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Taking the University to the Classroom Teacher: Field-Based Graduate Programs

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The field-based master's program is an innovative approach to graduate study in education. The program has received positive responses from all involved. One reason is that the faculty were careful not to wrap an old program in new paper and fancy ribbon.

taking the university to the classroom teacher: field-based graduate programs

Gerald Douglass Bailey



Dr. Bailey, an assistant professor of Curriculum and Instruction at Kansas State University since 1972, is particularly interested and active in competency/performance-based education, inquiry behaviors and techniques, and teacher-student interactions. He earned his bachelor's, master's, and Ed.D. degrees at the University of Nebraska at Lincoln. Since 1966 he also has taught in two Lincoln secondary schools, co-directed a Nebraska TTT inservice staff development project for University of Nebraska staff members, been coordinator for a University of Nebraska-Midwestern Regional Education Laboratory inservice staff development project for Lincoln public schools, and been consultant and instructor for the Kansas State University Teacher Corps project.

Events of the past decade have made educators keenly aware of societal expectations and demands for improved educational practices in America. One of the more significant outcomes generated from this widespread interest in education has been the close examination of graduate programs in higher education. Searing commentaries about unimaginative and unresponsive graduate programs are common to the current literature. Resultant change, innovation and reform in these graduate programs have not been observed with similar frequency. At Kansas State University, an experimental graduate program leading to a Master of Science Degree in Education has been in operation since the Summer of 1973. While evaluation is still in preliminary stages, the data point to the following: (1) participants have an extremely positive attitude toward their graduate work, and (2) participants believe that the experimental graduate program has more advantages than the "traditional or standard" graduate program.

More than a year and a half ago, Kansas State University and the Topeka Public Schools entered into a cooperative agreement to bring a new kind of graduate program to the classroom teacher.¹ The new program offered classroom teachers an opportunity to obtain a Master of Science Degree in the College of Education at Kansas State University. Unlike other graduate programs, (1) this program is specifically designed for classroom teachers who desire to improve their teaching effectiveness and/or who desire to become instructional leaders and (2) the major portion of the program is field-based (conducted in the Topeka Public School District).² During a brief orientation, Topeka school administrators were asked to discuss the experimental graduate program with their teachers and interested personnel were invited to make written application. After an initial screening process, approximately 25 elementary, junior high and senior high school teachers were selected to participate in the program.

Program Characteristics

The new program was called the Experimental Field-Based Master's Degree Program and was created as an option to the existing Master's degree program at Kansas State University. The following characteristics distinguished the program:

Off-Campus/On-Campus Instruction. The major thrust of the program was field-based. Over two-thirds of the program was offered on location in Topeka, Kansas while one-third or less of the program was offered on-campus at Kansas State

University in Manhattan, Kansas. Any teacher could take 3 to 6 hours per semester during the field-based phase and 3 to 9 hours could be obtained during the on-campus phase.

Program Completion. Participants were encouraged to participate in the program as a total group. However, the designated time for completing the program varies from two to four years depending on how quickly a candidate desires to finish the degree. A minimum of 30 credit hours is required to complete the program. Any elementary, junior high or senior high school teacher who held a Bachelor's degree in education and who was teaching in the Topeka Public Schools was deemed eligible for enrollment in the program.

Course Offerings. In addition to regularly offered courses in the existing Master's program, a wide array of courses was specifically designed for the program. A partial listing of these courses included: Competency-Based Education, Open Education, Curriculum Development, Media Production, Action Research, Creativity, and Humanizing Education. In almost all courses there is a special emphasis on development of new instructional materials by the teachers for classroom utilization.

Course Time Configurations. Field-based courses have offered a wide range of configurations for class meeting time. Certain classes have met for 16 weeks (2-3 class hours) while other courses will meet for 8 weeks (5-6 class hours). During summer sessions, participants may take courses which are offered on a four-day week schedule and have opportunities to engage in eight-week courses as well as courses varying from one to four weeks in length.

Leadership Training. A select few of the participants will receive additional training in specific program components. It is expected that this training will allow these participants to conduct mini-training sessions for interested teachers in their respective schools.

Program Orientation. One of the most exciting components of the program has been the Program Orientation Workshop conducted in the Summer of 1973. Ample opportunity was given to participants to socialize and specially designed exercises were conducted to promote group camaraderie. A block of time was used to relate long- and short-range goals of the Experimental Field-Based Master's Degree Program. Participants were asked to establish their own academic goals and objectives. During this time, the Program Director described various courses which were geared to participants' needs.

Cooperative Decision Making. The latter stages of the Program Orientation Workshop gave participants an opportunity to make decisions about their academic aspirations and plan a course of action which would help meet those needs. Participants were given an opportunity to discuss courses offered at Kansas State University and even suggest new courses which would be appropriate to their specific demands. The second stage of the cooperative decision making process included a "prioritizing exercise" which was used to sequence the courses in the program. The third stage included independent activities in which participants were counseled on an individual basis about specific courses that fit their needs and particular subject matter interests. The final exercise involved establishing a Program of Study which was then submitted to the Graduate School.

