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ASSESSMENT AND SUPERVISION OF THE FIELD EXPERIENCE OF A COMPETENCY BASED READING METHODS COURSE

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When the University of Houston committed itself to competency-based, field and campus-centered teacher education over eight years ago, the reading methods courses were primarily campus-centered and included lecture and discussion over assigned reading in a reading methods textbook. In an effort to be compatible with the field-centered focus of the College, a more intensive field-experience component was added to the reading methods course. This addition accentuated the need for a changed format which would be more consistent with a field-based program. The textbooks which had been used previously presented applications of the theory and practice of teaching reading, but did not provide enough guidance in applying them in a classroom situation. The preservice teachers were able to talk knowledgeably about providing for individual differences, yet when they were actually in the classroom they seemed to have difficulty translating the theory into practice.

Therefore, the reading methods course was reorganized on the premise that there were three different levels of learning involved. The first level of learning had to do with what had already been done well—the gaining of theoretical and practical knowledge about the subject of how to teach reading. The second level of learning required that the students demonstrate behaviors needed for effective teaching of reading in the classroom. The third level of learning assessed the pre-service teacher's ability to bring about change in the reading behavior of others. A competency-based, modularized textbook was written which was designed to facilitate transfer of learning from the knowledge to the application level. The text presented explanations of the principles and methods of teaching reading and then guided the students in changing the words into actions by stating needed skills in behavioral terms. The three levels of learning were categorized as the following kinds of behavioral objectives:

1. *Cognitive objectives* which require specified knowledge of key concepts in the teaching of reading. These are usually assessed through discussion and paper-pencil type tests.
2. *Performance objectives* which require the demonstration of certain teaching behaviors by the student. Guided practice is provided in applying the principles in a classroom-like situation.
3. *Consequence objectives* which require the demonstration of the

ability to bring about change in the reading behavior of others. Supervision of lessons taught to youngsters focus on the change in the youngster's reading behavior.

The first two levels of objectives were easy to measure through paper-pencil tests, classroom discussions, construction of activities designed to teach reading, and role-playing with peers. However, the third level of objectives, considered to be the most important, was difficult to assess. The public school provided an excellent laboratory for the pre-service teachers, but the responsibility of the classroom teacher was obviously with the public school pupil and not the University student. The classroom teacher was often already overburdened with work and therefore his commitment to the University was primarily in terms of allowing the University student to teach reading in his classroom. The classroom situations in which pre-service teachers were placed varied considerably. In some classrooms, the student was given a group of youngsters and told to use whatever techniques he wanted; in other classrooms the pre-service teacher was given a group of youngsters and specific instructions to teach the lesson *exactly* as outlined by the teacher's manual. There was a need for continuity in format between the campus and the laboratory. Besides the obvious desire to have a more specific purpose for being in the classroom other than just to "experience" what youngsters were like, there needed to be a means to define a classroom teacher's role in supervision in a manner which would be most useful to the pupils and the pre-service teacher. In order to have a consistency between learning behaviors which were explicitly delineated on campus, and the specified learning behaviors required while in the public school, flexible "laboratory objectives" needed to be developed.

The issue of supervision was thought to be basically the task of the University. As originally designed, one University instructor supervised a class of thirty-six undergraduates. Each University student worked with children for forty-five minutes a day, three days a week. Therefore, each undergraduate was supervised by University faculty, at the most, about three minutes a week. The validity of such a short supervision was questionable—particularly in light of the minimum type of supervisory role required of the classroom teacher. Even if there had been objectives delineated for the school setting, the system of supervision did not lend itself to giving the students the type of feedback they needed to assess their objectives and improve their teaching.

The solution was twofold: (1) devise a set of objectives consistent with the campus format and which would be flexible enough to fit any teaching of reading situation; and (2) devise a system where each student could be adequately supervised by the University and/or the classroom teacher on the designated laboratory objectives.

Development of Objectives

Thus two kinds of objectives were developed. The first category was "generic" in nature and could be used regardless of the reading skill the classroom teacher wanted his students to learn; the second category was "categorical" in nature and could be utilized when the participant had a

choice concerning the reading skills he would be teaching to the youngsters. Undergraduates were asked to construct and carry out a plan for each of a number of objectives. Components of both types of objectives are listed below:

increasing participation in reading discussion through questioning techniques

achieving one hundred percent participation through pupil-involving techniques

reducing behavioral incidences through preventive techniques

dealing with behavioral incidences through a variety of methods

motivating the child who is reluctant to read

motivating the child who is not reluctant to read

conducting a reading conference with a youngster

teaching a step of a directed reading lesson

administering the informal reading inventory

administering the word list test

diagnosing a small group of pupils on at least three different reading skills

designing and teaching the first lesson in a series of three lessons on one reading skill

designing and teaching the second lesson in a series of three lessons on one reading skill

designing and teaching the third lesson in a series of three lessons on one reading skill

selecting a book for a youngster

dealing with parents, report cards, and grading

conducting follow-up activities for a reading lesson

teaching a reading skill through one of the content areas

making a book with a youngster

The development of these laboratory objectives was founded on the premise that (1) learning is facilitated when it is reality based. In addition, the reading methods course was based on three more premises: (2) learning is facilitated when the instruction is personalized; (3) the role of an instructor in a personalized program should be a model of the methodology stressed; and (4) the instructional system should provide for the individual differences of the students using it. Therefore, the modularized text used in the course acted as a model of individualization of instruction in several ways:

