have expected that she would have asked herself why these young people were being tracked in classes such as this. I asked the student teacher if she knew how the students got into the class: "Test scores?" "Counselors?" "Volunteered?" She did not know. Moreover, she had not tried to find out. I thought the morality of her behavior in tearing down the picture and justifying its removal, even though she, as she said, would "probably not have done it," should have been a more important issue to her.

I could not blame completely this student teacher. She had learned what she had been "taught" in the teacher education program. And, of course, this is not to say that the teacher education program was solely at fault or inconsistent generally with her role as a student in the university or in schools earlier in her life. She herself had been basically an object acted upon during the pre-service experiences. It had not been a matter of her selfconscious participation in the decision as to what manner of educator she wished to become. Competencies were decided upon, without her mature participation, and her

responsibility was to master these outcomes chosen by others. While those who created these goals most certainly took her needs into account when devising the skills and knowledge to be learned, she most certainly was not engaged in an intense effort to do so. Her task, as I believe she saw it, was to become an "innovative" teacher, one who effectively and creatively accomplishes the objectives of the school system which hires her--or as one of my colleagues has put it, one who "makes ripples and not waves."

In this and in so many programs of which I know, emphasis is placed on the means of schooling--particularly the techniques of classroom instruction. She learned to draw up lesson plans, to sequence activities, to relate to students, to lead discussions, to discipline students--the list could go on. She had, to be sure, been exposed to content related to the sociology of American education and had read of several philosophical points of view which considered the functions or purposes of education. I don't think she spent much time considering just what schools do to and for individuals and the society. Or, really, just what we ought to be teaching in school (I'll teach my major"). It is my judgment that these concerns remained far less salient, less important, to her--and the faculty who worked with her--than the more "practical" concerns of "getting up there in front and doing a good job of running a class." I do not think she was intensely reflecting on the meaning or significance of her own education in the teacher training program. And I don't think she was drawing implications from her thinking for her actions as an educator or as a person. Her "actions" were--as were her students in that English class--directed toward outcomes which were not chosen by her or even explicit in any detailed way in her thinking.

With all of this, it can be seen that it is my view that education programs are by and large weak for just the opposite reasons from those posited by many critics. Pre-service courses are at fault, not because they "aren't practical"--my experience is that as a matter of fact they do teach many useful methodological and management approaches. It is that these programs are not theoretical enough; do not allow the development and enhacement of ideas and ideals within the context of the student's self-conscious participation in the activities of learning about and actually educating others.

Students are admonished against "idealism": "Wait till you get in front of those students. All that stuff they teach you in those education courses won't do you any good here in the trenches." As a matter of fact the "idealism" is often at

the level of running an "open" classroom or doing away with tests, or managing discipline through humane approaches. It is not idealism supported by any measure of self-knowledge or well-thought-through political, social, or economic beliefs and values. It's not the idealism of an opposition to racism, economic inequality, or sexism, or the idealism of the promotion of personal freedom or democratization. It's not the idealism of a vision of a world that this student has chosen as an educator to work for. It isn't an idealism supported by a self-image of personal efficacy, or an idealism bolstered by the desire and ability to, alone or with others, take action against obstacles in the society and within the school itself (a power that takes understanding, skill, and courage). Too often in my experience teacher-training programs have pointed toward the development of the embodiment of a role--classroom teacher, a role that does not often imply idealism and action of the sort I value.

The idealism of the "latest fad" as I pajoratively refer to it, is often shattered during the initial in-service experiences. Particularly is it shattered among teachers who are mainly oriented toward activity within a classroom context--in contrast to a focus which includes the school, professional, community and societal content. I worry that we produce teachers who see "a better lesson plan" as the solution to every problem, ignoring the larger circumstances which influence their lives and the lives of their students. Then, when it does appear that "those things I hoped for just aren't happening," what is to guide behavior but expediency, practicality, newness: "It works." "The kids like it." "At least they keep quiet." "It's a good way to cover the material." "It's the latest approach."

From an analysis of the typical student experience and from talking and working with student teachers, the student teaching experience itself is one of accommodation rather than liberation for student teachers. Most often the student teacher is sent alone to the classroom supervisor. The supervisor then "plugs in" the student teacher to the curriculm the supervisor has developed. The student teacher is often told, "I don't care how you cover the material, but the students have to be through Silas Marner by March," or some such instruction. The student teacher then has a great deal of control over the "little questions" as I have called them--control over developing and sequencing activities, giving assignments (although sometimes not even that). But too often the student teacher does not have

opportunity to answer the basic questions of curriculm velopment: What? and For what? and With Whom?

