

Faculty Research Edition

of

The Savannah State College Bulletin

Published by

THE SAVANNAH STATE COLLEGE

Volume 15, No. 2 Savannah, Georgia December, 1961

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The Savannah State College Bulletin is published in October, December, February, March, April, and May by Savannah State College. Entered as second-class matter, December 16, 1947, at the Post Office at Savannah, Georgia under the Act of August 24, 1912.

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Improving Teacher Education Through Selective Recruitment and Admission: A Review of Research Findings

by

Velma V. Watters

That a need for strengthening programs of teacher education exists is obvious. That college-wide responsibility is needed for this task is becoming increasingly evident each day. That the improvement of recruitment and admission practices in teacher education is being explored with vigor today is revealed by the voluminous research on this subject. Therefore, this study has been designed to acquaint the reader with findings from existing studies in the area of selection, recruitment, and admission to teacher education.

In order to make a more thorough appraisal of the program of teacher education there is the urgent need, it seems, to re-examine recruitment and selective admission practices to determine whether the most effective procedures are being adequately utilized; to decide what next steps to take; to consider seriously meaningful ways of working together to bring about change; to secure and skillfully use suitable resources and facilities until substantial improvement is made.

THE PROBLEM

If teacher education institutions will give serious attention to procedures employed in the process of selective recruitment and admission, one of their primary purposes will be accomplished.

Horton (5) points this out by saying:

As it now stands some rather poor specimens are permitted to enter the ranks of student teaching. Some have no desire and no intention to teach while others are physically and emotionally unstable and unfit. The obvious cases are easily detected but little formal effort is made to analyze personalities, detect their strengths and weaknesses, and screen and guide students accordingly. Careful selection, specific and scholarly preparation and life-long dedication—these constitute the acceptable roots into every recognized profession . . .

Barnett and Martin (1) emphasized the need for selection in teacher education:

. . .an honest look at teachers, sometimes forces us to believe that sometimes, persons enter teaching because of emptiness in their own lives which they, unconsciously probably, try to fill through entering into and dominate the lives of others. Because we believe that teachers perpetuate their kind, we should seek and deliberately plan to attract only the most capable, creative students . . . We do not know all the criteria for selecting such individuals.

At present many poor prospects are permitted to go into teaching. Some of these persons are status seekers. Others are following the dictates of parents; while many are using the profession as a means to an end. According to Shane, Callis, and Meridith (7) money, time, frustration and disappointment on the part of many students could be abolished if high standards of selection were followed.

Barnett and Martin (1) also assert:

The usual practice in many colleges and universities is to give tests to freshmen to evaluate achievement, aptitude, mental maturity, and personal adjustment. How often these test results are used by the teacher of the students would probably be an interesting statistic. Perhaps, it would be correct to say that this information is utilized, for the most part, when students have real difficulties and expert diagnosis is needed to effect a cure. The test data are infrequently used in the prevention of difficulties.

In relation to this problem, Barnett and Martin (1) state:

Despite high standards of selection in many institutions, there is a decided need to devise even better means of identifying factors which provide a reliable basis for deciding who shall be admitted to professional training.

Many problems await today's teachers. There is the problem of individual differences in children which confronts them. Again ways of providing for the gifted child need to be explored. And the search for enriching the experience and encouraging the full development of every child is a demand of the times.

Thelen (7) states:

. . . the real problem is to do a better job of preparing teachers and that the best way to get more students into teaching is to make the program of preparing for teaching exciting, challenging, and rewarding. . . . It is probably accurate to say that the preparation of teachers begin at birth, but since this seems to take in quite a lot of territory, let's compromise and say that preparation begins with the first entry of the child into school.

Witty (10) emphasized the need for guidance in teacher education:

Guidance by informed and competent adults is necessary throughout the gifted child's career . . . During the past few years there has been a trend toward special plans of school organization to care for the bright student. For example, special classes for the gifted pupil have been organized recently in a number of cities. We should recognize, however, that superior and potentially gifted pupils are found in almost all classrooms. Moreover, every teacher can do much to enrich the experience and to encourage the full development of such students. Perhaps the greatest possibility for enrichment lies in the field of reading.

Eckel (3) states his belief on this matter:

Perhaps the problem is that our main concern has been with the learners' veneer—gathering facts and techniques—therefore, we do not see what else might be done.

