

# Issues and Problems in Teacher Education

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**Abstract:** Teacher education or teacher training refers to the policies, procedures, and provision designed to equip teachers with the knowledge, attitudes, behaviors, and skills they require to perform their tasks effectively in the classroom, school, and wider community. The professionals who engage in this activity are called teacher educators (or, in some contexts, teacher trainers).

There is a longstanding and ongoing debate about the most appropriate term to describe these activities. The term 'teacher training' (which may give the impression that the activity involves training staff to undertake relatively routine tasks) seems to be losing ground, at least in the U.S., to 'teacher education' (with its connotation of preparing staff for a professional role as a reflective practitioner).

## I. INTRODUCTION

In nearly all countries, courses of the Normal School B, college, and university categories contain three main elements. The first element is the study of one or more academic, cultural, or aesthetic subjects for the purpose both of continuing the student's own education and of providing him with knowledge to use in his subsequent teaching career. A second element is the study of educational principles, increasingly organized in terms of social science disciplines such as psychology, sociology, philosophy, and history. A third element consists of professional courses and school experience. Primary teachers may also receive instruction in the content and methods of subjects other than their own specialties that figure in the primary curriculum. In normal schools and colleges, and some universities, the three elements run parallel to one another, and the student is professionally committed from the outset of his course. Elsewhere, the study of educational processes and professional work (including school experience) may follow the completion of a period of academic study that the student has begun without any prior commitment to teaching as a career. There are still advanced countries where the possession of a university degree, without any qualification in education as such, is sufficient basis for the award of qualified teacher status. In England and Wales, for example, compulsory training for graduates, generally comprising two terms (six months) of professional and theoretical studies and a further three-month period of school experience, was scheduled to come into effect only in 1973.

## II. GENERAL EDUCATION

The sequencing, balance, content, and organization of general and specialist academic work, courses in education, and professional studies and teaching experience has been a subject of discussion since the earliest days of organized teacher education. The importance of the element of general education has been defended on various grounds. Sometimes such academic work may be highly specialized. Students in many colleges of education in England study only one principal subject, to which they devote about one-third of their total time, and teachers who graduate from universities have often pursued three-year courses for single-subject honours degrees. In the United States and elsewhere the academic

element is broader, and the first two years of college or university work may embody a wide range of elective subjects from diverse disciplinary fields. Both patterns have their critics, the first because it produces narrow intellectual specialists, the second because it encourages dilettantism and inadequate depth. Where a pattern of electives is combined with a units/credits system, as in some universities in Japan and the United States, it is claimed that one result is an undesirable fragmentation of study and effort. In his influential *Education of American Teachers* (1963), James B. Conant recommended that half the course requirements of the four-year program of preparation for elementary teachers should be given over to general courses, a further quarter to an "area of concentration," and the remaining quarter to professional studies, including school experience. Prospective secondary teachers would spend still more time on the subjects they were preparing to teach, with less than 10 percent of their time devoted to practice teaching and special methods. Such a subject emphasis for secondary teachers can be found in many countries. In France the *École Normale Supérieure* still places freedom of study and the nurture of intellectual curiosity above questions of professional teacher training. Generally speaking, wherever there is a stress upon academic excellence and the achievement of high standards of scholarship, there is likely to be skepticism as to the claims of professional training for teaching. Oxford University had still not appointed a professor of education by the beginning of the 1970s.

In countries where technical or vocational education forms an important part of secondary school provision, there have sometimes been specialist institutions for the training of teachers for this work. Such teachers tend to have lower status than the secondary school staff who teach academic subjects, and efforts have been made to upgrade the position of the teacher of agricultural and industrial arts, home economics, and handicrafts. Nearly all the universities in England and Wales that now offer the bachelor of education degree for college of education students include technical subjects within their list of approved options.

