Education of Teachers in Field Settings: A Case Study

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Abstract

The efforts of one teacher education program to improve the education of teachers in field settings are described using NCATE criteria related to the world of practice. The selection of sites, types of experiences, supervision, sequence of experiences, skills developed, lengths of experiences, professional roles and responsibilities, and relationships with graduates and schools are presented and briefly discussed.

Teacher education experiences in field settings need to be based upon a strong philosophical and theoretical framework, a sound knowledge base and a well-articulated set of values. Experiences in field settings before teacher education students undertake student teaching or an internship is a common practice in teacher preparation programs in the United States (Moore, 1979). A review of research suggests that the value of field experiences depend upon being prepared to learn from the experience (Lanier and Little, 1986). If learners do not have the knowledge base, skills or disposition needed to learn from practical experience the experience may not result in any real value. The need for teacher education programs that provide the prerequisite knowledge base, monitor teaching experiences, sequence experiences, and balance instruction and field experience is recommended (National Commission for Excellence in Teacher Education, 1985).

Field experiences can serve as a vehicle to connect philosophy, theory, knowledge base and values to practice. To do so, they need to offer more than an opportunity for students to observe what takes place in the classroom if they are to prepare students to be effective practitioners. A brief description of what Northern Michigan University (NMU) is doing to improve the education of teachers in field settings is given in this paper. The National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) Category II criteria for effective field experience programs will each be presented and Northern’s compliance presented.

Clinical and Field-Based Experiences

NCATE Category II, Relationship to the World of Practice, has three standards and fifteen criteria for compliance (numbered 24-38). The first standard, Clinical and Field-Based Experiences, gives criteria related to whether the teacher education field experiences prepare students to work in the roles they are preparing. NMU’s field experiences are based upon a taxonomy consisting of the following phases: role orientation, role conceptualization,
ning and commitment, role assumption, and role evaluation (Smith and Sagan, 1975). This longitudinal process of combining theory and practice prepares allows for more growth in making instructional decisions and reflection on practice. In Chart 1 is a list of the NMU courses required according to the phases of the field experience taxonomy.

ntation involves observation visits to schools and classrooms to better understand them and the teachers' role in them. Our field experience related to the taxonomy occurs in our first course, ED 201 Introduction to Education. Students spend one-half day observing in a classroom and report one maintained, one assignment from the teachers and a child's point of view, and how do students learn in this class. They also interview the teacher he or she became a teacher, the difference between the first year and later years of teaching, and what the teacher is trying to accomplish.

ces in field settings to develop role conceptualization occur in the pre-methods education course most students take next. For elementary education that course is ED 230 Teaching and Learning in the Elementary Classroom and for secondary students it is ED 231 Teaching and Learning in the Classroom. This 15-hour field experience will become a 30-hour experience beginning winter 1995. It will include structured observations and opportunities for children in classrooms to better understand them, schools and teachers. The elective courses ED 222, Classroom Management, and ED 223, Multicultural Education, aid students in developing insights into the role classroom management and culture plays in education. Both one-credit courses are being prepared” (NCATE, 1987, p. 41). Observation begins in the first experience and continues throughout all of the field experiences. Planning and practice begins in the methods level field experiences with practice playing a larger role as the student progresses through their program. The variety of settings is usually realized through student teaching and the teaching seminar. This experience requires the students to assume and effectively roles and responsibilities of a teacher for which the earlier field experiences have prepared them.

ient learning and commitment phase in our secondary program is the focus of two field experiences. The first occurs with ED 319 and consists of students reading textbooks a nearby middle school over a week long period and involve the students interacting with students and faculty.

ents admitted into the methods phase of the program move into the role learning and commitment phase of the field experience taxonomy. At this point to practice the skills and duties of a teacher and to reflect on their teaching and commitment.

mentary program, we have several field experiences to develop this phase of the taxonomy. One course requires students to read a book aloud to a group for one session in an area classroom. Our science and our social studies methods students teach two lessons in pairs to two different area classrooms for each course. Our language arts and reading courses have become site-based with the classes meeting in area elementary schools. Students have experiences in those same schools with teachers who have been oriented to the expectations of our program and are cooperating with our objectives. Students also video tape lessons delivered in the classroom and critique them. In the first language arts course the students work with children in various classrooms in the school. In the second course the students work with one elementary classroom individually tutoring a child.