THE PURPOSE

This intensive search in volumes including investigations that have been made results from the multiplicity of problems existing in programs designed to prepare teachers. Specifically, it attempts to acquaint the reader with various approaches that have been employed for improving the quality of teaching through selective admission and recruitment and to alert the education profession as a whole to its selection and recruitment responsibilities. The writer contends that every teacher education institution may and should follow these practices.

This is not a new idea, like many other cultural changes this idea has been suggested by others.

Edson and Glotzbach (4) state:

If a college is ready to accept its responsibility in selection it has taken the first step.

These findings are a review of several studies, but not a compendium of all the available information about selective admission procedures. They have been carefully chosen and compiled for the purpose of revealing what has been done in some situations and what might take place from an experimental point of view in a given situation. At the same time they indicate what could be accomplished if full use were made of what is already known about dealing with the problem. It is quite probable that they remind us of things we know already.

Edson and Glotzbach (4) make this assertion:

Through selective recruitment and admission there is opportunity to help obtain more persons with the physical and emotional health, interests and intellectual capabilities that are necessary if one is to find the satisfactions and the challenges that lie ahead in working at a true professional level . . . that . . . Securing adequate members of students with appropriate interests and abilities will be more certain of attainment as attention is given to personal qualities and sound guidance procedures . . . ; that the purpose of recruitment is to identify students who should apply for admission to a particular kind of college and university and then to do whatever must be done to see that an optimum number of those students actually apply for admission. The purpose of selection in higher education is to select from the applicants the persons who in any given school will benefit the most personally and at the same time develop the skills, attitudes, interests, and knowledge that will make them of maximum social value . . . The college should

select students so as to reduce the drop-out rate and insure that faculty time will be devoted to expanding staff and physical plant to accommodate those students who are likely to discontinue after one, two, or three years.

Much that has been learned from current studies along with the various experiments in teacher education may be incorporated into a direct attack on improving the selection of teachers. Since this era demands a creative approach to teaching, it is the writer's hope that this documentary instrument will closely coordinate some of the previous studies, which have related to selective admission but have often been confusing rather than clarifying and filed rather than used.

Further, it is the desire that this review will reveal approaches, results, and trends relative to the all important task of improving the quality of teaching. We need a fuller understanding of the problem and its nature.

There can be little doubt that there is room for much research in the area of identifying promising new approaches to selection in teacher education.

Cronbach (2) states:

Schools today are more effective than ever but we need systematic research to keep pace with social changes, Fact-finding and fact-interpreting are essential to efficient operation.

THE NEED

Improvement of teacher education programs has long been one of our concerns. Some college and university campuses have emphasized improvement of their over-all programs in terms of trends and general approaches. However, the details of certain aspects of their pre-service and in-service education for the most part have gone unchanged. The time has come for screening those persons who wish to prepare to teach in today's and tomorrow's schools. We should concentrate our energy and community resources on those who show promise and reject and guide into other fields those who do not seem to possess the necessary qualities for success in teaching.

Since there is need for more critical study of component parts of teacher education, it would seem that an attempt to select persons for teaching suggests a need to decide where the start for improving the education of prospective teachers should be. Further, it suggests assistance in the directions for goal setting, and those responsible for supplying good teachers need to become engaged in doing more research, placement, follow-up, and evaluating. This also necessitates increased concentration on ways of working effectively with students, counseling with them, and doing dynamic, creative teaching.

Barnett and Martin (1) in their description of this need say:

Teaching others how to teach means more than a set of "recipes" or "devices" which imply that the user

merely discovers truth and applies it in all situations. The role of professional education should increasingly help students acquire the kinds of understandings, attitudes, skills, and abilities that can be taken to new problems that demand creative answers. A clearer understanding of the specifics of this role would probably result in improved instruction.

If improvement is to be effected there must be careful scrutiny of students who enter teaching. An institutional philosophy guiding the selection of students for teacher preparation needs to be established. A look at guidance tools and techniques for this undertaking needs to be taken so that the staff through guidance may encourage those who show promise for becoming good teachers and eliminate those who apparently lack such potential.

