

Practice Teaching in Canada's Independent Schools

Abstract

Recognizing the need to broaden our understandings of the nature of the process by which student teachers are inducted into the profession, several teacher educators have called upon researchers to give special attention to the varying contexts of student teaching. This study reports the experiences as supervisors of practice teaching of a unique group of educators, the headmasters and headmistresses of over 50 of Canada's private or independent schools. We analyze their responses and compare them with the experiences of the authors as teacher educators in Nova Scotia. We discuss the advantages and disadvantages associated with practice teaching in the traditional private school.

Résumé

Reconnaissant la nécessité d'approfondir notre compréhension du processus selon lequel nous initiions les stagiaires à la profession, plusieurs formateurs de maîtres ont invité les chercheurs en éducation de porter une attention toute particulière aux divers contextes de la formation pratique. Nous rapportons dans cette étude les expériences—dans leur rôle de surveillants de formation pratique d'un groupe spécial d'éducateurs—des directeurs et directrices de plus de 50 écoles privées ou indépendantes du Canada. Nous analysons leurs réponses et les comparons aux expériences des chercheurs comme formateurs de maîtres en Nouvelle-Écosse. Nous discutons des avantages et des désavantages associés à la formation pratique dans l'école privée traditionnelle.

Student teaching has been, and remains, an integral component of preservice programmes for prospective elementary and secondary school teachers in Canada. Despite this fact, the current state of our knowledge base related to the influence of student teaching on the process of learning to teach is less than satisfactory.

Zeichner (1986) suggested that this may be due, in part, to the lack of attention by researchers to the contexts of student teaching. Similarly, Hersh, Hull, and Leighton (1982) observed that placement sites for practice teaching vary on a number of dimensions that may have different effects and make different contributions to the student teacher's growth, and they called for research into the characteristics of placement sites. Recently, Calderhead (1989) has suggested that one category of research that might inform our understanding of reflection and its role in teacher education was that of the teacher training context. In their study of social strategies and institutional control in the socialization of beginning teachers, Zeichner and Tabachnick (1985) concluded that the common assumption regarding the existence of one homogeneous culture into which all new teachers are socialized is not a reality and that the practice of describing only central tendencies in induction into teaching cannot illuminate the diversity which characterizes induction practices. Similarly, Feiman-Nemser and Buchmann (1987) reported that cooperating teachers set the affective and intellectual tone and also shape what student teachers learn by the way they conceive and carry out their role as teacher educators. School ethos and faculty norms, according to these researchers, may be sources of influence as well.

Independent Schools in Canada

Most students in teacher education programmes enrol in them, in part, to qualify for certification for teaching within the public school system, and, as a rule, their practica are conducted in one or more public school settings. In different parts of Canada, however, a second, or in provinces which maintain a publicly-funded separate school system, a third option exists as a source for student teaching experiences: the private or "independent" school sector. This includes institutions with a specifically and primarily religious orientation, such as Jewish, fundamentalist Christian, and private Roman Catholic schools, private venture schools dedicated to serving special student populations, such as the physically or learning disabled, or which are based on a variety of experimental pedagogies, such as Montessori or Waldorf schools, and a number of boarding and day schools modelled most closely on the traditional British public school. The majority of schools which participated in this study could be classified as members of the last group. Although they are distributed unevenly geographically among and within provinces, the total number of independent schools and the percentage of students attending independent schools have

grown steadily in recent years and show little sign of diminishing (Edmonds, 1981; Bergen, 1989).

Rationale for Study

The present study was predicated on the belief that independent schools constitute an unique environment which provides special challenges and valuable opportunities to student teachers and also poses its own particular problems for cooperating teachers and university supervisors. It was hoped that the perceptions of officials in independent schools would contribute to our understanding of the ecology of teacher education and the importance of the context of the practicum by illustrating the character of the student-teaching experience in independent schools.