1. each chapter contained a pre-assessment which determined whether the student already knew the data contained within. He was instructed to proceed through only as much data as he had to in order to meet the objectives;
2. each chapter contained a choice of learning alternatives which allowed the student to select a means of learning which was most comfortable to him. There was usually a choice of readings, audio-tapes, slide-tapes, and class sessions; and
3. each student received frequent feedback regarding performance at all levels. He was assessed each time he participated in a paper-pencil test, simulated teaching situation, or actual teaching situation.

For example, student W turned to the chapter on word recognition in the text and took the pre-assessment. He determined that he did not know anything about the phonics approach to teaching word attack skills. He looked through the list of learning alternatives and decided that he would rather listen to a discussion of phonics than read about it. After listening to an audio-tape of a previous lecture on the topic, he decided he still needed to know more. He looked at the schedule for class sessions and met with his instructor and peers on the day phonics was taught. A few days later, he role-played the teaching of the hard and soft sound of “g” in a peer-teaching situation. Both his peers and his instructor gave him feedback concerning the content and the techniques used. Much later in the semester, he was in the public school and diagnosed that several of the youngsters did not know the difference between the two sounds of “g.”

He designed a lesson in which his students were taught both sounds and then practiced the skill through the use of a hopscotch board on which words containing the hard and soft of “g” were taped. In order for the child to hop into a space, he had to correctly pronounce the word which began with “g.”

Student X worked with a classroom teacher who was very protective of his class. He requested that the undergraduate follow his prescribed lesson plan every day. The pre-service teacher followed the format, but used techniques for achieving 100% participation one day, and techniques for

more effective questioning the next. Therefore when his University supervisor came in to watch him teach, student X had a specific objective which met the requirements of the University and also was teaching a skill which the classroom teacher wanted him to.

Student Y worked with some students who needed to learn the comprehension skill of locating main ideas. He checked with his classroom teacher to see if he might develop a language experience lesson to teach the children this skill. This was considered acceptable and the student developed the lesson.

Student Z worked with a class that needed help with affixes. The student had not yet gotten to that part of his course where the instructor discussed structural analysis. He looked up the skill in his text and read about it. He then listened to one of the audio-visual alternatives which was available to him on the topic. He still felt a bit unsure of the skill, so he scheduled a time to meet with his instructor and discussed how the skill should be taught.

Development of the Supervision Process

However, as the feedback process was one of the key aspects of the methodology behind the reading course, before any of the above students taught their lessons, they worked with peers according to a specified set of guidelines.

Several of the role-playing situations which were used to assess some of the performance objectives on campus were also used to demonstrate techniques for assessing a peer. A series of small group seminars which occurred immediately following each role-playing situation, focused on developing "helping relationships" and techniques for giving effective feedback. Students were asked early in the semester to select a peer with whom they felt comfortable to be a partner for their laboratory experiences. The procedure practiced by the peers in the role-playing was the same procedure to be used in the school. The process required that each peer (1) hold a pre-conference with his partner before teaching to discuss the objective he intended to meet; (2) while he was teaching, the partner would watch to see that he had met the designated objective; (3) after the teaching, a post-conference between the two was held to assess the pre-service teacher's skill in meeting the objective as well as to give him suggestions for future teaching. Each student taught a portion of every day he was in the school, and every time he taught, his peer helped him assess his teaching.

In addition, an elaborate system of supervision utilizing teachers enrolled in the reading methods course for certification, graduate students, and the instructor was set up to assure each undergraduate of adequate supervision. Small group seminars held on campus by the instructor for "buddies," their student assistant, and their graduate assistant were designed to facilitate the feedback process.

A checklist format was developed so that the peer, graduate students, the instructor, or the classroom teacher could be provided with a uniform means for assessing the undergraduate. Though in most cases, classroom teachers left the supervision to the University personnel, the checklist

provided the teacher with a means to visualize the tasks expected of the students. This awareness enabled the classroom teacher to provide guidelines for students without forcing them to take time away from their pupils nor obligating them to revise their class to meet the needs of the University.

Various aspects within the field experience component have continued to be revised and adapted as new situations occur. However, the basic format described above has been successfully used in a diversity of classroom and university situations. Additionally, the format was transferred and used successfully in a second University in a completely different geographical setting during the Spring of 1975. In all situations, student feedback indicates that they liked the field experience component because it is reality based; the format lends itself to individualization of instruction; and there is emphasis on interaction with peers.