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ECHOES FROM THE FIELD

Joe R. Chapel and Ronald A. Crowell

One of the most valid criticisms of traditional teacher training programs is the inability to place students in actual practice teaching situations at a time in their training when the experience would be most meaningful. Often the student takes a class in the methods of teaching reading in his sophomore or junior year and then does not make any application of this learning until the last part of his senior year when student teaching takes place. Even though many classes in education encourage visitation and observation, the experience is sporadic and incomplete.

The Teacher Education Department at Western Michigan University is experimenting with a new program aimed at eliminating this problem. It is the intention of the program to allow classes in methods and student teaching to occur simultaneously. The students in this program are juniors who are taking three classes: Teaching of Reading, Teaching of Social Studies, and Teaching and Learning. During the same semester these students are observing or teaching two full days per week. During the first part of the semester the students are observing and are developing background in methods of teaching. Within the semester they are given an opportunity to participate and finally to teach. Ample time is provided for them to discuss their teaching problems with their professors and school personnel. In terms of enthusiasm, ideas produced by students, questions generated in classroom discussions, and effectiveness with teachers, the program is indeed promising.

Western Michigan University, along with other Teacher Training Institutions, is attempting to provide more varied, extensive, and meaningful teacher education programs. If the future teacher has had an opportunity not only to talk about reading and observe reading but actually teach reading and discuss its problems with specialists, it is believed that the student will be better trained.