The significance of the independent school as a partner in student teaching has not attracted serious attention from educational researchers. While substantial research has been conducted on teaching practica in public schools, a review of major educational indices over the past fifteen years has yielded but a single reference (Bonanno, Feigley, & Dougherty, 1978) to a book, article, or report bearing directly upon practice teaching in nonpublic schools. Perhaps too few placements are made in independent schools by comparison to those made in the public system to excite interest in the subject. It is clear, however, from the work cited above, educational researchers have begun to question the assumption that the experiences of student teachers do not differ greatly from one sector to another.

This study sought to determine (1) the extent to which teaching practica were carried out in the independent schools of English Canada; (2) the impressions of independent school officials as to the success of those practica; and (3) the views of the headmasters and headmistresses about the advantages, disadvantages, special opportunities, and specific problems associated with practice teaching in their schools.

Although we recognized that independent schools in English Canada include a variety of small sectarian and alternative schools, it was decided to study at this time only those schools which were members of the Canadian Association of Independent Schools (CAIS). This organization, which exists to promote communication between and advance the interests of its member schools, represents most of the older, larger, and more prestigious independent schools in the country. It is comprised of 56 member schools from eight of Canada's ten provinces, distributed as follows: British Columbia, 10; Prairies, 4; Ontario, 25; Quebec, 12; and Atlantic, 5. This paper is based on a survey of the 56 CAIS-member schools, from which we received 50 responses, representing almost 90% of the CAIS membership.

The Study and its Findings

Methodology and survey results.

A ten-item survey instrument was prepared by the authors for this study. It included items designed to gather the perceptions of participants concerning various aspects of the student-teaching experience, ranging from “subject areas taught” to “advice to teacher educators”. The survey was mailed to all CAIS-member schools, with one follow-up request to nonrespondents. For the purposes of this paper, the results of the survey are reported together, where appropriate, for those schools that have now or have had student teachers (n=39) and those that have not (n=11). More than three-quarters of the schools responding to the questions currently take or have taken in the past some student teachers, and 40% (n=23) of the schools reporting indicate that they take more than two student teachers per year. These facts suggest that the independent sector is, in general, open to having practica conducted within their schools and that the number of places available may be greater than is often suspected.

Over one-third of the schools surveyed indicated their willingness to take student teachers in most major subject areas. Several, however, took student teachers only in what might be seen as supplementary fields, such as art, music, and physical education, areas which tend to be understaffed normally in independent (and in the first two cases, indeed, in public) schools. (Due to the large number of tables, they do not always follow immediately their reference within the text.)

Table 1

Curriculum areas of student teachers (n=39)

English	(22)
Mathematics	(22)
Science	(22)
Foreign Languages	(17)
(all four above)	(15)
Social Studies	(20)
Physical Education	(12)
Elementary	(9)
Other	(9)

Of the schools which accepted student teachers, almost 60% (n=23) took student teachers from only one teacher education institution, while the remainder (n=16) accepted student teachers from two or more institutions. For many of the schools involved in the survey, only one teacher education institution was nearby; in other cases, the schools had been contacted by only one institution. In only a few instances did the respondents indicate (and we did not ask for) the names of institutions with which they preferred to work or those with which they did not prefer to cooperate.

Those schools which did not take student teachers were asked why they had not done so.

Table 2

Why schools do not accept student teachers (n=11)

Never been asked	(7)
Objections from parents	(3)
Objections from staff	(2)
Provincial prohibition	(1)
Obligation to provide only quality teaching	(1)
"Never wanted to"	(1)

Over half of the responding schools which have not taken student teachers have simply never been asked to cooperate in the practicum. Negative attitudes toward cooperation are minimal.

Of the schools which accept student teachers (n=39), just over one-half (n=20) reported a number of terms and conditions of employment, most of which square with the popular image of the independent school.

It is clear that the independent schools expect their teachers generally to serve as models for students, if only through outward appearances in some cases. Student teachers in independent schools can expect to have to meet a number of nonacademic as well as academic standards.

