The Preparation of Classroom Teachers for Supervision of Student Teachers

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Perhaps we will know more about the problems of supervising teachers when Greenville College, in Illinois, completes its nationwide study of the supervision of student teaching in English as part of the ISCPET project. But I doubt that the following generalizations will be contradicted by the findings: most programs as they are now arranged are quite haphazard in the selection of supervising teachers; they permit very little college control over the student teaching experience; and they offer insufficient help to the supervising teachers and the student teachers.

Certainly the English education specialists in colleges which prepare English teachers are not completely responsible for this situation. For one thing, there are far too few of them to have created such a monumental hodgepodge. But if we may be pardoned for temporarily accepting arrangements as we have found them, we cannot long escape the responsibility for their improvement. The awareness and concern of English education specialists—evident in a number of articles on the care and feeding of supervising teachers—have not, for the most part, led to improvement of student teaching programs. The situation remains, in most places, analogous to an Old Vic production of Hamlet in which the choice of an actor to play the melancholy Dane is left largely to chance. Of course, they would prefer an Olivier or a Burton, but perhaps Wally Cox will just have to do.

We can improve student teaching programs by improving our casting. And we can improve our casting by improving the training of supervising teachers, also referred to as critic teachers, directing teachers, and cooperating teachers. I believe that the role of the English education specialists in the colleges is threefold here: first, to establish the framework within which preparation of supervising teachers is possible; second, to identify good potential supervising teachers and encourage their cooperation; and third, to establish programs to train and aid supervising teachers.

First, we must establish the framework within which preparation of supervising teachers is possible. We must recognize that present arrangements for supervision are inadequate, that they are likely to get worse as the number of student teachers increases, and that, if changes are to be made, those now responsible for teacher preparation will have to bring them about. In order to prepare classroom teachers for supervision, we will first have to recognize
the importance of supervisory skills, consider the objectives of the student teaching program, and establish a closer working relationship with English departments and teachers in the public schools.

It is something of a truism that an excellent teacher is not necessarily an excellent supervisor. But it is also true that the skills essential to supervision are essential to good teaching. Except perhaps for those few great teachers with apparently innate abilities, any teacher can improve by increasing his ability to observe, analyze, and evaluate teaching behavior—his own or somebody else's. All teachers need the ability to observe carefully and objectively, with an eye to critical classroom variables. All teachers should be able to evaluate materials, organization, and methods in light of the objectives of a lesson and the students being taught. And all teachers should be aware of alternative methods and techniques with which to approach teaching situations.

Few teachers receive adequate training in these skills, however, and fewer still are able to develop them on their own. They have heard about these skills, but usually in the context of a general education course which seemed too abstract to be meaningful to prospective English teachers. Consequently, their teaching too often appears to be a series of subjective reactions rather than a conscious activity; they are often unable to explain to others why they teach as they do or the process by which they make teaching decisions. And they are more apt to compare the teaching of others than to analyze it. They are unable to offer more than a subjective critique, because they have never learned the techniques of objective evaluation. Their suggestions to student teachers most often come down to an explanation of "how I would do it," because their own teaching is all that they have seen since they were students. Certification, for most teachers, signals the end of their observation of other teaching techniques, except for the college lecture, and it is little wonder that few teachers have appreciation or tolerance of a wide variety of teaching styles. The student teacher's problems are seen in light of the supervisor's own classroom experience, combined perhaps with a dash of Mr. Novak or Sidney Poitier.

Perhaps the English education specialist, like most English majors, has shied away from analytical approaches because they smack of quantification or pseudo-objectivity. Most students of the humanities have over-learned Wordsworth's dictum that "we murder to dissect." Although we are seldom sympathetic with a student's plea that analysis ruins his appreciation of literature, we persist in the notion that the enormously complex behavior patterns of teaching are somehow beyond the reach of analysis. When we can free ourselves and our supervising teachers from this prejudice against analysis, we can begin to make progress in their preparation. As far as possible, teaching behavior should be the result of conscious choice rather than unconscious reactions. Clearly many of our unconscious reactions and habits in teaching are good. But perhaps as frequently they are inappropriate or poor, the kinds of teaching habits which plague the mediocre teacher and which in an otherwise good teacher become known politely as his "idiosyncrasies."

