

Microteaching

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skills . . .

Many institutions are using the microteaching model to raise the level of the teachers competencies to develop teaching skill.

Microteaching is a system of controlled practice that makes it possible to focus on specific teaching behaviors and to practice teaching under controlled conditions. Competence in one skill is developed before proceeding to another skill.

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Microteaching

Microteaching is a scaled down teaching encounter. In microteaching, however, the complexities of the normal teaching encounter have been reduced and the level of feedback to the teacher has been greatly increased. Furthermore, the objectives of a given microteaching lesson are neither inadvertent, as is often the case with traditional practice teaching, nor are the appraisals of the experience purely subjective and arbitrary.

From a purely descriptive point of view, microteaching is quite simple. Its basic elements are a teacher, the microclass (usually four or five pupils), a short lesson of five to twenty minutes, and predetermined objectives which have been stated for the particular microteaching occasion. These seemingly limited parameters can be applied to purposes ranging from training, to diagnostic evaluation, to experiment with innovation.

The advantages of flexibility offered by microteaching are matched and indeed at some points derived from concomitant advantages in economy. If the objectives that are dealt with in the microteaching setting were attempted within the traditional teacher-training environment, the required educational resources would make such an experience prohibitively expensive.

In creating a microteaching setting, five essential conditions are combined:

1. Actual teaching takes place, even though the teacher and students are brought together specifically for practice.
2. The complexity of the normal teaching situ-

ation, including the number of students, the scope of the presentation, and the length of class time, are deliberately reduced.

3. The focus of teacher training is reduced in order to accomplish a specific task, such as the practice of instructional skills or techniques of teaching, the mastery of specific curriculum materials, or the demonstration of a particular teaching methodology.

4. A high degree of control over such diverse elements as time, the use of students, and the methods of feedback and supervision is structured into the training situation.

5. The typical feedback dimension in teaching is greatly expanded through an immediate follow-up critique utilizing sources such as the trainee's own analysis, students' reactions, and video tape, with the assistance of a colleague or a supervisor. Generally, the evaluation focuses on one particular aspect of the teacher trainee's performance, and an attempt is made immediately to translate the suggested improvements into actual practice during a second microteaching session shortly after the critique conference.

Microteaching has evolved as one part of an experimental teacher-education program supported by the Kettering and Ford foundations over the past several years. This program included research which identified specific teach-

ing behaviors that can be isolated as observable skills as well as the development and testing of appraisal instruments that measured attainment of these skills. Microteaching itself was a by-product of this research, and continuing attempts are being made to identify new teaching skills and discover further experimental applications for microteaching.

During the past seven years, both the impact of microteaching and the evaluation instruments developed for assessing teacher trainee progress have been validated. For example, during one period of experimentation, teacher interns training ten hours per week in the microteaching clinic demonstrated a higher level of teaching competence at the end of eight weeks than did a similar group receiving separate instructions and experiences as teaching aides for an average of 20 to 25 hours per week.

In the six teaching skills subjected to experimental treatment within the microteaching setting, there were positive changes in intern performance. Teacher candidates in the microteaching clinic recorded a high acceptance of the microteaching technique and credited it with greatly increasing their perceptions of weaknesses and strengths in their own teaching performances. Significantly, performance in the microteaching situation accurately predicted subsequent success in classroom teaching.

When the defects of traditional teacher-training programs are considered, the economy of microteaching as a method of teacher training becomes more than apparent. In traditional programs, the teacher trainee must travel far and at too frequent intervals to get practice teaching experience, usually under spotty supervision with no student feedback. Microteaching offers the advantages of both the controlled laboratory environment and the reality of bona fide teaching. It is not a substitute for practice in teaching (for example, problems of discipline and classroom control cannot at present be dealt with in microteaching settings) but, certainly, it supplies some impressive alternatives such as close supervision, manageable objectives established according to individual training needs and progress, continuous diagnostic feedback, unprecedented opportunity for self-evaluation, immediate guidance in areas of demonstrated deficiency, and an opportunity to repeat a lesson conveniently as often as desirable.

microteaching setting can provide both beginning and experienced teachers with a safe practice environment for the development of competencies in the techniques and skills of the profession. Practice is an essential prerequisite for many learning activities; a significant portion of the typical teaching day is made up of activities that are learned and can be improved upon through practice. However, virtually all of the actual practice which occurs under the traditional preservice and inservice structure consists of on-the-job practice.