The respondents were asked to consider a number of aspects of the student teaching experience and indicate if they believed student teachers would have greater opportunities for their realization at their school or at a public school. Most of the respondents expressed the belief that their

Table 3

Special conditions for student teachers which differ from those set by public schools (n=39)

Adherence to a dress code	(15)
Involvement in extra-curricular activities	(7)
Must live in residence	(6)
Adherence to school philosophy	(4)
Conform to "generally accepted social practice"	(4)
Attendance at chapel	(2)
Non-smoking	(1)
"commitment to literacy"	(1)
No special conditions	(19)

schools offered student teachers significant advantages over public schools in opportunities to engage in inquiry-based instruction, to interact with gifted and talented students, to individualize assignments, to know better their students and their academic histories, to employ discussion-oriented activities, to work on a collegial basis with other teachers, and to develop a personal philosophy of education. On the other hand, public schools offered greater opportunities for student teachers to work with learning disabled and other special students. Those surveyed saw little difference between independent and public schools with respect to the opportunities for student teachers to have access to modern equipment, to become better acquainted with provincial curricula and materials, to develop skills in classroom management, or to receive pedagogical guidance from master teachers.

The independent school administrators surveyed were asked to consider the advantages and disadvantages of doing one's practice teaching in their schools and to identify both the most and least attractive aspects of practice teaching in those schools. The advantages most commonly cited included the opportunities to work with "better" (i.e., brighter, more highly motivated) students; to be part of a caring, "family" atmosphere; to teach smaller classes; and to receive feedback from all faculty members. Other responses ranged from the advantages of greater structure and discipline in allowing student teachers to concentrate on their teaching skills to the opportunity for free meals for those prepared to live with one hundred adolescents.

Table 4

Main advantages for student teachers doing practice teaching in an independent school (n=50)

Smaller classes	(9)
“Better students” (bright, polite, etc.)	(8)
Small school, more intimate	(8)
Boarding/residential nature	(8)
Caring, “family” atmosphere	(5)
Greater feedback from all faculty	(4)
Gives variety, broader experience	(3)
Calm, structured environment permits concentration on teaching skills	(2)
Participation in extra-curricular activities	(2)
Opportunity to individualize lessons	(1)
Enriched curriculum	(1)
“Free lunch” provided	(1)

The respondents identified the helpful colleagues, motivated students, and small classes as the most attractive aspects of practice teaching in independent schools.

Despite being generally enthusiastic about the idea of practice teaching at independent schools, many of the administrators surveyed identified some potential disadvantages to the student teacher, the two most serious and frequently cited being the “atypical” character of the independent school experience and the greater time demands on teachers in independent schools.

In an effort to determine the level of satisfaction among independent school administrators with their student teachers, in general, the responses were found to be very positive. Almost 80% (n=32) of the respondents whose schools had taken student teachers said that they were either “most satisfied” or “somewhat satisfied” with those student teachers.

We were somewhat troubled by these responses, in that other comments suggested that these assessments were generous. In view of our experience as practice teaching supervisors dealing with public school teachers and administrators, we suspect that many of those who were “most

Table 5***Most attractive aspects of practice teaching in independent schools (n=50)***

Engaging, helpful colleagues and atmosphere	(20)
Smaller classes	(13)
Purposeful, motivated students	(11)
“Good” discipline	(4)
Smaller school	(3)
Greater involvement in students’ lives	(3)
Quality academic programme	(2)
Varied responsibilities, not just academic	(2)
Ability to concentrate on teaching	(1)
Academic freedom	(1)
Stability of school	(1)
Less staff politics/ teaching seen positively	(1)
Chance to develop communications skills	(1)
Free room and board	(1)

Table 6***Major disadvantages for student teachers doing practice teaching in an independent school (n=50)***

