Title: Teacher education and change
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Teacher education, just as any other area of education, lends itself easily to armchair dialectics and hypothetical discourse. This is because it has to concern itself largely with human behaviour and value judgments – more so than other types of preparation for human activity as, for example, in the training for general practice in medicine or bridge-building in engineering. The latter are based more on the acquisition of certain rather specific skills, whereas the former has to include an equally desirable development of mental and moral attitudes. I am not discounting the importance of these in the other professions, but a doctor or lawyer is not required to pass on these attitudes to their clients in the way a teacher has to do.

There are many views, too, based in the intellectual and social tendencies of each age and time, about what education should be and what it should do for the individual or for the nation. Even if there were general agreement on the philosophical aims and expectations of education, the nature of the implications of these for action may still vary to the extent that in the implementation the result no longer matches the goal.

Take, for example, the attempt in this century to provide universal education in the many countries around the world. The motive is praiseworthy, namely to provide equality of educational opportunity to all. Operationally, the human resources for the implementation of such an objective are in short supply. Yet, delay cannot be brooked. The humanistic considerations which prompt the desire to promote justice through equality and freedom through the liberation of the mind are too obvious for argument and all hasten to comply. In no developing country is there any account to show that serious consideration has been given to the qualitative aspects of teacher supply alongside those of quantitative
demand. There are statistics a-plenty to witness to the mammoth tasks carried out, but they also hide a multitude of sins. Like sausages from a machine, teachers are staffed and processed by the hundreds to meet the demand. Like sausages, the shape is recognisable, the price is cheap and the stuffing a heterogeneous mix of pedagogical chaff. In the long run, those children who would have been favoured in an elitist society continue to be favoured. The vast number from the masses, to whom the “new deal” was to bring unprecedented benefits, return to society worse off at the latter end than at the beginning – discontented, disenchanted, disoriented, unlearned though not unschooled.

Quality and quantity in education have somehow become mutual exclusives. This thinking has also affected teacher training. One is often told:

“We cannot afford quality!”

“Satisfy the demand first; quality can come later”.

But why should quality and quantity be separated? This does not hold as a tenet in any other human enterprise except in education. In this century, more so than in any other, are the means to reconsider new ways of providing instruction, new ways of using teachers. While quantity demand cannot but affect quality, it does not follow that, therefore, all consideration of quality must be abandoned. More particularly should this apply to teacher education since the effects of training, good or bad will affect innumerable cohorts of children. For if we estimate conservatively that each teacher looks after forty children each year of a professional time span of 35 years on the average, he should encounter at least 1,400 children intimately in his life-time. As each cohort of children moves up the educational ladder, what would they have received in the way of values, knowledge and skills? By the quality of the products of the system, teachers must stand or fall, no matter the extent to which the factors which confound the teacher’s task may multiply. By the quality of the outputs of schools, the institution which prepares teachers must also be prepared to share in the glory or the shame. I do not hold the view that all ills of the young should be blamed on teachers. Neither do I complacently shrug off the rising incidence of juvenile recalcitrance as though, I as an educator, have no part in it. To seek to absolve ourselves (teachers) entirely of blame is to deny that we have any influence at all on the course of things. Pursuing this thinking to its logical conclusion, we shall soon have to face the issue as to whether there is any need for teacher education, and hence, for teachers at all.
I have attempted in a rather roundabout sort of way to make the following points.

Firstly, teacher education involves more than mere training for a set of obvious skills. Philosophies of education imply this, the practice of education generally overlooks and ignores it.

Secondly, quantitative demand for education, response to which seldom admits qualitative considerations, tends to obscure the importance of having good teachers and not mere bodies to place before groups of children.

Thirdly, the setting of quality aims in teacher education and the planning of strategies to achieve their fulfilment are an inescapable commitment of any institution which professes to train teachers.

These have been three important considerations in the developments which have taken place in our local teacher education centre during the period between the change in the administration in June 1971 and the conversion of status from Teachers’ Training College to that of an institute of education in April this year.

Changes at the Institute may be perceived in four major areas – in the structure and content of the curriculum, in the area of human relationships, in the administration as a whole and in the admissions policy.

The Curriculum

Pre-service training for teachers commonly comprise three traditional components – the basic disciplines or subjects which form the “foundation” courses offered by colleges and institutes of education, the pedagogic courses or teaching methods, and teaching practice.

Normally, the basic disciplines involve a study of such subjects as educational philosophy, psychology, sociology, systems and certain required academic subjects as well as the study of languages, the last-mentioned particularly in the newer countries. The proportion of time devoted to the academic subjects in contrast to other subjects is largely determined by the academic preparation the student cohort has received at entry point. The less of schooling they have had, the greater the proportion of academic study at the teacher training institution. In this area of the basic disciplines therefore, the characteristic pattern is one of a broad range of compulsory subjects, parading many and complex
problems which get thin treatment, very often unrelated to the real situation of the classroom.

