

A CASE FOR DISTINCTION : SUCCESS IN THE PRACTICUM

*- Report of a talk by Dr Leslie Sharpe, Lecturer from the Division of Policy & Management Studies,
School of Education on 22 Nov 91 at NIE -*

Dr Sharpe's talk took the form of a progress report of research he was undertaking with secondary school teachers who had received a distinction grade for the teaching practice component of their Postgraduate Diploma in Education (PGDE)(Sec) programme in April 1991. Of the 249 student teachers, 20 had received a distinction grade for teaching practice. Background data had been analysed for the entire sample and interviews conducted with 17 of the distinction students.

Both quantitative and qualitative data had been used to construct an ideal-type figure - the case for distinction - to aid analysis of the processes involved in gaining a distinction grade for teaching practice. It was apparent from the data analysed to date that age, gender, and 'O' and 'A' level results were unrelated to teaching practice grades. Though the mean parental income of the distinction students was noticeably higher than that of the non-distinction students, the difference just fell short of statistical

significance. Differences were found to exist, however, in relation to final examination results in taught courses at NIE and degree type. Approximately two thirds of the distinction students had entered the programme with a Class II Honours degree or higher, while the position was almost exactly reversed for the non-distinction students.

Distinction students were found to have scored higher grades for practical teaching right at the beginning of teaching practice, though there were individual exceptions to this. Given their strong academic backgrounds, it was not surprising perhaps to find them recording their highest grades for the planning, communicating and evaluating roles, these being the roles drawing extensively on subject knowledge. Though grades awarded by supervisors on observational visits subsequent to the first had yet to be analysed in detail, it appeared that distinction students used teaching practice to consolidate early strengths, whilst making real gains in the induction and management roles.

A further point of interest was the uneven distribution of distinction students in the Curriculum Studies Options (CSO) subject areas. 70% of distinctions had been awarded in one subject area alone, contrasting markedly with other subject areas where no distinctions had been awarded. It had not as yet been possible to enquire into the reasons for these differences or to ascertain whether they had occurred in previous years.

Drawing on interviews with, and written materials produced by, the distinction students, Dr Sharpe then went on to describe, and illustrate with detailed quotations, the key components of the ideal type: definition of the situation, strategies and resources. He pointed out that the ideal type was intended as a heuristic device to further an understanding of the processes involved in gaining a distinction. A further step in the research would be to take this ideal-type back to the distinction students (now teachers) and to subject it to a process of participant verification.