etics methods students spend a minimum of 10 sessions with cooperating teachers who have been specially trained and selected based upon their teaching experience with students with exceptionalities, lower class students, and students of various cultural origins.

ntents in the teaching of the mentally impaired program not only complete the elementary program, but also several courses in mental impairment. At least 20 hours observing and helping in a special education classroom is required.

learning and commitment phase in our secondary program is the focus of two field experiences. The first occurs with ED 319 and consists of students reading textbooks for 20 hours local middle and secondary schools and doing a case study of their tutor. The second field experience is with ED 349 students working at a nearby middle school over a week-long period and involve the students interacting with students and faculty.

 reimbursement is primarily realized through student teaching and the teaching seminar. This experience requires the students to assume and effectively roles and responsibilities of a teacher for which the earlier field experiences have prepared them.

ution is the process of revising and improving one's teaching based on new knowledge, skills, needs and dispositions, and should continue through their career. Role evaluation is most related to the time our students are taking continuing courses after certification. As they are already practical and have many experiences to draw from, specified field experiences are only connected with courses that are preparing students for new areas.

for compliance number 24 requires "students to observe, plan, and practice in a variety of settings appropriate to the professional roles for which they are prepared" (NCATE, 1987, p. 41). Observation begins in the first experience and continues throughout all of the field experiences. Planning and practice begins in the methods level field experiences with practice playing a larger role as the student progresses through their program. The variety of settings is limited to this region. We can give students experiences in field settings that span their level of certification (K-8 for elementary students and 7-12 for secondary students). Most of these settings are in rural areas that have very limited racial or religious diversity (less than 3% minority population on the average or 2% being of non-Christian religions). Our students are exposed to students with exceptionalities, lower class students, and students of various cultural and religious origins.
criterion 25 states that experiences need to provide the skills to diagnose and solve problems involving the application of educational principles (NCATE, 1987). Every field experience has opportunities to diagnose and solve problems and apply the knowledge learned in classes about effective teaching. Education students analyze and evaluate what they observe, plan and practice. For example, ED 318, Elementary Reading Instruction II, meets with the elementary school and the students spend part of their class time working with one or two students in reading instruction. They diagnose and solve problems using information learned as part of their course and receive feedback from the classroom teacher and the university professor. The questions arising from the practicum students’ experience become the focus of class learning and discussions. The practicum students take their tutoring very seriously and are very motivated to learn how they might be better able assist their tutorees in becoming better readers. As the learning is active and meaningful to the retention and usefulness of the knowledge is expected to be greater.

Revision in the above example relates to criterion 26: "Field-based and clinical experiences are accompanied by professional supervision and feed back to students. These experiences provide opportunities to observe the educational environment, develop professional judgment, and practice skills" (NCATE, 1987, p. 41). ED 318 combines all these components in its field experience and many of our other field experiences have elements as part of the course. The level of supervision increases as the students progress through our program with the final experiences having revision outlined in criterion 26.

We found it more challenging to meet criterion 27 concerning experiences with culturally diverse and exceptional populations (NCATE, 1987). With education generally practiced in the schools where our students have field experiences, it has not been difficult to give our students experiences with these populations. Because these same schools lack racial and religious diversity, it has been difficult to give our student experiences with these populations. Currently we offer opportunities to student teach in more urban and racially mixed areas. These areas are over three hours away from our campus and student avail themselves of these options. We also offer a multicultural education course on an elective basis. We are discussing other options to cultural perspectives of all graduates from our program, as we feel more needs to be done in this area.

Once our field experiences to have students gradually assume full professional competence and responsibility, which relates to NCATE criterion 28 (NCATE, 1987). The sequencing relates to the taxonomy for planning field experiences explained above and NMU’s Professional Studies Taxonomy. We are exploring how the goals and performance indicators of our program will be met through our courses and field experiences.

Tuition teaching for 16 weeks exceeds the NCATE criterion 29 of ten weeks full-time student teaching. We are also in accordance with NCATE criterion 30. Our University supervisors, supervising teachers, and student teachers “have a well-defined charge to support a successful experience as the student assumes full-time responsibility in the school setting” (NCATE, 1987, p. 41). Orientation sessions are held for each of these groups to discuss their roles and responsibilities in the student teaching process. Also, The Student Teaching Guide gives much information to help in this process. We also select our sites for the field experiences to offer experiences that reinforce the goals of our program that relates to criterion 31. The last criterion II-A is number 32: "The roles and responsibilities of education students, college based supervisors and field based supervisors who participate in clinical experiences are delineated in negotiated written agreements" (NCATE, 1987, p. 41). The roles and responsibilities have been negotiated and involved. The formal written agreements would be found in the contracts, syllabi and field experience guides.