On-the-job practice in a normal classroom setting has severe limitations: (1) students are there to be taught, not practiced on, (2) practice of a specific skill or technique must fit well within a longer lesson specified for that particular day, and (3) there is only limited opportunity to receive feedback on the skill which is practiced. Teachers can utilize the practice setting of microteaching not only for skill training but also to try out new curriculum materials and instructional techniques.

As an instrument which focuses on specific teaching skills, the second major advantage of microteaching is its potential use as a means of providing improvement in the teacher's classroom performance. In the past, one of the major barriers to improvement has been the vagueness and mystique surrounding the teaching act. The fact that there is an artistic quality in an excellent teacher's performance does not preclude the need for a more precise way of describing and improving specific aspects of the teaching act. Teaching has been analyzed into various types of activities (for example: explaining, questioning, demonstrating), and the behaviors involved in certain teaching skills can be isolated and made the focus of training. After an individual teacher has identified a teaching activity or cluster of activities for improvement, microteaching provides a practice environment. By eliminating irrelevant concerns and providing immediate feedback from several sources, the microteaching setting allows the teacher to concentrate and thus make great progress in acquiring improved teaching proficiency in a very short period of time.

A third major contribution of microteaching is the development of a wide variety of readily available instructional skills models. Although there are many model teachers within the school setting, their influence on other teachers is diminished by their relative isolation within their classrooms and by the difficulty that a neophyte teacher has in separating an excellent teacher's performance into smaller, more digestible parts. A combination of video tapes focus-

Microteaching has many unique contributions it can make to education. First, the use of a

ing on a model teacher's performance in the classroom and a series of specifically designed microteaching video tapes demonstrating his individual technical skills would serve as excellent models for the beginning teacher.

Opportunities for new approaches to supervision is a fourth area in which microteaching contributes unique relevance. In schools today, no one really knows what teacher supervision has accomplished. Teachers are evaluated by principals during randomly selected class periods followed months later by other observations that usually involve entirely different circumstances—different instructional settings, different lessons, and perhaps even different classes, different grade levels, or different subject areas. Teachers have no real basis for perceiving, let alone changing, ineffective teaching patterns.

A microteaching clinic can provide a less threatening setting for supervision than traditional approaches to evaluation. Although most teachers are rather sensitive about having supervisors observe them in their classrooms, a microteaching clinic is considered neutral territory—the emphasis is on instructional help for the teacher. Whatever the specific goals of the microteaching lesson, both the teacher and the supervisor have a clear picture of those goals ahead of time. As a result, the critique period following the microlesson enables both the teacher and the supervisor to talk realistically about growth within the narrow range of mutual concern. Microteaching supervision tends to be highly specific, and the teacher can immediately apply a supervisor's suggestion in a reteach session. Microteaching could be applied to obtain consistent and constructive supervision and to train supervisors in helping teachers to improve their classroom performance.

A fifth use of a microteaching clinic within a school system is to test new instructional materials and techniques before their introduction to the classroom. Even the most experienced teacher can make serious misjudgments about the student experience or maturity required to learn a given set of materials or to function effectively under a new organizational structure. The microteaching clinic would provide an opportunity for quick judgments of student receptivity toward new curricular materials or instructional techniques. Teachers would also have the opportunity to gain mastery over materials before actual tryout in the classroom. To facilitate transition from self-contained classrooms to team teaching settings, microteaching provides opportunities for fledgling teaching teams to develop new materials and to test new modes of presentation while the other team members eval-

uate them. In the process, microteaching can serve as a catalytic element for bringing teachers together to discuss professional issues in light of a shared experience. It can be used as an effective neutral ground upon which to bring diverse elements within a faculty together to focus on the teaching-learning process.

From its inception as a simple device for the training of secondary school teachers in a few selected teaching skills, microteaching has grown to the point where multiple specific applications are being made at all levels of education, from the elementary school to the university. Preservice as well as inservice microteaching clinics and workshops have been established in many universities and public school systems throughout the country. Microteaching techniques and research have also been implemented with increasing frequency in new and different ways outside of teacher training, as in medical education.