Before we in English education can hope to prepare supervising teachers, we must decide more specifically than we have exactly what we expect student
teaching to accomplish. We must delineate the role we wish the supervising teacher to play. Among other things, we must decide what part he is to have in evaluating the student teacher, and what his status is to be as a participant in the teacher preparation program. The ISCPET-Greenville College study should offer some stimulus for consideration of these matters. At present, there is no other major study underway. I believe that a limited study such as the 1964 Urbana-Cleveland conferences on high school English departments could make a valuable contribution. Some such publication as NCTE's *High School Departments of English*,¹ which resulted from those conferences, could be of great help to supervising teachers in English.

Closer contact with secondary school English departments and teachers is a third essential condition for the preparation of supervising teachers. We cannot expect the schools to assume additional responsibilities in teacher preparation without strong encouragement and support from the colleges. Nor can we expect overworked English teachers to obtain specialized training in supervision without the support of their schools. At best, we would be faced with the time-consuming task of persuading teachers, one by one, to prepare themselves to do the profession a favor. The need for closer school-college cooperation and the mutual benefits to be derived from cooperation are often overlooked. For the college department of English education, closer contact with public schools would provide increased numbers of potential supervisors and a wider variety of known situations in which to place student teachers. It would provide more opportunities for our students to observe varying teaching situations and methods. Perhaps most important, it would force the college specialist to keep abreast of things as they are, rather than as they were when he was in the classroom. Educational psychologists may find it possible to speak meaningfully about learning and teaching in the schools on the basis of their reading and their work with rats, but I do not believe we in English education can afford the luxury of losing contact with the realities of secondary school teaching.

To obtain the cooperation of the schools, however, English education departments will have to accept their responsibilities to inservice teachers. Except for specific programs supported by foundations or the NDEA in recent years, our dealings with secondary school English departments have been largely those of a supplier. We have provided certified teachers and various degree programs for professional advancement. But we have not provided other services which these departments need. In return for help with teacher preparation, I believe the schools may rightfully expect possible advantages in recruiting, help in the supervision of beginning teachers, inservice courses, help in the preparation of special teachers, and help with curriculum revision and evaluation. In short, closer cooperation with the schools will require that college specialists free themselves from the bondage to degree programs and begin to think in terms of service programs.

The second major responsibility of the English education specialist is to identify good potential supervising teachers and encourage their cooperation. Increased contact with secondary schools will increase our opportunities to identify the kinds of teachers we want, but we should not overlook an important source of supervising teachers available to us now. Each year the colleges graduate a number of very promising English teachers and grant advanced degrees to excellent experienced teachers. Very often, unless these teachers return for further work, we lose track of them, even when they teach in nearby schools. If we extend the services of our department to our recent graduates and attempt to keep up some contact, at least with our best graduates, they might supply us with leads to good teachers in their departments and might even be willing to serve as supervising teachers themselves.

Although our criteria for selecting good potential supervising teachers will depend somewhat on the role we want them to play, there are some obvious guidelines to follow. Basically, we want career teachers with adequate backgrounds in English and the ability to get along with people, teachers who can give some account of, can analyze, their behavior in the classroom. Through the process of observing, questioning, and evaluating, we should be able to identify many potentially good supervising teachers and to obtain some indication of the weaknesses we will have to overcome. We must recognize, as we do with our undergraduates, that although some of our best supervisors may have inherent natural abilities which others lack, many teachers can be trained to do an adequate job of supervision. Even the best supervising teachers make mistakes which might have been avoided with more help from the colleges.

We cannot, in our present situation, hope to encourage teachers' cooperation by financial rewards. The most usual forms of remuneration offered by colleges are free courses, token payments of money, recognition in the form of a listing in the college brochure, and, occasionally, faculty status with the college. Ultimately, our success in obtaining the cooperation of classroom teachers will depend on our success in establishing the conditions I cited earlier. When teachers can see the benefits of supervisory skills to their own teaching, and when schools and English departments enjoy the benefits of more direct work with college specialists, there should be little need for imaginative token rewards to encourage cooperation.

The third major responsibility of the English education specialist is to establish programs to prepare and aid supervising teachers. Several programs have been developed by general education departments to train classroom teachers in the skills of supervision. The underlying assumption is very often the same one which underlies the general methods course: that supervision is supervision, regardless of the subject. Although this may be true on a theoretical level, on the practical level supervision does not occur in a content-free context; training in supervision of English teachers is probably best learned in the context of English education.

