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The Impact of Field-Based Teacher Education Programs on Public Schools

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College and university teacher education programs have increasingly become more field-oriented as they expand the role of public schools in the training of student teachers. In some instances, entire teacher education programs, such as Arizona State University, have become based in the schools as university professors teach methods courses in local district classrooms. Thus, (a) public school teachers and administrators are increasing their input in university program development, (b) greater numbers of college students are being placed in public schools earlier in their education and (c) college students are having much more and varied contact with children. Unfortunately, most analyses of field-based programs have concentrated on the effect upon the institution of higher education. However, one also needs to examine these programs as they affect pupils, teachers, administrators, community and the school plant itself. As a result, the thrust of this article is the examination of the costs and benefits of field-based teacher education for public schools.

Many field-based programs result in the development of teacher centers which, in many cases, are consortia formed between a university and school district for the purpose of improving preservice and inservice education. On the surface, the monetary cost to a school district is minimal when weighed against the expanded and improved inservice program provided by the university. Working together, these partners can plan seminars, workshops or courses specifically tailored to the needs of the individual teacher, school and/or district. However, school districts usually

compensate teachers for earned graduate hours by increasing the salary as teachers move to a higher pay step. Since field-based programs can result in a concentrated inservice effort, more teachers may accumulate more hours and, thereby, greatly increase the districts' salaries on the budget-line. Luckily, trained evaluators look beyond dollars and cents when examining the positive and negative spin-offs of a program. Otherwise, the benefits to the public schools of such programs could be questionable.

One of the spin-offs of an increased number of student teachers is the effect on classroom instruction. When teachers assume increased supervisory responsibility, they feel a need to examine their own roles in education, to know why certain procedures are followed, to know why certain teaching strategies are chosen and to evaluate their own performance in the classroom. Not only does this self-analysis and knowledge improve their ability to supervise student teachers, but it also serves as a means for improving instruction through constant self-evaluation.

In addition, greater numbers of college students can be an asset as they share with their cooperating teachers the innovative theories and methods being pursued by the university. The implementation of new ideas and experimental techniques may result in a more efficient and varied method of instruction. In reality, the classroom becomes a necessary testing ground for innovative theories and methods as more teachers keep abreast of new trends by actually implementing them in the classroom.

A further asset of an increased number of college students is the capacity to provide additional support in the classroom. One such benefit is that programs can become more individualized. For example, students assist in the instruction of reading or math groups, freeing the teacher to work with pupils needing more intensified instruction. Also, college students can do the time-consuming tasks of constructing bulletin boards or learning centers, thereby allowing the teacher to concentrate more fully on instruction.

A field-based teacher education program also means more readily available resources to schools and teachers. This is true not only in terms of audio-visual and media equipment, but also in terms of university and non-school personnel serving as consultants to assist with district and classroom problems. It is especially true if a teacher center is located in the district, since trained personnel are employed to assist in diagnosing and solving special problems.

One of the major spin-offs of a field-based program results from the increased input of the public school in university teacher education programs. Obviously, the key to such a program's success is that both university and public school personnel work together, as equals, so that both institutions benefit. Thus, public school and university personnel exchange, debate and create ideas and methods that improve both the instructional and programmatic components of each institution. The access to each other, the responsibility to work together and the dedication to common goals create the opportunity and atmosphere for integrating theory and practice. As university theory and public school classroom practice become integrated, the main beneficiaries are the pupils, both university and public school.

In order to share the benefits of field-based teacher education, the public schools must be prepared to deal with potential costs other than those that are monetary. Obviously, a school's physical plant cannot be radically altered to provide space for the influx of a greater number of college students. Thus, space can be a problem. Often, additional rooms are needed so that student teachers can work with math or reading groups or teach a special lesson. This rarely presents an extreme problem, however, since most student teachers "team" with their cooperating teachers or make arrangements to use "free" classrooms. Ironically, my experience has been that the most serious problem arises from an increase in cars for very limited parking spaces or from over-crowded conditions in teachers' dining areas or lounges. Although not an instructional problem, this often results in resentment toward stu-

dent teachers and creates a serious public relations problem.

As stated previously, field-based programs have induced university faculty to offer courses in participating schools during the regular day and, again, this can result in problems of space. Although most schools welcome the participation of university faculty in their buildings, it is often difficult to procure additional instructional space for thirty or forty college students. Many schools have solved this problem by placing classes in basements or storage areas--not the most conducive for learning.

More college students in the schools are not always welcomed by principals or parents. Principals, of course, realize a tremendous responsibility for maintaining quality educational programs. Although they may be aware of the assets of an increased number of student teachers, this influx could appear to pose a threat to quality instruction as pupils spend less time with certified experienced teachers. Parents, too, sometimes voice their opposition to an increase in the number of student teachers. Often, a child may have several student teachers during the school year or, if a secondary student, during the school day. As a result, parents may believe that they are not getting their money's worth for their child's education. Certainly, one realizes that all student teachers are not as qualified as others. If a student teacher is having a negative effect on a pupil's learning, it is the responsibility of the cooperating teacher, university supervisor and principal to decrease the student's role in the classroom. However, parents are rarely made aware of the student teacher's role in the classroom or of the possible assets of an increased number of student teachers. A good public relations program by the public school and university can go a long way in alleviating this problem.

Most of the "spin-offs" from a field-based program are those that would result naturally. However, the potential "spin-off" that perhaps raises the most

intriguing possibility for changing the present structure of teacher preparation again involves money. In practice, the majority, if not all, of a semester's education for a full-time student teacher occurs in the school district. In most cases, the student's primary mentors for that semester are the faculty and staff of the public school. At the same time, all of the student's tuition for that particular semester is paid to the university. Is there not some kind of inequity here? Could there not be some formula to allow the district to share this money? Certainly, this is a radical proposal, especially in the eyes of the university, but it appears that this question will eventually be asked by participating schools, teacher unions and/or taxpayers. Although the amount may not be great, it could be used to purchase additional resources, to alleviate the need for staff cuts or to employ additional trained specialists.

Obviously the university could suffer serious consequences from such a policy. The current economic status does not make it feasible for many institutions to relinquish large amounts of money. Many universities provide tuition waivers to cooperating teachers and support in terms of courses and consultants. Depending on the size and wealth of the university, forfeiting any additional income could pose serious questions about the institution's survival. Even if survival is not an issue, the relinquishing of funds would most assuredly reduce the support of significant research or the feasibility of large, costly projects. It matters not what my opinion is concerning this proposal. This is the era of tax revolt and accountability and what matters is that this question be anticipated and examined thoroughly before it is thrown into the teacher education arena.

In conclusion, the benefits of a field-based teacher education program appear to outweigh the costs for the public schools. The increased cooperation between schools and university, the increased support for teachers, the increased integration between theory and practice and the increased contact with children for future teachers are benefits that offer great po-

tential for improving teaching and learning. In the end, it is the benefit to children that provides an excellent argument for field-based teacher education.