Edson and Glotzbach (4) emphasized this need in this statement:

The time has come for each teacher education institution to think through its admission policies, to evaluate the adequacy of its selective criteria as they are related to the success of its students, and to be willing to apply the results of research that will help achieve the purpose of the institution.

Edson and Glotzbach (4) further assert:

. . . It is well to realize the practical importance of applying what we now know to identifying persons likely not to succeed.

Calling to mind again the central purpose of this section—to reveal the present status of the need for improvement in teacher education—the need for improved ways of admitting students to teacher education is clear. It is also clear that institutions of higher learning face a myriad of problems as a result of this fact. These problems center around the recruiting, admitting and selecting of students to programs preparing students to teach. It must be understood that a good system of guidance is necessary for making that program effective.

THE SCOPE

After listing some of the advances and trends in teacher education, I turn to two basic concerns. I wonder quite seriously whether institutions are interested in keeping abreast with these trends, whether the programs for preparing teachers in our schools are adequate, and whether we are interested in those new approaches which will net better selection. One has the right—the responsibility to ask such questions.

I have cited existing weaknesses in today's teachers and in many of our teacher-preparation programs. I have suggested the need for getting better teachers in the profession. It is obvious to most of us that many people who lack the qualifications needed are permitted to enter the profession. At best it is not easy to discuss the denial of persons who have no potential for teaching when our nation's schools are in such grave need of teachers.

How difficult it must be for that institution which is just embarking on a program of selection to change its isolated pattern of admitting 'all' and graduating 'some' after experiencing many drop-outs.

Their greatest task—and probably an unexpected one—is instilling a sense of responsibility for improving the quality of those who prepare to teach and to avoid using public or private resources in preparing prospects who are unlikely to become successful teachers.

Collaborations can contribute much toward what we are trying to do in terms of present practices, and what implications there are for the future. Institutions need to involve the entire faculty personnel in the job of selecting, admitting and guiding and each individual faculty person needs to accept his responsibility in this college-wide venture.

Eckel (3) echoed this need for the entire college staff to assume responsibility in selection and admission by this statement:

There is growing evidence that when people work together on problems important to them in a supportive friendly climate relatively free from threat and fear, they grow in their basic qualities of human personality which are so important in the teaching process. If, however, colleges are to stress these deeper qualities, it is necessary that they give up some of their window-dressing orientation.

Any situation is improvable. We must try to see things as they are; we must be willing to explore and experiment; we must cease politicking which often causes a loss of sense of direction or perspective; we must be willing to depart from set and familiar ways of doing things which so often require the services of the same individuals; we must try to utilize the abilities of many people.

Research may contribute toward improving a situation. In considering the problems of teacher education, Horton (5) points out:

The second problem . . . is a lack of research and experimentation. There are a few areas in higher education where experimental research is more needed than in teacher education. With more of it the administrative personnel would have a better basis for securing needed funds if they could present to the "purse strings" group, empirical evidence of the values to be derived from (for example, let's say) additional staff and supplies.

. . . We have been so busy with little things that must be done that there is little time for research or carefully planned evaluation studies . . . Our most effective leadership could come from the State Department of Education. This department alone is in a position to understand the educational interests, points of view, and problems at all levels. Hence it should be the greatest unifying factor in the planning and operation of the student teaching program. This department alone has the background, the information, and the authority to sponsor needed studies, to mediate conflicting interests, and

to bring about a well-ordered program of student teaching.

Also noteworthy are Thelen's (7) comments:

. . . organizations for the program stretches far beyond the institutional walls. In a complex and sensitive operation like training teachers we need lots of help and the help must be trained to make its contribution.

Recognizing the need for continued improvement in teacher education programs, this presentation has focused attention upon a few findings. It has suggested that immediate consideration be given to them so that better selective recruitment and admission practices, and sounder and workable programs in institutions preparing teachers may be developed.

SOME RESEARCH FINDINGS

Research already done points out that good selection and recruitment practices free professors, and especially directors of student teaching from having to weed out students who should never have been admitted to teacher education courses. It has been shown further that there is a need to select potentially good teachers and that a selection program can enhance the teaching program by reaching out, identifying and encouraging students with potential to come into the profession.

MacLean, Gowan, and Gowan (6) indicate that the following conditions need to be met for developing an adequate selection program:

The selection of potential good teachers has been long recognized as a requisite for effective staffing of our schools. We have given lip-service to the idea, have sometimes developed our own concepts of what the process might be, but have seldom tested the validity of such processes as we have devised.