School is “atypical”	(12)
Little or no free time	(5)
Smaller classes	(3)
Aggressive and/or unsympathetic parents	(2)
Possible difficulties with certification	(2)
Less access to consultant services	(2)
Lack of choice in courses taught	(1)
More academically demanding programme	(1)
Fewer resources available	(1)
Residential aspect	(1)

Table 7

Least attractive aspect of practice teaching in *independent schools* (n=50)

“Atypical” students/environment	(13)
Long hours, lack of privacy	(8)
Limited resources	(3)
Limited experience	(2)
Demanding clientele	(2)
Lack of access to Board of Education services	(2)
Physically isolated from urban areas	(1)
Not put fully in charge of a class	(1)
Might not “fit in” to school community	(1)
None identified	(17)

Table 8

***Level of satisfaction with student teachers* (n=39)**

Most satisfied	(20)
Somewhat satisfied	(12)
Neutral	(3)
Somewhat dissatisfied	(0)
Most dissatisfied	(0)
No Response	(4)

satisfied” were really only “somewhat satisfied” and that those who were “neutral” weren’t very happy at all.

The respondents were asked to identify what they saw to be the main problems that they have experienced with student teachers. Not surprisingly, the concerns of independent school administrators echoed those most frequently expressed in our experience by master teachers and administrators in public schools.

Table 9**Major problem areas with student teachers (n=39)***

Lack of teaching skills	(15)
Lack of subject knowledge	(9)
Management/discipline	(8)
Differences with School philosophy	(7)
Other:	
Laziness	(2)
Lack of supervision from university	(2)
Poor English usage	(1)

* *Some checked more than one area and some checked none.*

We asked if the problems identified above were more serious or of greater consequence as a result of the student teacher's practicum being completed in an independent school. Of the twenty responses received to this question, only 25% (n=5) believed that the independent school setting heightened the seriousness of problems with student teachers, while the majority (n=15) believed that student teachers would have experienced similar problems and to a similar degree at public schools.

Of the five respondents who believed that the problems experienced by student teachers were more serious as a result of their placement in an independent school, some of the reasons cited included the belief that the academic ability of the student body tended to highlight the student teacher's inadequate knowledge of subject matter and could intimidate many student teachers, and the belief that the very closeness and intimacy of the independent school could exacerbate problems experienced by student teachers. On the other hand, the majority who believed that problems with student teachers were not more serious as a result of an independent school placement expressed the view that greater care was taken by independent school administrators in placing student teachers with experienced and committed faculty members, and that independent school students were more willing than their public school counterparts to accept and work with student teachers.

Finally, the independent school administrators whose schools had accepted student teachers were asked what advice they would offer teacher

educators attempting to prepare students for practice teaching in independent schools. The most common responses emphasized the need for student teachers to recognize the distinctive and added demands of teaching in an independent school and to be prepared to demonstrate their dedication to the goals and work of the school.

Table 10

Advice offered teacher educators working with independent schools (n=39)

Must be dedicated to school and its goals	(14)
Promote awareness of added demands	(6)
Better liaison with/knowledge of schools	(5)
More guidance/support from Faculty of Education	(3)
Better preparation in lesson planning	(2)
Better preparation for team teaching	(1)
Work on discipline/classroom management	(1)
“Individualization” is hard work	(1)
Prepare students for a different experience	(1)
Get students to examine motives for teaching	(1)
“Weed out incompetents before you send them”	(1)
Acknowledge efforts/ support of the school	(1)
Send only students with a first degree plus educational studies	(1)
No response	(1)

Discussion of Results

The results of the survey yielded few (but a significant few) surprises. The administrators of independent schools identified a number of positive and negative aspects of locating practica in their schools that are worth considering.

Positive findings

1. The independent schools are interested in having student teachers. It was anticipated that the experience of teacher education institutions in

Nova Scotia, where independent schools have been quite open to accepting student teachers, was unusual, and that in Central Canada and the West greater reluctance to accept student teachers would have been found, but that seems not to be so.

