

In Omaha, interns helped canvass the ghetto neighborhoods as part of the mayor's survey on unemployment.

In Milwaukee, Corpsmen lived in the heart of the ghetto during preservice training.

None of these activities is an end in itself. But to the student-teacher, they are the keys to knowing and understanding the larger environment which shapes the lives and habits of their pupils. And from this understanding comes acceptance and good teaching.

This is how Kathleen Rosentretter, an intern and former Peace Corps volunteer, explains its value:

"When a boy falls asleep at his desk, I recall the visit I made to an apartment house without glass in the windows. At night, the nine children sleep curled around the only radiator. When the boy awakes in class, I merely inform him of what he has missed and will have to make up on his own time.

"If the noise level rises during a class activity, I no longer become alarmed, because I know that noise is synonymous with city ghetto life and is more frequently an indication that learning is taking place.

"But, when I catch a student's blank stare, I know that the same ghetto clamor has now created a different result. The student is practicing a technique of escape he has perfected after living in a three room apartment with ten people who shout, argue and cry a great deal. I attempt to change the tempo of class activity to draw him back to the reality of the classroom."

This kind of sensitivity we desperately need in the teacher of the ghetto.

Why is such extensive and specialized preparation necessary for this job? One answer is that too many teachers on their first assignment are dropped into a classroom of students whose life is utterly strange to them; pupils whose existence is inconceivable to the recent college graduate; whose behavior is conditioned by reward patterns incomprehensible to the campus coed; whose learning patterns are far removed from the book-centered university. The new teacher in such a situation undergoes a kind of cultural shock.

So far, despite program uncertainties, the dropout rate among Teacher Corps interns in the first school year is half that of the national average. Because with the Teacher Corps the job shock comes before, and not after, graduation, far more of the Teacher Corps graduates are likely to stay with teaching than is generally the case—particularly among ghetto teachers.

The Teacher Corps has built-in shock absorbers. Working as part of a team, the young intern's morale is more easily lifted. There is always someone to turn to when the going gets rough. There is a group commitment which keeps performance high.

In the last analysis, no program is any better than the people who make it work. Here is where the Teacher Corps offers a unique contribution. It is able to attract bright, dedicated, imaginative, warm young people to one of the toughest jobs in the teaching profession.

The reasons are many, but one is pervasive. The Teacher Corps represents a national commitment to improve education where it is starting to do its job. The Teacher Corps means a chance to work and study with others who really care and who are willing to forgo private advantage for the satisfaction of greater service.

This opportunity attracts college graduates who had not previously considered teaching. It is helping to raise the sights and stature of dedicated teachers who are already working with the disadvantaged. Assignment to a slum school has traditionally stigmatized a teacher as either a neophyte or a reject.

The Teacher Corps is helping to change that—helping to show that teaching the disadvantaged child can attract our best, most respected and most dedicated young men and women.

And it is helping to show these young people that nothing is more important or more rewarding than taking part in this national effort to eliminate poverty of the mind in the schools of the poor.