Strengths and Limitations

Participants, public school officials and university personnel agree that substantial progress has been made in a relatively short period of time. Evaluation efforts, however, reveal both strengths and limitations in the experimental graduate program. Formative evaluation measures indicate the following strengths:

1. Students in the program appear to be highly task-oriented and motivated. Meaning and value are associated with graduate courses since they are related to immediate and topical academic needs.
2. A substantial amount of convenience is afforded the classroom teacher by offering courses within the local school district. Much less time is consumed in commuting to and from the university and their time is spent in more productive activities.
3. Participants have been allowed to make suggestions in planning their graduate program. This cooperative decision making process has contributed to a healthy work attitude.
4. The emphasis placed on the development of new classroom instructional materials has contributed to a high degree of participant incentive.
5. Participant involvement in the program as a total group has promoted group solidarity. Participants seem to enjoy the opportunity of engaging in long-term friendships with other teachers from different schools.

While a number of strengths have been identified, certain limitations have become readily apparent:

1. The experimental graduation program has been met with skepticism and reservation by some university faculty. These faculty members question the necessity of carrying their courses off campus. A broadened commitment by the faculty will be absolutely necessary if field-based graduate programs are to continue and expand.
2. The current energy crisis portends continued difficulties in scheduling off-campus courses. Limited fuel allocations to the university could adversely affect future expansion of field-based programs.
3. Certain courses carried off campus require written materials, media-related supplies and library resources. Financial provisions for these items will be needed if the program is to operate at maximum efficiency.
4. Correspondence and counseling with the twenty-five participants has been assumed by the Program Director. The amount of time needed to deal with participants' needs has been severely underestimated. Additional staff and public school liaison personnel will be necessary to meet the demands of the participants.
5. In the past, the responsibility of the program has rested heavily on the shoulders of a small number of interested faculty members. Governance of the program in the future will need to be placed under the direction of a committee or board of directors to ensure program effectiveness and continuity.

Future Directions

The Experimental Field-Based Master's Degree Program has
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FOOTNOTES

1. See in this issue of *Educational Considerations*: Bailey, Gerald Douglass, "Taking the University to the Classroom: Field-Based Graduate Programs."
2. Parker, Barbara, and A.B. Campbell, "A New Approach to Graduate Education in Adult Basic and GED Education," *Adult Leadership*, Dec. 1973, p. 208.
3. McComas, James D., and John P. Noonan, *Designing Doctoral Programs in Education*, The College of Education, The University of Tennessee, Publication No. 5, 1968.
4. Epps, Willie James, and Jordan Utsey, "A Staff Development Program in Education." *American Education*, U.S. Dept. HEW, Education Division, Fall, 1974.

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swirling on the walls (an overhead projector, a pyrex tray full of water, oil, and food coloring were used to gain this effect); and "things" brushed past their feet. When they left the experimental area they were asked to record their immediate reactions by speaking into the tape recorder's microphone. The reactions were played back later. The major objective of the experiment was the heightening of awareness through manipulated activation of the senses.

At the present time, the fifteen teachers in the workshop are trying out the ideas they picked up from the three weeks of interaction. I prepared an evaluation form to determine the changes that have come about in their classrooms as a direct result of their involvement in the English curriculum workshop. I have talked with many of them informally. I learned that more worthwhile creative thinking and learning *did* take place in their classrooms. The students (and the teachers) improved their abilities to read, listen, speak, write and reason. Other experiments in interaction were tried as a result of the teachers' involvement in the workshop during the summer. The teachers became more aware of individuals within the classes. The curriculum became more student-centered. English was taught humanely.

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been greeted with considerable enthusiasm by participants and administrative personnel from the university and public schools. The reasons for this attitude are attributed to the following: (1) The faculty at Kansas State University have been careful not to wrap an old program in new paper and fancy ribbon. In essence, the experimental graduate program has a truly innovative substance. (2) Standards of graduate program quality have not been sacrificed by moving the program off campus. (3) The program has not been viewed a gimmick to garner greater numbers of graduate students.

Participants have been the best salespersons of the program. They have related their experiences to friends and school administrators. These activities have led Kansas State University to make plans for a Second Field-Based Master's Degree Program in Salina, Kansas.³ While field-based graduate programs warrant continued investigation and experimentation, it is clear that they have established themselves as a means to better serve the ever changing needs of a key person in the educational hierarchy—the classroom teacher.

FOOTNOTES

1. The author wishes to express his appreciation to Dean Samuel R. Keys, Dr. J. Harvey Littrell (Kansas State University), Dr. Arnold J. Moore (Youngstown State University), and Drs. Merle Bolton and Roy Browning (Topeka Public Schools). Without their support and encouragement, the cooperative effort would not have been possible.
2. Topeka, Kansas is located approximately sixty miles east of Kansas State University.
3. Salina, Kansas is located approximately seventy miles west of Kansas State University.