ships with Graduates

Standard II-B relates to maintaining relationships with graduates through such means as follow-up studies and continuing assistance. Northern Michigan University meets the three criteria in this standard. They do this through annual questionnaires sent to recent graduates and discussion with graduates and their employers. We have close relations with area educators and get direct feedback from our graduates and their fellow educators as we are in touch through professional development classes and in-school visits. As job opportunities are limited in our area, our direct contact with recent graduates teaching is limited. Our formal questionnaire responses indicate our graduates feel generally well prepared and their employers feel they have the necessary training to be effective.

Of our evaluation efforts have been used to improve our programs. For example, areas of concern, such as classroom management, dealing with exceptional populations, and using computers, have been strengthened in our program and will continue to receive attention in the future. One way we have better addressed these concerns is through our Seminar in Teaching taken concurrently with student teaching. We also now offer new elective courses in each of these areas.

Relating to criteria 35, we have worked with area school districts to assist our recent graduates employed in their districts. Our graduates have been quite successful in their new professional roles and neither the districts nor our graduates have been responsive to our offers of assistance. Discouraged graduates who are first year teachers reveal that they are so busy orienting to their new roles that they have no time or interest in outside assistance. Our graduate assistants generally begin taking professional development courses through Northern Michigan University soon after they begin their teaching, they receive support in continuing education at the University. Next the state will be requiring mentors be assigned to beginning teachers, which will address this need.
Ships with Schools

The standard of Category II deals with maintaining "relationships with schools to advance the goals of the profession and to promote the effective professional educators" (NCATE, 1987, p.42). Northern Michigan University's relationship with area schools is positive and improving. Most of the teachers in the education in P-12 schools with our recent Professional Development School, increased cooperation in field experiences, continuing professional development activities offered by University faculty and agencies, and greater collaboration in decision making and projects. Examples of the involvement of P-12 teacher and administrator on our University committees and advisory councils. Because Northern is the only teacher education institution in the Upper Peninsula, we hold the professional conferences and offer the professional services needed by area teachers and schools. We are using a number of schools via computer networks and making available to a number of educators opportunities work together more collaboratively through such things as e-mail.

The area educators are enrolled in our graduate courses, they are involved with our faculty in researching question of interest to educators. Our faculty also involved together in many professional development activities and organizations. With our increased involvement in area schools through college classes held on site in school buildings and our professors and students working closely with classroom teachers, our faculty benefit by the involvement with practice in P-12 schools and classroom teachers benefit by increased exposure to new methods and ideas regarding practice. Teachers generally speak very highly of our field practica program and are doing a good job assisting our students to become effective teachers. Concerns occur, as they often do, we try our best to address them in a prompt, responsible and effective manner. All of this can be time consuming, but the benefit in improved practica experiences for our students is apparent in the level of opportunity, attention and concern given by the principals and teachers to doing a good job with our students. University faculty also supervise student teachers, which keeps the contact and collaboration between the University and the schools high.

References


Field practica courses according to phases of the education program.

The students required to take the courses and field experience are listed after the course number: elementary (elm), secondary (sec), elective (elc), and special education (spe) only. Special education students must also complete all of the elementary education program.

Methods (Choosing to Become a Teacher)

The Institution, Phase 1-Role Orientation

all) Introduction to Education
The Student, Phase 2- Role Conceptualization

elc) Classroom Management

elc) Multicultural Education

elm) Teaching and Learning in the Elementary Classroom

sec) Teaching and Learning in the Secondary Classroom

(Learning to Become a Teacher)

Instruction, Phase 3 Role Learning and Commitment

elm) Children's Literature

elm) Social Studies Methods & Materials for Elementary Teachers

316 (elm) Language Arts Methods & Materials/Elem Read Instruction I

elm) Science Methods and Materials for Elementary Teachers

elm) Elementary Reading Instruction II

sec) Teaching of Reading for Secondary Teachers

sec) General Secondary Methods

spe) Orientation to Special Education

(elm) Elementary Mathematics Methods

Teaching (Becoming a Teacher)

Practice, Phase 4- Role Assumption

440 (all) Student Teaching

all) Seminar in Teaching


Phase 5- Role Evaluation

999 (all) Selected graduate level courses