

Honors Student Teaching — A Professional Partnership

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There are individual differences among student teachers just as there are individual differences among pupils in a classroom. Anyone who has had experience with student teachers will readily agree that some attain a reasonably high level of competence in a few weeks while some others barely attain minimum competence in the course of a semester.

Although the relationship is by no means perfect, it is generally the more able and promising student who attains teaching competence more readily. The intellectually talented student seems to gain insight into instructional problems more easily and bring to bear his understanding of theory more effectively.

Although the concept of a wide range of ability and potential among students is one which most people would accept, in most teacher education programs there is very little differentiation in the field experiences provided students. By and large, all students are provided with essentially the same experience regardless of their ability and potential. In most programs, for example, all student teachers engage in essentially the same activities, for the same length of time, and with the same type of supervision.

It has been within the past decade that an Honors Program has been initiated in the College of Education, University of Hawaii, to provide for some of the individual differences among students. During their last two undergraduate years, teacher education students who appear to possess exceptional promise participate in two interdisciplinary seminars with their counterparts from other colleges. In addition, they participate in a specialized seminar

in education and plan and execute a "senior thesis" of relevance to their professional goals.

The primary objective of the honors program in the College of Education is to provide able students professional experiences of greater breadth and depth than those ordinarily afforded undergraduate students. It is assumed that most of these students will pursue graduate degrees. It seems reasonable to expect, too, that these individuals will eventually be leaders in education.

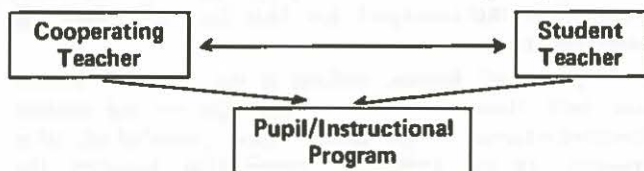
In past years honors students in the College of Education were afforded observation-participation and student teaching experiences identical to those provided all other students. In the 1968-69 academic year, however, the honors program for prospective teachers was modified to include the field experience portion of their professional education.

The field experience program for honors students in education incorporates a number of elements such as personalized assignments to host teachers, continuity of experience from observation-participation into student teaching, in-school and out-of-school enrichment experiences during the student teaching semester, and supplemental seminars geared to the needs and interests of the students.

While all of the elements noted above are viewed as important ingredients in the program, the character of the working relationship between the student teacher and the cooperating teacher is seen as the most vital facet of the honors field experience. This relationship is intended to be a professional partnership in the fullest sense.

In many student teaching programs the cooperating teacher and the student teacher work in a superior-subordinate relationship. The student teacher functions as an intermediary between the cooperating teacher and the pupils. The focus of the cooperating teacher's effort is on the student teacher who is seen as the "weak link" in the instructional program chain. The primary task of the cooperating teacher is that of "molding" the student into an effective teacher.

The honors approach, in contrast, is to encourage the student teacher and the cooperating teacher to work as *professional partners* in the fullest sense of *both* words. In this approach the focal point of the cooperating teacher's effort, *and* the student teacher's effort, is the pupils and the instructional program. Professional leadership is shared by the cooperating teacher and the student teacher as is the responsibility for planning and implementing the classroom program. In this type of relationship each partner views the other as a colleague. The goal to which both partners are dedicated is that of creating the best possible educational experience for pupils through continuing analysis and improvement of the instructional program. This kind of relationship is best illustrated in the following diagram:



In the professional partnership which is sought in the honors student teaching program, personal and professional maturity on the part of both must prevail. Each individual must be sensitive to the needs and capabilities of the other. Similarly, each partner must be willing to hold himself up to the professional scrutiny of the other. The goal is to work together in such a way as to make the best use of the talents of each individual.

In a genuine professional partnership, there can be personal and professional growth on the part of *both* the student teacher and the cooperating teacher. The partners learn from each other as they learn together. The responsibility for leadership shifts back and forth between the partners in the best interest of the pupils and the instructional program.

The hallmark of the professional partnership is continuing experimentation and evaluation, a continuing search for

better learning experiences for pupils. In this context, the exploring of new ideas and resources is commonplace. There is no reluctance on the part of either partner to engage in thoughtful experimentation because there is no failure in the usual sense of the word. Rather, an unsuccessful experiment provides the basis for professional analysis and the reformulation of ideas. Thus a "failure" is in fact both a learning experience for the two individuals involved and a point of departure for further effort to improve the quality of learning of pupils.

The intelligent and flexible use of time is an important aspect of the professional partnership. Although there are times when the cooperating teacher works alone, times when the student teacher works alone, and times when the student teacher and the cooperating teacher works together, in every instance the decision as to who-does-what-when is based on the requirements of the instructional program and not on an arbitrary allocation of time or duties. In this framework, the amount of time that the student teacher and the cooperating teacher gives to working directly with pupils can vary from day-to-day and week-to-week.

All in all, the professional partnership affords the honors student teacher an environment for optimum personal and professional growth. There are opportunities for thoughtful analysis of professional problems, for creative efforts to improve instruction, for flexible use of time and resources, and for consideration of relationships between theory and practice. There are opportunities for leading and opportunities for following. At the same time the cooperating teacher learns and grows professionally along with his student teacher colleague.

Many observers say that in the school of tomorrow the team approach will prevail much as it now prevails in medicine. If this prediction is indeed accurate, the honors student teacher and the honors cooperating teacher are the teachers of tomorrow—today.

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