The simplest "program" is to offer a course in supervision, usually free, to teachers presently supervising student teachers, but very few colleges offer
even this. Such courses usually establish the role of the supervisor teacher, offer background in the theory of supervision, introduce teachers to tools for analysis of teaching behavior, and point out important variables which should be observed in the classroom.\(^2\)

The Oregon Plan is a more ambitious undertaking, intended to upgrade supervision throughout the state. The initial study identified the following seven weaknesses of supervising teachers:

1. an inability to observe and collect data from classroom events in a systematic, objective way,
2. poor skill in analyzing a teacher's performance,
3. inability to plan sound strategy for conferences,
4. limited ability to discuss performance with students in such a way as to change behavior patterns,
5. the tendency to teach only for content goals, with only incidental attention to skills, attitudes, and processes,
6. inability to help students effectively in planning a lesson or series of lessons,
7. limited ability to deal effectively with problems of interpersonal conflicts.\(^3\)

These weaknesses, which have been cited in other, less comprehensive, studies, are certainly not unfamiliar to college supervisors who have worked with supervising teachers. The Oregon Plan consists of clinics, workshops, conferences, and courses at colleges throughout the state in such skills as the use of various coding systems for analysis of teaching, clinical supervision, interpersonal relations, and assessment of questioning processes.

One study reports the use of micro-teaching units to train supervisors in techniques of observation, analysis, and the conduct of conferences with student teachers.\(^4\) Training programs have also been established in which teachers receive school-college joint appointments for a year, during which time they receive instruction in supervision and work with student teachers.\(^5\)

Preparation of supervising teachers might involve all of these techniques. We are faced with the immediate problem of training teachers who are already supervising, and for these teachers we need efficient and effective ways to "add" skills quickly. Many good prospective supervising teachers who are willing to take specific programs geared to immediate objectives would be unwilling to take general education courses or to embark on full degree programs. Recognizing the importance of supervisory skills to teaching, however, we

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\(^5\)Ibid.
should also incorporate such preparation in our basic degree programs. The undergraduate who learns early the techniques of critical observation and analysis of teaching procedures in English is more likely to be able to use the skills later, both as a teacher and as a supervisor. Realizing that many of our master's candidates will eventually assume positions of responsibility within their departments, we could fully justify the inclusion of supervisory techniques in an advanced methods course for experienced teachers.

The following objectives, culled largely from general courses in supervision, might serve to guide the construction of a profitable English education program for the preparation of supervising teachers. The program should lead teachers to:

1. develop a clear understanding of the objectives of the student teaching program in English,
2. develop strategies for accomplishing these objectives with different types of student teachers,
3. understand clearly the role of the supervising teacher,
4. learn to evaluate method and technique in terms of the material, objectives, and particular students,
5. acquire a working knowledge of various "tools" of analysis, such as the Flanders system of interaction analysis, the Bellack system of examining pedagogical moves, and the Bloom taxonomy of educational objectives,
6. become acquainted with a wide variety of methods and techniques and develop a tolerance of differing teaching styles, primarily through extensive observation,
7. have supervised practice in observation, analysis, and evaluation of teaching,
8. develop skill in conducting conferences with student teachers,
9. update, where necessary, their background in English.

By drawing examples from English teaching, dealing directly with the particular problems of English teaching, and bringing together teachers with a common background and teaching experience, we can make these general objectives increasingly specific. As with the teaching of methods, the more specific and directly applicable we can make our preparation of supervising teachers, the more likely we are to bring about real improvement.

Our responsibility to the supervising teacher does not cease when we have once prepared him, however, any more than our responsibility to the teacher ceases when he receives his teaching certificate. Through the college supervisor, research, and publications we must extend our services to the experienced supervisor as well as to the novice.

I believe that the important first step in improving the supervision of student teaching in English must come with the recognition and acceptance of responsibility by English education specialists. If we hope to prepare our

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teachers fully, we cannot leave the arrangements for student teaching in their present haphazard state, and we cannot depend on others to correct the situation for us. Overworked and understaffed as departments of English education usually are, it is not surprising that we have avoided acceptance of such additional and far-reaching responsibilities as are posed by the preparation of supervising teaching. But one thing is certain: until we do accept the responsibility, little is likely to be done in our behalf.