The student teaching experience where I've been is seldom matter of coordinating one's behavior with one's considered als, and then after the activity assessing the purposes, sumptions and values which guided and informed the activity. ny times the student teacher uncritically models herself/ mself after the critic teacher--emulation substituted for alysis and autonomy. If not emulation, most certainly the udent teacher will refer most often to the wishes and approaches the critic teacher and to the university supervisor. Because the monumental importance of the recommendations of the udent teacher's performance for employment, the last person e student teacher feels must be pleased is himself. In my perience if a student teacher is faced with the choice of ing what he sees to be right by his students or himself, or please the supervisors, he will most often attempt to please s supervisors (the awful position to be in for a student acher is when one thing will please one supervisor and its posite will please the other). We tell the student teacher at practice teaching is a learning experience, but he knows is as much a place where you show what you can already do. d while we sell ourselves, his supervisors, as his helpers, knows that we are also his judges. With these circumstances, it any wonder that "looking competent," "hiding weakness," afety first," and "Will this be OK?" are the prime orientations many student teachers?

Obviously, I don't see this state of affairs as promotive ough of a change of the status quo in education. At best it ads to mild reform (ripples). It has always struck me how ld" 22 year-old student teachers become when they student ach. The student teacher may be just a few years older than e student she is teaching--they are of the same generation-- d in any other situation they would use the styles of commun- ation and manner common to them. But instead the student acher often affects a "pose" of a person much older--affecting formal, rather authoritarian style or a pseudo-warm, patronizing ounselor" manner. My guess is that the student teacher is ying to please us, her critics. She knows that we control her; e must please us. She is outnumbered (we rarely allow student achers to plan and teach together and support one another) and a position of very limited control over her life. We should

give, in my view, more "room" to those younger to reconstruct the profession.

These and similar experiences have caused me to think hard about education generally and teacher education specifically. What follows are some personal goals which guide my work. I'm not really at the point where I can implement these notions, but they do act as criteria to guide my behavior.

I am working for a program which is personally liberating for students (and for me). I contrast the idea of liberation--or transcendence--with the notion of accommodation. Programs can take the posture of helping individual prospective teachers to become critical, analytical, committed, autonomous, powerful educators, who may reconstruct the way we educate children. Alternatively, a program can be oriented toward the training of effective classroom teachers who will view their professional responsibility essentially as effectively accommodating themselves to the way schools presently function--or, most likely, to the current "fads" of the profession, whether "values clarification" or "inquiry" or "open classrooms."

Surely, no program will acknowledge that it wants to produce a particular kind of mildly innovative, but "safe" and accommodating, classroom teacher. I do understand that this matter of the liberating quality of a program is a continuous and not a dichotomous variable; programs can be at many positions on a continuum from liberating to objectifying. I also understand it is not always easy amid the rhetoric to tell what state in fact exists. However, I believe, upon analysis, that we <u>can</u> distinguish a pre-service program which is manipulative--which treats students as interchangeable parts, as objects--from one aimed at liberation, human freedom. At least I think I can tell when I am in a situation in which my liberation is promoted from a situation in which others are attempting to mold me into this or that.

Students should <u>study</u>, explore, engage the world, rather than respond to a series of lesson plans faculty develop and implement. Rather than work to achieve the specific goals or competencies established by others, I want students to work in programs centered around their transaction with a rich, diverse environment of books, people, and experience possibilities.

he program I envision would promote an interplay of self- and ocial analysis, theory building, skill development and activity. ames Macdonald, Bernice Zaret, and Esther Wolfson describe uch a program, one which centers around student <u>learning</u>, the hrust of a student into freely chosen activities within an nvironment contrived with his participation, activities ccompanied by intense personal reflection and analysis. They ontrast this model with an <u>instruction</u> centered model in which he teacher asks and resolves the usual questions, controlling oth the means and ends of learning: What outcomes do I want rom my students (usually particular knowledge, skills, values)? hat activities can I employ to attain these goals? How can I equence these activities to best provide for the attainment f these goals? How can I evaluate the students' achievement f the knowledge, skills and values I consider important? Thus, would hope to work in a program in which students engage in ork as a matter of personal choice, chosen from <u>varied</u> opportunities which they have participated in creating, with outomes unique to them and determined in the course of their work.

Students in teacher training should be challenged (required f you will) to assume responsibility for the goals and directing f their life at <u>this</u> <u>time</u> of their life within relationships ased on shared work, mutual help and criticism. Included in teacher training program should be encouragement of students and teachers) to engage the ongoing processes of education--oth the efforts being undertaken to educate children and the tructures in which they find themselves (the teacher training etting)--with the aim of altering the processes and themselves. tudents should have extensive opportunity to work with others n colleagueal relationships instead of continually being in a eferential position in relation to an older person. In some egree I see teacher training to be a struggle of one generation's ttempts to impose its style of teaching and living on another. ertainly becoming an effective educator involves an intense ndividual struggle to gain greater personal understanding and fficacy. But also, this growth in individual competence and he improvement of education is a result of an interplay between n individual's struggle and the struggle he shares in collective ction with others. I think a teacher education program would o well to promote both individual and collective work; each ontributes to the effectiveness of the other. Most pre-service rograms in my experience place greatest emphasis on individual effort at the expense of individuals coming together and deciding what purposes they share and work together to employ means that will facilitate the realization of these aims. A part of the

collective experience is mutual help and criticism among students and teachers. Typically the instructor alone is responsible for the helper/critic role. Students do not respond very much to one another's or the teacher's work.