There are numerous examples of usage within the field of education. At the University of Massachusetts, the regular preservice microteaching clinic is supplemented by an intensive summer workshop to train school personnel who can then return to their systems and establish microteaching clinics and practices on a local basis. At the University of Illinois, Arye Perlberg utilized microteaching in the preparation of vocational education personnel and in the refinement of teaching skills among university professors.¹ At the University of Maryland, David B. Young has used microteaching in teacher education centers to (1) train center faculty members to work with student teachers within the centers, and (2) to develop the teaching skills of student teachers. Young and his associates have also used microteaching and selected self-analysis techniques at Johns Hopkins University to individualize preservice training and internships for prospective teachers.²

The use of microteaching to train Peace Corps volunteers is an excellent example of its flexibility with unique teacher-training objectives. The microteaching clinic was adapted specifically to the preparation of the Peace Corps volunteers for the Philippines and has since become a

¹ Arye Perlberg, Professor of Education at Technion Institute in Haifa, Israel, was a Visiting Research Professor at the University of Illinois during the 1967–68 academic year.

² For a detailed discussion of the work performed by Young and his associates, see pp. 186–89 of this issue of *Theory Into Practice*.

model for other Peace Corps training programs. Objectives for the Philippine Peace Corps clinic were (1) to equip the volunteers with teaching skills directly related to English as a second language, (2) to acquaint them with special materials for teaching English as a second language, and (3) to provide a reality test during which the volunteers could decide if they really wanted to become elementary school teachers in the Philippines for the next two years. Since the microclasses were made up of Philippine students who had been in the United States less than six months, the microteaching sessions were much more directly related to the reality to be faced by the Peace Corps volunteers than would have been possible in a regular classroom situation.

An example of how microteaching concepts and techniques have been utilized in counseling and guidance has been provided by Allen Ivey. He and his associates³ developed the concept of microcounseling, which is a video method of training counselors in the basic skills of counseling. Microcounseling training procedures focus on these skills: attending behavior, reflection of feeling, and summarization of feeling.

Microteaching techniques and principles have been used with some effectiveness in the area of medical education. Hilliard Jason, director of the Office of Medical Education Research and Development in the College of Human Medicine at Michigan State University, has utilized microteaching techniques in assisting medical students to acquire the skills of relating to patients. He is developing a series of process skills utilizing patient simulation, video taped patient-doctor relationships, immediate video playback, and supervisor-doctor critique and analysis.

Additional areas exist, both within and outside of education, where microteaching techniques and principles appear to be useful. For example, microteaching could be useful within education for preemployment prediction as a framework for selection or rating of experienced teachers seeking employment within a school district. This concept could also be extended to include the evaluation of current employees for possible promotion; however, it would be necessary to indicate clearly to teachers those occasions when their microteaching sessions would be utilized as the basis for evaluating their competency.

Microteaching principles and techniques might be effectively applied in the training of admin-

istrators to improve presentation skills, particularly in the area of administrator-parent communications. Such prior practice, combined with an effective supervisory critique of the administrator's micro-presentation, might result in a significant improvement in the administrator's ability to communicate with his community and might also result in an increase in the number of bond issues which are subsequently approved.

Another example of the possible application of microteaching is the training of personnel such as secretaries or receptionists. They might be trained in specific interpersonal relations skills to become more effective in dealing with the public. Teacher aides who would be working primarily with students (e.g., in open laboratories, resource centers, or cafeteria duty) could also receive such training.

Potential areas outside of education would include those service areas where information is obtained by a specialist from individual clients or from groups of clients such as social workers, psychiatrists, and police officers. Inservice teachers in diverse preparation institutions (hospitals, police academies, the military, and schools preparing social workers) could increase their competence through the use of microteaching procedures. Microteaching can also help to train people in the techniques of oratory and debate. Law school students could practice the skills of set induction, closure, and probing questions before a small audience. High school students, politicians, and ministers could improve speaking skills in a microteaching setting in which they could practice specific speaking skills on a small audience.