The element of educational courses in the teacher preparation program has been the object of criticism from academic specialists, defenders of liberal culture, and practical-minded professional educators. The growing range of speculation and empirical data generated by the burgeoning social sciences, philosophy, and history, have provided a rich ore from which those responsible for teacher preparation mined the materials they needed for the construction and legitimation of their pedagogic systems and principles. But such borrowing has done little to establish any very coherent system of educational ideas, or to provide the basis for a systematic theory of teaching adequate to sustain the variety and complexity of teacher preparation programs. In his *Evolution of American Educational Theory* (1964), C.J. Brauner was forced to conclude that

*middleman theorists, inexpert as scholars, had naïvely striven for some impossible synthesis that would be at once faithful to scholarship, useful to the practitioner, intelligible to the populace and thus comprehensive as a discipline, workable*

*as a general method, and defensible as a social institution.*

### III. THE STUDY OF EDUCATIONAL PRINCIPLES

There has been much dispute as to whether the study of educational principles is to be seen as part of the liberal element in the course, contributing to the teacher's general education and personal development, or whether it is properly an adjunct to the professional sequence, serving to illuminate and enrich students' method courses and practical work. Where it was well done, the study of the philosophy, sociology, and history of education and of educational psychology clearly served both ends and also provided an introduction to a systematic exploration of human conduct and affairs that was both educationally defensible and important in its own right. But all too often it was not well done. As the field of the social sciences grew, it became increasingly difficult for those employed in teacher-preparing institutions to keep pace. In some places, student teachers could follow courses in psychology, sociology, and so on given by recognized authorities in their respective disciplines, and in all countries there were some prominent social scientists who themselves took a close and direct interest in educational matters. But, given the large number of institutions responsible for teacher preparation and the fact that the majority of their staff were necessarily recruited for their teaching competence rather than for their high academic qualifications, much of the teaching of educational principles tended to become out-of-date and secondhand.

In recent years there has been a revival of interest in the social sciences as an integral feature of teacher-education programs. This is partly a recognition of the popularity of studies of this kind among students, partly a reflection of their relevance in a time of rapid social and educational change, and partly a function of the larger supply of qualified social scientists available to teach them. There is now also becoming available a substantial volume of research material on problems such as the dynamics and correlates of children's learning, language development, differences in individual educability and response to teaching, and social class and educational opportunity. In his 1929 lecture, "The Sources of a Science of Education," John Dewey saw the elements of such a science being drawn out of other natural and social sciences, organized in relation to problems defined by the educational process. These hopes are now closer to realization.

### IV. PRACTICAL TRAINING

Professional and practical studies constitute the third major element in the teacher-preparation program. "Teaching practice" has always been important, initially carried out in the model or demonstration school attached to the normal school or college, later in the schools of the neighbourhood, and more recently in a variety of school, college, and community settings. The model and demonstration school was frequently criticized for the unreality of its teaching settings; some model schools attached to universities tended to become academically oriented and ceased to play an experimental role. But if there are advantages in practicing in more typical schools, there are also difficulties in relating the variety of experience thus attained to the purpose and content of the college course, particularly when there are discrepancies between the methods and approaches taught in the colleges and those that the student encounters in the school. In some countries, experienced teachers view the work of teacher-preparing institutions with a certain amount of disdain. It is

sometimes claimed that college and university staff lack the recent, firsthand experience of schools that is needed if training is to be fully effective. Efforts have been made to reduce the separation between school and college; these include the transfer of college staff to periods of classroom teaching and of experienced teachers to college work, dual appointment to a college and to a school where the "teacher-tutor" assumes responsibility for supervision of the student's school-based work, the involvement of teachers' organizations in the determination of national policy on teacher education, the involvement of individual teachers in the government and committee work of teacher-preparing institutions, and the use of periods of school-based teacher education in which a tutor and group of student teachers are attached to a school or a number of schools for an extended period of observation, practical teaching, and theoretical study. Courses are also being devised in which periods of education, training, and paid employment in schools alternate with one another to make up a four- or five-year program.

### V. APPOINTMENT PROCEDURES AND PROBATIONARY REQUIREMENTS

Generally speaking, in federal countries such as the United States, Canada, and Australia, each state or province sets its own requirements for certification, which inevitably do much to shape the content and organization of the teacher-education programs. The variety of such regulations often means that teachers who have received their education and training in one province or state are not qualified to teach in schools elsewhere without satisfying additional requirements. In other countries, such as England and France, requirements are determined on a national basis. Responsibility for recommending the granting of qualified teacher status may, however, be delegated. In England this responsibility is exercised by regional consortia of colleges, local educational authorities, universities, and teacher interests known as area training organizations that were established after 1944.

There are likewise considerable variations among countries in the way in which teachers are appointed to their first posts after graduation from college or university. In a small number of countries, students have a completely free choice among all the schools of the type in which their training qualifies them to teach, and they make their applications directly to the school in which they wish to serve. A more common pattern is that of appointment to the service of a local, state, or provincial authority, which then places the teacher in a school where a suitable vacancy exists. In some places there is a tendency for beginning teachers to be placed in schools in more remote or less desirable areas. In countries that have universal military service, such as Israel, it is sometimes possible for trained teachers to satisfy military requirements by being drafted to a school of the government's choice.