The thorny question of what characteristics constitute the potentially good teacher lies at the root of much of our uncertainty. There is first the necessity to identify and analyze good teaching itself.

MacLean, Gowan and Gowan (6) also report on practices followed at the University of California in Los Angeles:

Each student entering a credential program is now required to register with the Teacher Selection and Counseling Service as early as possible in his professional program.

He takes a series of tests including the *Cooperative English Test*, an *arithmetic test*, *The American Council Psychological Examination*, *The Allport Study of Values*, *The Minnesota Multiphasic Inventory*, and *certain experimental forms* . . . All credentials candidates must also

complete a preliminary *health check*. In an *interview the accumulated data are interpreted in the light of the student's plan*, and alternative teaching areas are explored where they seem more appropriate. Those students needing further examination, *therapy, or experience* are referred to appropriate *agencies*; and those of *exceptional* promise are *referred* to the central Counseling Service . . . for vocational *redirection*. Those accepted are then cleared for credential analysis. At the time of application for student teaching another physical examination is given; the case record is reviewed; those who have met all the requirements are cleared; those with remedial work in process are tentatively approved pending a second review; and those who have disqualifying defects that are not remedial, or who have not undertaken the remedial measures recommended, are disapproved. All recommendations for disqualification are made to the Dean by a faculty committee . . .

In a coast-to-coast patterned study of 785 institutions engaged in training teachers, Stout (8) found:

. . . Eighty-three per cent of the respondents believe there should be selective admission to teacher education. More than 88 per cent think a workable program for periodic review of students can be set up and maintained, many institutions indicating they are already operating such programs. Successful completion of courses and honor point requirements is considered by more than three-fourths of the respondents to be only one of several requirements for admission to student teaching, and by 65 per cent for certification. Between 20 and 30 per cent of the respondents still think academic achievement should be the primary (though not the sole) requirement . . .

. . . Clear patterns are apparent in the identification of the five most important criteria for use in selective admission and retention. An outstanding "first" is *emotional stability* (N-674), with *moral and ethical fitness* (593), general intelligence (591) demonstrated ability to work with children (498) and *professional interest and motivation* (480) following the order named. It is to be expected that 90 per cent of the institutions would use as a criterion for recommendation for certification, satisfactory completion of general, special and professional education course requirements as set by the state. But in the light of the *high percentage urging emotional stability as a first consideration*, the actual use of it as a criterion for recommendation by *not quite 49 per cent* is disappointing. In comparison of grade averages of teacher-education students with those of students in other professional and pre-professional curricula, and with liberal arts students, only 0.5 of 1 per cent indicate

teacher-education student averages lower than those of the other groups. Between 11 and 14 per cent of the institutions lack adequate bases for comparison; another 14 per cent report grade averages for teacher-education students *higher* than those of other groups, both professional and liberal arts. Two-thirds of the institutions report grade averages as about the same in the various groups . . .

. . . In spite of the high percentage of respondents who believe in selective admission, approximately one-half the institutions permit a student to enter the teacher-education program if he has been admitted to the institution (and less than 10 per cent of all institutions have general admission requirements of graduation in the top third or better of the high school class).

STAFF ACTIVITIES

Our concern here is chiefly with the function of the student personnel staff in the selection and retention process. These activities seem to cluster about seven steps in the entire procedure. Stout (8) listed the following: (1) pre-college contact (2) orientation and admission to the institution, (3) admission to teacher education, (4) periodic review, (5) admission to student teaching, (6) recommendation for certification, (7) placement and follow-up.

. . . thirty-six per cent of the institutions report the custom of holding joint meetings of college and high school counselors. (Research in this area may well be fruitful.) Such activity seems most common in the Middle States Association area and least common in the Southern area. As to type, teachers colleges are far ahead, with one-half having plans in operation for consultation among college and high school counselors . . .

. . . in questions probing pre-college contacts specifically in the area of recruiting for teacher education it becomes evident that though more than two-fifths have no contact beyond the institution's general recruitment, more than two-fifths of the divisions of teacher education do contact prospective candidates during the high school senior year. Almost one-half have college orientation courses which present teaching to students who have not yet selected a profession; about one-third have an orientation course specifically designed for students who have decided to prepare for teaching.

