

A Response to Mickelson

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It is obvious that Mickelson is concerned with improving the quality of practice teaching. However, this was not the major concern of my paper. I have stated quite explicitly that the paper was directed toward much broader issues: (1) developing a theoretical conception of the differences between teaching and practice teaching, and (2) explaining why practice teaching may not be a very adequate way of either training or evaluating prospective teachers.

Unfortunately, Mickelson has not directly addressed either of these issues. Rather, she has picked up one of the four suggestions in the conclusion of the paper and pushed it in a direction that was not the focus of my attention. As such, her comment is not directed at the major issues raised in my paper, but at an issue about which she may be concerned irrespective of the analysis I presented.

Of course, Mickelson has the right to develop arguments in any direction which pleases her. In fact, I would encourage her in this pursuit. However, in doing so I would suggest that she represent my arguments in at least the complexity in which they were presented. In this respect, she has done a very inadequate job of summarizing my position. The differences become quite clear when the arguments are juxtaposed.

According to Mickelson my argument is:

... the solution [of training teachers] is to ensure that practice teaching is of longer duration than at present and is integrated in better ways with school situations. ... In order to achieve this integration, however, Clifton provides a quantitative solution to a qualitative problem — practica should begin when schools first commence in the autumn and continue throughout the year. The only specific suggestion given in addition to longer periods of school experience in order to improve the situation is to structure the experience so that students are seen to hold official positions in the school and are recognized as being competent by both cooperating teachers and pupils — a solution which may be very difficult to achieve, of course, if the student turns out to be less than competent!

However, she is referring to the following statement in my original article:

Thus, in order to make sure that practice teaching has greater significance in the training of teachers it must be integrated in better ways with school situations. ... This goal may be achieved *in part* by having student teachers

begin their practice teaching when the schools first commence in the autumn, with their continued participation throughout the school year. At least this may mean that the student teachers would learn and understand the important rituals of the classroom. *Beyond this, however, it may be important to ensure that student teachers have authority in the classroom. This may be achieved not only by having student teachers spend more time in practice teaching, but also by structuring the situations so that they are recognized as holding official positions in the schools. At the same time, it may be important to ensure that student teachers are recognized as being competent by both cooperating teachers and pupils.* All of this may entail substantially revising the way student teachers are educated. *Finally, if we are serious about improving the education of teachers, researchers must monitor practice teaching situations to be certain that the desired goals are achieved.* Hopefully, better programs will be based upon research evidence. (emphasis added)

In essence, my argument is that student teachers must be given legitimacy in their classrooms by ensuring that they have authority (in the same way that interns have authority in a hospital whether they are competent or not) and that they understand the rituals of the classrooms. In a sense, I am suggesting that the quality of practice teaching may be improved if student teachers have legitimacy in classrooms. As such, I suggest that increasing the amount of time student teachers spend in classrooms may be of some assistance in ensuring that greater legitimacy is achieved. It seems that Mickelson is claiming that I am arguing in favor of increasing the quantity of practice teaching at the neglect of quality. Unfortunately, she has misinterpreted my argument.

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