With this in mind, perhaps instead of assuming "aide" responsibilities in schools, as is often done in "school-based" programs, students could perhaps be more often in observing, evaluate roles, and, most important, "altering" roles--altering in the sense that the student's activity is aimed at changing, improving, the means and/or ends of education rather than furthering current practices. Students and teachers should develop educational activities they consider consistent with their purposes as educators at this time of their life, developing projects or programs which will be aimed at present contributions to the field (after-school enrichment programs, work in alternative schools, student organization, curriculum reform efforts, etc.). Instead of being placed in a practice teaching assignment, students should participate in the creation of options to the conventional student teaching assignments. One immediately thinks of student involvement in alternative schools--or starting an alternative school of their own. Perhaps a public school that has elective courses could assign one or more to groups of student teachers, who would in their own way develop completely and teach the course to school students who choose it. Perhaps they could help organize "school-within-a-school" programs. These groups could be facilitated by public school and university personnel. This approach still runs the danger of supervisor dominance, but at least there are some aspects of the situation which may give more power to students. There is no on-going program to act as a restraint on curriculum planning, and at least the student will not have to face the supervisors alone. Under this arrangement, students could decide what to teach and how to teach--and unlike most practice teaching arrangements, whether or not to teach alone. More important than the approaches to practice teaching that I can think of, however, is student participation in the process of creating options which make sense for their lives and the lives of the students they will teach. Lastly, students should be encouraged to act in ways to alter their own education; they should share with faculty the responsibility to continually improve the nature and quality of the teacher training program. This means a situation in which students maturely participate individually in such matters as curriculum, selection of faculty, and entrance and exit requirements of the program. It means students being organized enough to exert collective pressure to bring about changes in

ir education. This in contrast to a situation in which ulty go off, virtually in secret, to decide the course of educational lives of students. Or, it means a situation which students seemingly participate but in actual fact are erless, dominated by faculty.

I know that teaching is not a "value free" or "belief e" enterprise. I may try to create an environment in which ense work is expected, but the individual purposes and ections are an outgrowth of each individual's encounter with educational environment. I know my values and beliefs e into play when I contribute to the identification of erials, experiences, opportunities, people, issues, and the e, that make up the environment. I do not underestimate effect on students. I'm older, have more experience, and am a dominant role position. I know that what is "in" a dent--the meanings, goals, values, whatever they are called-- going to be in some measure affected by his/her experience h me. I notice many of my students become much like me and er instructors' students much like them. There is nothing ng with this as such, but I do worry--or at least I think orry--about uncritical discipleship.

One value I say I have is that I want students critically l self-consciously to choose their way as educators. Perhaps an help this along by making my motives, values, assumptions, l actions clear to them. Too often, I think, teachers do not ll students who they are and what they are trying to do, a tuation which could run the danger of giving a false impression ng students of "objectivity" on the part of the teacher and thin the learning situation. I also may be able to help by inging students into contact with people representing diverse ints of view, views different from mine. I can not fairly present all sides of any issue. As a matter of fact, I want be all that I am with students, all my preferences and ssions and involvements, and really do not care to be a eutral" discussion leader or a "laid-back" facilitator. wever, a program centered on learning can, I hope, break away om the single instructor dominance in classes as students ntact individuals with diverse perspectives. In this circum- ance I do not think I need worry as much about being "every- ing to everybody." Lastly, I can invite and allow students consider and talk about my control over them; I can make it explicit issue. I can invite students to take action to ssen my control over them.

All this has taken me pretty far from the censored advertising layout. I have read that important things result in "global applications," where this leads to this and then the other thing. It would be easy enough to say that everything is interconnected. But that is the point, is it not? Everything is connected to everything else. If we are too narrow in our perspective--as I thing the student teacher was in that English class--we miss the basic relatedness of things and perhaps never come to grips with some large and important issues. I have concluded that if change in teacher education is to be significant, it must involve more than reform of the practice teaching experience--although I must start somewhere. What-ever, it is time I went to work.

Reference

J. Macdonald, B. Wolfson and E. Zaret, Reschooling Society: A Conceptual Model. Washington, D. C., Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 1973.

Security

By DAVID J. FEELA
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When it is dark
   and accusingly quiet
I must sit
on my hands
for two dollars an hour
and protech these cars
                that rest
like sleeping coffins
in a dusty half-acre lot
behind the bloodshot eyes
of a meat packing plant.
I wonder what earthly good
   I am doing
            here;
Nothing ever happens
but people worry
about what might
   and I worry
about rent
and groceries
and my fingers
that are growing numb
from the weight of an unactive body.
The air is sensuously still;
listening to rust
   make love with crome
and the muffled groans
   of dying cattle
who are processed to feed
                the dying.

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