Another aspect of the diversity of certification requirements is the extent to which teachers are permitted to undertake work in subjects other than those they specialized in at college or university. Generally speaking, where national and state rules exist they tend to be interpreted liberally during periods of teacher shortage and more stringently as the supply of teachers improves; it is often possible for a teacher to secure the additional qualifications required to undertake a greater variety of work by taking university summer sessions or other kinds of in-service courses.

## VI. IN-SERVICE TRAINING

Training on the job involves more than courses, conferences, and other organized study programs. Such efforts belong to a much broader system of communication whereby all those who are involved in the educational enterprise—teachers, administrators, research workers, curriculum-development specialists, teacher trainers—keep in touch with one another and with developments in their respective fields. One must therefore consider the media that are available for in-service education as well as institutional arrangements by means of which such training is provided.

Printed matter forms the most obvious kind of communication medium among teachers. In all countries there are both general and specialist educational journals and newspapers; educational bodies of various kinds issue their own newsletters, broadsheets, and bulletins. The volume of material published in this form has increased enormously. In some countries books, journal articles, and research reports are systematically abstracted and distributed, and some schools have their own library and information services.

A second group of media for in-service training includes lectures and related types of face-to-face instruction and discussion. Greater use is now being made of seminars, working parties, discussions, and other group activities that require a higher level of individual participation. Alongside these methods, a beginning has been made with the use of case studies and simulation materials. Among the advantages of such techniques are the high degree of personal involvement they encourage, the “realism” of the problems dealt with, a reduction in the didactic element (especially important in work with senior staff), and the opportunities for questions of theory and principle to arise in the discussion of actual teaching and administrative incidents.

Multimedia approaches to in-service studies are encouraged by closed-circuit and broadcast television facilities within individual school systems and local areas. The work that professional and specialist associations have long performed in bringing teachers together for the discussion of issues of mutual concern is now being extended by such developments as the establishment of teachers’ centres in Britain. These help to disseminate a wide range of new educational practices and ideas, including those that derive from the teacher-controlled Schools Council for Curriculum and Examinations. In North America, Australia, the United Kingdom, Germany, and some other European countries, credit-bearing courses are now available for teachers through broadcast television, radio, and correspondence tuition.

The use of a wider range of media has diversified the institutional settings in which in-service teacher education is provided. Universities, colleges, teachers’ centres, and teachers’ homes are now among the places where the teacher can pursue his education and seek to improve his qualifications. Given the larger number of teachers on the staffs of many schools, there is also scope for school-based in-service education. A new idea or principle may find more ready acceptance within a group of like-minded people than when it must make its way against the organizational conservatism of a particular school. Department discussions, staff working parties, and other forms of school-based meetings enable matters of curriculum and organization to be discussed in depth, facilitate the induction of younger members of the profession, and help to limit the isolation of the teacher within the classroom. School-based in-service

education has the important merit of recognizing that there is a gap between the ideas, techniques, and approaches that teachers acquire as a result of their training and the application of these ideas and approaches within the social system of the school. With the growth of team teaching and interdisciplinary work, and the reinterpretation of the teacher’s role as an organizer and manager of learning resources rather than a solo performer on the classroom stage, the importance of bridging this gap will become increasingly important.

## CONCLUSION

Coming decades are likely to see continuing development and change in teacher education. Post-secondary and higher education may soon reach between a third and a half of the population in many advanced countries. The teacher must adjust to new developments in educational technology, the growth of human knowledge, and the problem of creating a relevant and appropriate curriculum from the enormous range of material available. There will be new understanding of how children develop and learn. The patterns of authority in society will continue to change, and it is likely that there will be a greater recognition of the importance of moral and personal education in a world of pluralistic values and goals. All these factors will affect the ways in which teachers are educated and trained.

In all countries, whether or not any fundamental institutional changes are contemplated, there are evidences of radical change in the structure of ideas and assumptions that underlie the preparation of teachers. But it is unlikely that coming decades will see the introduction of any comprehensive pedagogical system resembling those of the 19th century. No single theory of learning or teaching is likely to satisfy the diversity of individual needs and societal arrangements.

## Work Cited

- [1] [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Teacher\\_education](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Teacher_education)