The normal classroom setting contains so many variables that precise research is virtually precluded. A major attraction of the microteaching format is that it simplifies the teaching act and provides an opportunity for real experimental control and manipulation of variables.

As a teacher training technique, microteaching is in its infancy, and many issues related to its most effective use have not as yet been resolved. There is no convincing research evidence regarding the optimal number of students for microteaching sessions. It would be useful to examine the impact of student characteristics upon the success or failure of the teacher training session and the impact of a variety of different timing and sequencing arrangements within the microteaching setting. Finally, how to increase the effectiveness of the self-confrontation cri-

³ The original research was conducted while Ivey was the Director of the Counseling Center at Colorado State University. He is currently at the University of Massachusetts.

tique and the feedback that it supplies in training teachers to acquire specific teaching skills must be determined. The important point here is that microteaching as a teacher training technique should proceed in light of a careful investigation of the contributions of each of its components.

The microteaching situation suggests that a second major category for research experimentation might focus upon the process of learning itself. Some of the learning situations which might be investigated relate to the use of models in the training of specific teaching skills. As noted in Allen and Ryan,⁴ the key issues which might be examined are as follows. (1) Is a model of a skill a more efficient aid to learning if it contains the positive and negative instances of the skill or if it contains only the positive instances? (2) To what extent does extreme exaggeration of teaching techniques in a model add to or detract from its usefulness in a training situation? (3) Is transfer of the skill to the real classroom by the teacher trainee improved by the use of models in several different contextual situations (e.g., one in a microteaching situation, one in a regular classroom, and one in a large group lecture hall)? (4) Are modeling procedures more effective in producing learning if they contain segments which show the model being reinforced for performing the desired skill?

The supervisory sessions within microteaching also provide an opportunity for investigating some basic learning phenomena related to self-confrontation situations. Examples of the kinds of issues involved are: (1) the effectiveness of various schedules of reinforcement in training particular skills; (2) the effectiveness of different verbal and nonverbal reinforcers in training particular skills; (3) the relative training effectiveness of pointing out positive and/or negative instances of a training use of a particular skill in a self-confrontation situation; (4) the effects of training on different attitudinal sets and expectancy on the part of a supervisor; and (5) the investigation of supervisory techniques and cueing devices which can eventually eliminate the role of the supervisor and can make the trainee himself an adequate critic of his own teaching behavior.

A third major category of microteaching research would focus on the interactions between students and teachers. Teacher trainers must be-

gin to face the problems of determining the relationships between teacher performance and student performance so that they can build empirically based justification for the objectives of their training programs. Video tapes on which the students and the teacher are recorded simultaneously will make it possible to do this. In addition to observing the immediate effect upon student behavior of a particular teaching skill, appropriate achievement measures could be given to the microclass students to determine the long range impact of the teaching skill upon student learning. As researchers begin to gather evidence in this area, we can begin to utilize teacher training programs where the skills, attitudes, and understandings required by prospective teachers are supported by the empirical evidence of their efficacy in producing learning.

Microteaching can and should be used as a research tool to investigate which training strategies are most effective for teacher trainees with different backgrounds and aptitudes. At the same time, it can be used as a training strategy to give individual teachers the kind of teaching most suited to their particular abilities. Such research into alternate training routes should provide educators with a means of approaching the problem of individualizing instruction within teacher education. There is a strong probability that teachers who are prepared in such an individualized program will subsequently be much more able to develop and implement individualized instructional approaches with their students.

While the four specific microteaching research categories which have been discussed are only those areas which today appear to be most fruitful, the most promising thing about microteaching as a research device is the extent to which it is open to new implementation and as yet unconceived experimental issues.

Microteaching stands today as one of the few experimental techniques which by its very structure encourages a combination of theory and practice, research and training, innovation and implementation. The phenomenal growth and diversity of microteaching should not obscure the fact that the technique is still in its infancy. The ultimate potential of this most promising tool for both research and training depends entirely upon our imagination and our ingenuity in developing and testing new ways of applying microteaching principles and techniques to the problems of education.

⁴ Allen, Dwight W., and Ryan, Kevin. *Microteaching*. Reading, Massachusetts: Addison-Wesley Publishing Co. (in press).