. . . over one-half either require an interview before admission to teacher education or interview most candidates. The burden falls on the head of the education department or some faculty member in education (about three-fifths), with trained counselors from the institution's student personnel staff used by 9 per cent, and a counselor from the division of education used by 9 per

cent for such interviewing. Nine per cent use a faculty committee even for initial interviewing . . . (It should be noted that these per cents are not mutually exclusive, for some institutions apparently use 2 or 3 interviewers, but do not consider them as functioning as a committee.)

. . . almost half the institutions make no use of the period between the student's admission to the institution and his admission to the teacher-education program for individual testing or remedial activities. Though 23 per cent indicate no special screening for teacher education and 19 per cent state none were refused admission to the program, one-third of the institutions refused admission to between 1 and 10 per cent of those who sought it in the year 1952-1953. One-tenth refused admission between 11 and 25 per cent; 4 per cent of the institutions excluded more than 25 per cent, some excluding more than 50 per cent of applicants.

. . . once the student is admitted, 36 per cent review his record at the end of each semester or quarter. The most frequently used period of review is just prior to admission to student teaching, when 52 per cent of the institutions assess the prospective teacher. It is encouraging to note that faculty committees rather than individuals are employed in 28 per cent of the institutions for the purpose of periodic review. Teachers colleges make far more use of the institutions. With the exception of institutions whose enrollment is over 5,000, 52 per cent of which use faculty committees, there is no significant difference among the various sizes of schools as to committee use.

. . . *satisfactory completion of prerequisite courses is still the single most frequent used measure* of readiness for student teaching, though 15 per cent require demonstration through performance in a laboratory situation, and written and oral evidence of grasp of teaching responsibility.

. . . between 1 and 5 per cent of the students are eliminated prior to *student teaching* by half the institutions. Six per cent or more are eliminated in 20 per cent of the institutions. It is interesting to note that from 6 to 10 per cent of the students drop or are counseled out of the program prior to student teaching in 17 per cent of the institutions. Five per cent of the colleges eliminate more than 30 per cent before this point is reached. The tendency, nation-wide is toward the positive approach of "counseling out" rather than the negative rejection.

. . . twelve per cent of the institutions report they are required by law or charter to certify all graduates. Expression of the philosophy that rights of the individual

make selection for admission to teacher preparation unjustifiable is given by more than 7 per cent of the respondents. In as much as many states operating under similar laws do select for teaching, and all states that have law or medical schools do select for these professions, it must be obvious that our first step is to gain recognition for teaching as the important profession it is. Next, attention may be directed to the rights of individual pupils to have the best teachers that careful selection and preparation can provide. We are reminded, too, that though the individual has a right to as much education as he can profit from, and of the type from which he can profit, he also has a right to careful counseling and guidance based on his capabilities and needs, rather than his being permitted to enter a field for which he is by personality or ability unqualified and in which his contribution to society is minimized and his individual satisfactions and happiness are jeopardized.

. . . marriage and military service play an important role, of course, but research is needed, also, to determine whether there is significant difference in numbers failing to teach among classes where a selective program has operated, and where there has been little or no selection.

. . . the paucity of follow-up studies being made by institutions points also to another great need, both in terms of effective guidance, counseling, and instruction. There is conclusive evidence in several studies to indicate that inadequate placement procedures are responsible for sizable losses to the profession of well-prepared teachers.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

I have cited the need for continued improvement in teacher education programs. I have pointed out a need for an improved quality of teachers. I have lifted some studies on this subject from research which has been done and I have asserted that teacher education stands at the crossroads—the entire college staff needs to become involved.

This condition we can rectify. I have two recommendations to make which, if put into effect, would go a long way toward rectifying the situation. First, teacher education institutions need to recruit better quality and a greater quantity of good teachers. This is pointed up in this study which basically is a general sifting of studies which have been done in this area. I offer a second suggestion that all teacher education programs use selective admission to these curriculums. I am firmly convinced that it is in order. The issue is clear cut and must be faced honestly. There needs to be new criteria for those who prepare themselves for teaching careers. It is not enough that these applicants have only 'admission to college admits.' There should and must be a selective admission to teacher education.

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