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A Viable Alternative in Teacher Education

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Gaming, Simulation and Simulation Teaching

Simulation often means gaming, because you can experience events, procedures, and processes through games--especially when time, money, space, and community conditions make it impossible to have the real thing.

One of the "real things" in teacher education is student teaching, but it doesn't come soon enough and it doesn't last long enough. Many people--many students--feel the need to develop basic teaching skills before they step into a classroom. To meet this need we developed a simulation-teaching procedure in the elementary language arts/social studies methods course. It provides students these opportunities:

> to practice lesson preparation,
> to teach in their subject area, to real people,
> to learn to critique their own teaching, and
> to design teaching around 5 basic skills.

How Simulation Teaching Works

Early in the quarter I give the students a brief pamphlet describing the simulation activities, and emphasizing these five basic skills:

> set induction,
> questioning,
> verbal reinforcement,
> non-verbal reinforcement, and
> closure.

Soon after that I use a color videocassette, prepared by Dr. R. Volker of the Instructional Resources Center. Actually, I "team-teach" with the tape, because it is designed to be used with a "live" classroom

instructor. It not only parallels the pamphlet describing simulation, but has a number of "turn-me-off-and-discuss" places. The advantages of using the tape seem to be that:

a person trained in teaching and simulation teaching demonstrates the skills the students will be developing,
the students can observe the use of the audio-visual facility and approach they will be emulating, and
there is the opportunity for interaction between myself and the class.

The class and I continue with a discussion of general simulation teaching technique relative to the elementary classroom. Each student then chooses one of the five basic skills and prepares a five minute lesson to present to a small group of classmates. To simplify any difficulties students may find in working with a new medium and an unfamiliar skill, I stress the following directions:

Focus on the skill to be practiced and ignore the subject matter you are using, except for the way it functions as a vehicle for skill's practice.
Use the guidelines in the pamphlet to help you determine the important elements of the skill you are practicing.
Relate to your classmates as peers during your presentation.

During the next class meeting each student presents to his small group the lesson he has prepared. This group reacts as peers during the presentation, and helps the presentor to critique his "performance" by using the appropriate evaluation guide in the pamphlet. If there is sufficient time, students re-teach their lessons after revising them according to the suggestions of their group members. Throughout this period I move from group to group, assisting with critiquing, acting as part of the "class," and

answering whatever questions arise.

Near the end of the two hour period, we return to a whole-class setting to discuss the activity in which we have just engaged and to resolve questions concerning procedure, critiquing problems, and the skills themselves. I also provide the directions and information the students will need to complete the extended phases of the simulation teaching activity at this time.

On Their Own in Simulation Teaching

After these introductory activities, each group is asked to produce its own tape. Meeting outside of class, on their own, students focus on whichever of the five skills their group decides on. The Resource Center staff offers technical assistance, and a ten-minute videotape is checked out to each student group for the production. When the lesson is produced, the group chairman returns the tape to me, with a note indicating the skill chosen and the names of the group members who produced the tape.

Critiquing the Results

Everyone looks forward to the "screening" session, when the tapes are viewed and discussed. Not only do we find ourselves enjoying the product others have created, but most students become aware that they can identify more factors and more subtle relationships in the teaching process. Since the beginning of the course, they have participated in a variety of teaching-related activities within the structure of the class; such as an in-class teaching presentation and a teaching field trip. The class and I have provided each student with oral and/or written feedback, based on the five skills introduced through videotaping, for each of these activities. As a result, though I have made no formal test of this "observation," I feel the critiquing comments made by class members do tend to show greater insight and a greater ability to determine why one technique was effective and another wasn't than their earlier critiquing

efforts--as well as a tendency to offer constructive criticism which hits the point.

But. . .I Didn't Get to Teach

Since only one member of each group actually teaches on videotape, I make provision for any student who would like this experience to choose videotaping a lesson on one of the five skills as an optional proj- ect. These students follow the same procedure we set for the group-produced tapes. They:

> choose the skill they wish to practice,
> develop a five minute lesson focusing on
>   that skill,
> ask friends to assist by acting as the "class,"
> make the tape,
> self-critique the tape, and
> meet with me for a joint viewing and critiquing
>   session.

The individual student may do this with as many or as few of the skills as he wishes--or none of them.

And. . .What Values Does Simulation Teaching Have?

One of my main purposes in developing this simu- lation teaching activity has been to provide students with an opportunity to teach in a relatively low- stress atmosphere. Simulation teaching provides an opportunity for the student to become confident in his ability to use a particular skill. He has ana- lyzed, isolated, and developed a small part of the teaching process to a point where he understands it and can demonstrate competence with it. When he meets the additional factors of student presence and overall classroom management in student teaching, prior experience with simulation teaching should les- sen the difficulty he may have in dealing effectively with these factors and the "cultural shock" which the real world of the classroom sometimes precipitates. Confidence in self almost always enables a beginner

in any field to grow more rapidly, to feel more satis-
faction in his performance to take minor setbacks in
stride, and to profit more fully from constructive
criticism.

In addition, this activity allows me to easily
demonstrate five basic teaching skills and to help
students develop expertise with them in a controlled
setting. Public schools are often overloaded with
temporary pre-professional personnel who are present
for such assigned training activities as observing,
tutoring, or student teaching. They simply do not
have the regular staff, space, or time available to
give us for the purpose of introducing and building
these basic competencies. However, simulation teach-
ing actually provides us with a situation in which
these goals can be accomplished more rapidly, perhaps,
than they could be were actual classroom situations
readily available to us. Through simulation teaching,
we can focus on the one aspect of teaching we are
working to attain a degree of proficiency in without
having large numbers of extraneous factors obscure
that skill. This is more difficult--if not impos-
sible--to do in an elementary classroom.

Finally, simulation teaching can assist the stu-
dent in his development of an attitude of continual
self-evaluation (an essential for continuing profes-
sional growth), and the willingness and capacity to
make use of the videotape equipment now available in
many schools as an evaluative alternative to check-
lists, audio-tapes, and similar devices.[1]

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[1]Some related elements suitable for further study
might include: (a) the degree of change in a stu-
dent's behavior after videotape viewing vs. discussion
only, (b) the continued use of videotape as a self-
evaluation mechanism by beginning teachers in the
field, (c) the effect on experienced teachers, as to
whether they use videotape after observing its use
with student teachers, and (d) whether the use of
videotape is extended, by both beginning and expe-
rienced teachers, to other kinds of classroom
activities.

The Future Holds . . .

Simulation teaching has provided one viable
alternative for me, as a methods instructor, to the
use of public school classrooms in developing student
proficiency in several basic teaching skills. I feel
it is a flexible, easily-used vehicle for performance-
based instruction and learning which has helped me to
add greater meaning and relevance to my course--
because the course now better fits observed student
needs. This activity has been consistently identified
by participating students as one of the top three
activities, as related to personal growth and learning,
they complete in the language arts/social studies
methods course.

As each of us searches for alternatives in teacher
education and explores the possibilities of variations
of performance-based teaching and learning, it would
seem that simulation teaching would offer real advan-
tages for many teacher education methods courses. It
has proved both a useful and successful learning expe-
rience for me and my students.