2. Independent school administrators on the whole believe that student teachers in their schools are able to “concentrate on teaching”; and that the high quality and relatively homogeneous character of their student bodies and their emphasis on subject matter gives student teachers greater scope to work on inquiry-based teaching, individualization of student programmes, and discussion-oriented activities.

3. Overwhelmingly, the independent school administrators believe that their schools afford student teachers the opportunity to get to know their students better, both in terms of their personal and academic histories and as members of a learning community. While this is especially pronounced in those schools in residential settings, almost all respondents noted this feature.

4. The administrators also believe that their teachers, for the most part, make as good (or better) master teachers as their public school counterparts. Furthermore, many noted that the small size and cooperative character of their staffs made it more likely that student teachers would receive advice and assistance from teachers other than those to whom they had been assigned.

Negative findings

On the other hand, the independent school administrators identified several features of their schools which might be viewed negatively in terms of their usefulness in practica.

1. Most regarded their schools as “atypical” and feared that the limited range of student abilities, small classes, relative absence of discipline problems, and so on would provide an unrealistic, and presumably, unhelpful experience for student teachers. Furthermore, in those schools where curricula differed from the public system or where, as in the case of some elementary programmes, radically different approaches to teaching, such as the Montessori method, were employed, student teachers would have to learn methodologies not taught in their university courses nor readily employable in public schools.

2. Most respondents also believed that a negative feature of their schools for student teachers was their lack of what were once called “slower” students. Very few of the schools had programmes to serve learning or

physically disabled students, and, with the widespread introduction of "mainstreaming" in the public system, the administrators believed that student teachers would be missing an important part of practical experience.

3. Several administrators also cited the high level of parental demands and expectations as a drawback to practice teaching in independent schools. As shown by Kapel and Kapel (1983), not only do parents demand a higher standard, their substantial investment in education leads to much closer monitoring of their children's schooling than is the case in public schools. Furthermore, teachers at independent schools must develop a great deal of sophistication and skill in dealing with parent inquiries and complaints, given that their survival depends upon satisfying their clients.

Summary

If we are to accept the perceptions of independent school administrators, then, on balance, independent schools would appear to be a willing and valuable resource to be tapped by directors of practice teaching. It is reasonable to ask, however, if we can trust the judgments of these respondents about their own schools and their suitability for our students. We suspect that people working in independent schools probably have more experience with the public system than those in public education have had in the private education sector.

The study has answered some of our questions, but about others we are only able to speculate and debate. For example, is it legitimate to use independent schools, both in terms of provincial licensing requirements and the university's definition of the nature and purpose of practice teaching. In some provinces, according to this survey, it is not permissible to complete practicum requirements at independent schools. Even where there is doubt, however, with respect to minimum licensing requirements, independent schools and other alternative placements should certainly be considered for supplementary blocks of practice teaching.

Universities also do their students a disservice if they regard their teacher education programmes as do provincial governments—and, indeed, many students—that is, merely as training programmes for local public school teaching. Between 30% and 50% of the students in the Bachelor of Education programme at Dalhousie University, for example, come from outside Nova Scotia, and over 50% of those who have been seeking teaching positions have done so beyond the borders of the province. Furthermore, many students who enrol in teacher education programmes do so to prepare themselves for settings outside the traditional public school system: vocational schools, professional and technical schools, tertiary education, adult education, or to teach their own children at home, a right which has been

recognized, if only as a privilege, in some provinces (Priesnitz, 1987). The School of Education at Dalhousie University has tried, therefore, to design practice teaching experiences to suit the skills, interests, and career goals of its students, while requiring all students to “do time” as it were in the public school system. Students have been placed in a variety of private schools, including the experimental elementary school affiliated with the School of Education at Dalhousie, vocational schools, special schools for physically-handicapped students, correctional institutions, hospitals, and post-secondary institutions.

In the final section of this study, we consider more fully some of the assumptions or beliefs about independent schools as settings for practice which emerged from the survey: specifically, the assumptions that independent schools have smaller classes, better students, better teachers, better programmes, and more coherent philosophies of education than the public schools.

Smaller classes

What student teacher—what regular teacher—would not welcome an opportunity to teach a class of eighteen rather than a class of thirty-five? Student teachers can learn names more quickly, learn more about each student. They are less hesitant to try discussion or inquiry-based exercises with smaller groups. Management tasks may be simpler. More time may be available for marking and commenting on student work, which in turn permits more assignments based on higher-order intellectual skills.

As a general rule, according to Johnson and Schneider (1985), independent schools maintain smaller class sizes than public schools, but this is not always the case. In Halifax, for example, where independent schools operate near the break-even point, without any government assistance, and the public school system maintains a large teaching force on permanent contract in the face of steadily plummeting enrolments, it is not at all uncommon to find many public school classrooms with lower student-teacher ratios than those in neighbouring independent schools. Financial pressures, the desire to accommodate children of alumni, and the wish to meet special needs may lead to additional admissions in private schools, but, unless the demand for places is substantially greater, however, those schools may not be able to afford an additional teacher to create a new class, even if space were available for it. A student teacher, therefore, may be responsible for more students, both in individual classes and over the course of the day, than some of his or her public school colleagues.

On the other hand, as many respondents noted, even if classes may be large, the independent schools themselves are generally smaller than

their public counterparts and present a more human scale to the student teacher. He or she more readily becomes a part of the school family; in this more intimate setting, student teachers may be able to devote more attention to lesson planning and execution and less to managing students and paper-work.

Better students

Do independent schools attract better students, and, if so, are classrooms bulging with young polymaths the best setting in which to place student teachers? Green and Brown (1983), Alexander and Pallas (1984), Jones and Krelis (1984), and Smith (1985) raise some questions about assuming superior academic ability or performance among private school students. The answer, of course, depends on the particular school and the particular student teacher. Most of our respondents claim to cater to only the ablest academic students. Yet restricting the student body to an academic elite is not the path chosen by a number of independent schools. Some, especially those with a religious affiliation, include students of quite varied ability levels, and, unlike the case in many public schools, ability grouping or "streaming" is precluded by the overall size of the school. Furthermore, despite, or perhaps because of, generally clearer and more stringent and consistent disciplinary practices, independent schools often attract so-called "problem" children from the public system. Most independent schools expect and demand student teachers who are both highly qualified within their teaching disciplines and conversant with a variety of the liberal arts. Those student teachers whose background is weak or narrow would likely not survive and certainly would not grow as teachers in the independent school setting. For those whose academic strengths are adequate, however, many independent schools offer talented and motivated learners who allow the student teacher to attempt more sophisticated lessons.

Better teachers

Are better teachers—and therefore, perhaps, better cooperating teachers—employed at independent schools? Most, but not all, of our respondents made this claim. Independent school teachers are usually paid substantially less than their public school counterparts (Chambers, 1985). Many have never gone through programmes of teacher education; indeed, some independent schools actually point to this fact with some pride. Many are part-time teachers who have other, perhaps greater, responsibilities outside the school. In the financial strait-jacket in which many independent schools operate and with the teacher surplus that existed generally a few years ago, and continues in many areas, independent schools seldom offer their teach-

ers any security of tenure, and weak or incompetent teachers usually have nowhere to hide and no trade union contract to protect them. Independent school administrators believe their teachers to be more highly motivated and committed to their work than their public school counterparts, perhaps because they are driven by a clearer conception of and stronger belief in the school and its purposes (Cookson, 1980).

Better curricula

In curricular terms, many independent schools offer an alternative to the public system. In Nova Scotia, for example, where the study of Latin (and all other ancient and modern languages save French) has been all but eliminated from public school curricula by the economic and political pressure of federal language policy and classical history by a vogue for local, regional, and, now, global studies, the independent schools have retained these subjects. One independent school offers a Grade Twelve course in macro-level sociology and has abandoned a wholly Canada-centred junior-high social studies programme in order to introduce a course in cultural geography that will focus on the nations of the southern hemisphere. Often, when the independent schools do follow the curriculum of the public schools, they draft their own teaching guidelines rather than use those of the provincial ministry and, more importantly, they choose textbooks and source materials for those courses which are generally more appropriate and stimulating than those which are offered to public schools through the provincial book bureau. With respect to student teachers, the independent schools have tended to be more flexible in allowing curricular experimentation and have allowed student teachers to implement their own unit plans, rather than requiring them to follow a rigid plan of studies.

On the other hand, if the independent schools allow greater flexibility to the student teacher, they demand it of him or her as well. Schedules are less rigid—classes may be moved about in order to accommodate staff shortages, extra-curricular activities, or special programmes. Student teachers may be asked more frequently to take combined classes. Perhaps most noticeable to student teachers is the flexibility demanded by the relative lack of educational hardware in comparison to the public schools, although most of the CAIS schools maintained that their equipment was equal or superior to that found in public schools.

Flexibility is demanded further of student teachers in that they are required in independent schools to undertake more separate preparations—usually for different grades, but, at times, of different subjects, too—than they are required to do in public schools. One student teacher in the Dalhousie programme completed one block of her practice teaching at a public high school, where she prepared one Grade Ten social studies class

and tailored it slightly for five different sections. In a second block completed at an independent school, she was asked to prepare history lessons for Grades Eight, Nine, and Ten, geography lessons for Grade Eight, and religion classes for Grade Seven. Hersh *et al.* (1982) note that student teachers, especially in their initial experiences, attempt to imitate the behaviour of the cooperating teacher. Students who want to be told exactly what to do and how to do it are not well placed in independent schools. More mature student teachers, however, have blossomed in the relative freedom and atmosphere of collegial support they have found in the independent schools.

Commitment to a unified philosophy

Perhaps the most striking aspect of the independent schools with which we have worked (but perhaps the most difficult to define or assess) has been the commitment of staff—and often parents and students—to a unified philosophy of education. While flexibility in curriculum content or methodological approach seems more common in independent schools, fundamental educational goals and purposes, attitudes towards learning and towards the school community, and a variety of intellectual and social values are shared (Peterson, 1979). If the student teacher is unable to assent to a school's philosophy or set of goals, he or she will be uncomfortable and ineffective. Furthermore, while teachers in independent schools enjoy a great deal of positive autonomy—as against the negative autonomy which results from no one in authority taking the time or trouble to demand accountability—in most of them policy and procedures are made by the teaching staff collegially more often than they are imposed from above. Observation and enforcement, therefore, tend to be important to the teaching staff and must be recognized as such by the student teacher and the university supervisor.

The work of Galbo, Diekman, and Galbo (1986) suggests that, in selecting their teachers, independent schools place very high value on the philosophical perspectives of applicants. The student teacher will likely, then, be more effective if he or she is able to share genuinely in the school's philosophy, but it is essential that there be understanding and respect for that philosophy. So too must university supervisors take care not to attack or seek to undermine school policies, practices, or values which may differ from those in the public system. Many of our respondents indicated, some passionately, that they want better liaison with teacher educators. They believe their work is not well understood or appreciated by faculties of education. "Get to know us—WELL!" —wrote one.

It seems, then, that the independent schools can provide an alternative context for the practicum experience. Though few in number and not

suites for every student, their alternative approaches to education, the challenges of their curricula and their students, and the example and commitment to teaching of their staffs can stimulate, test, and inspire many of our students. A critical challenge, then, for both researchers into the field of practice teaching and for those charged with placement of student teachers is evaluation of the context provided by independent schools generally and individual independent schools. Much of this work will necessarily be qualitative in nature, but the added difficulty of such work is likely to be repaid in a more sophisticated approach to the practicum.

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