On pedagogic courses, one author has this to say:

“There is one disturbing fact that the available evidence makes abundantly clear and to which our shared experience also testifies, that is that this element of teacher education has fallen into singular dispute. This is particularly disturbing because the matters with which pedagogic courses are nominally concerned represent the most distinctive features of teacher education”. (1)

It has also been frequently pointed out that we do not as yet have an effective theory of instruction. One study, carried out by Coleman in America during the last decade, found that differences in educational input (quality and quantity of school facilities, curriculum, teaching methods, guidance services, etc) were not significantly related to differences in educational output. There is as yet too much a gap in the knowledge of how pupils learn to predict the effectiveness of teaching.

In the shadow of this general gloominess, how does an institution set about to improve the art which, above everything else in the course, should be essence of it? But my personal conviction is that much of the gloom can be dispelled if more are willing to practise than merely discuss teaching.

The third component – teaching practice – is in almost equally bad shape. There has never been consensus on how long the practice period should be nor on how the novices should be inducted into it or be supervised during teaching practice. In some systems classroom teachers called “cooperating teachers” are paid to supervise. In such circumstances the situation which results is one where teacher educators spout theory, while others maintain practice to the extent that theory is seldom discerned as relevant to practice. In other systems, post-graduate research students in education are appointed graduate assistants by virtue of their greater knowledge of educational principles to act as

supervisors. Here theoreticians are brought closer to the field but are incapable of translating the implications of their theories for classroom practice. Yet another pattern of practice supervision exists. Lecturers at the training institution supervise their own students. Too often, however, such supervision becomes a series of stereotyped prescriptions, because it is not the custom for lecturers to keep in touch with ground level. Once at the training institution, they are above being teachers.

Such a state of things would be unthinkable, say, in the training of a doctor or a swimmer. In neither of these cases would the instructor hand out prescriptions and expect his students to perform to expectation. The surgeon discussing the operation of the appendix, would not simple instruct his students to read up Gray’s Anatomy, pages such a such, then exhort him to memorise its location and end up by advising him, “If you place your knife just about there you ought to find the appendix.” He would actually demonstrate how the whole operation may be carried out. He would explain why certain instruments should be used, why certain type stitches made to close up the wound.

But teacher education in respect of practice has rested all along more on prescription than on rationale and demonstration – which may be the reason why there is so little authority on what teacher really is and why it is so hush-hush. So long as a teacher can maintain a fair degree of disciplinary control, he is free to behave as he chooses in such matters as the amount of energy he invests in lesson preparation, the relationship he maintains with his class, the approach he adopts to the discharge of his duties. No one really questions his effectiveness. Behind the closed classroom door is his refuge. To improve the curriculum is to take note of the prevailing malaise and work a way out of it.

It is clear that changes in the curriculum should be made only if the objectives are clear, for only in the light of these may it be determined what subjects should be included and what practice skills imparted. Thus before changes were introduced, the objectives were first identified. These were found to fall into two categories – those which were skill-related and those which related to attitudes and the student’s personal growth. The chart on page 7 summarises the elements of the curriculum structure.

The major changes in the curriculum were the following:

a) First, the improvement of teaching practice through the definition of terminal behaviour to be expected at the end of the course.
Structure and Content of the New T.T.C. Curriculum

Whole Curriculum

SHOULD BUILD AND NURTURE

Professional Competence

WHICH REQUIRED

Theory + Practical Experience

Student’s personal growth and desirable attitudes

TO PERFECT SKILLS IN

Communication of information ideas concepts behaviours

Organisation and management

Understanding of children and their needs

Planning and evaluation

Which imply studies in

Communication of information ideas concepts behaviours

Organisation and management

Understanding of children and their needs

Planning and evaluation

Purpose + Motivation + Critical Thinking Ability

Making reasoned decisions

Adapting to changing situations

An increasing awareness and sensitivity to social issues

Maintaining interest in the job

Which imply studies in

a) Psychology of human growth and behaviour; instructional and learning behaviours; human relations; measurement
b) Strategies in planning
c) Methodology
d) Use of educational technology
e) Actual practise

a) Philosophy of ideas
b) Sociology of urbanisation and industrialisation
c) Contemporary issues in education through comparative studies
d) Local systems and problems
e) Special interest subjects
The beginning teacher would need to know his subject, should have learnt how to take cues from the behaviour of his class in order not to “lose” them; should have been initiated into the use of the many aids; educational technology places at his disposal, should have been given certain insights about local needs, objectives of education and about the sorts of pupils he is likely to teach; he should be keen to be involved in the process of change as an innovator and as one who continues to learn. Lecturers at the Institute have been told that the number of supervision visits to be made to each student would no longer be specified: the objectives on terminal behaviour would help them determine for themselves how their students should be supervised. By way of improving the insights of students, lecturers were asked to teach classroom lessons and subject themselves to the criticisms of their student supervisees. This would help them appreciate better the problem of the novice. This would also help to induce a proper attitude towards teaching as an art.

Micro-teaching has also been introduced in order to give each student effective feedback through seeing himself in the act.

b) The principles of practice were henceforth to be drawn from the basic disciplines which would be studied as an integrated whole and not as separate subjects. This was meant to bring together theory and practice in a basic and compulsory core course. While there may not be a comprehensive theory of instruction, there is at least enough information on which to raise a simple structure in practice.

c) The methodology of teaching any subject was no longer to be divorced from the content of the subject. Students would study specific methodology related to two subjects in which they are academically competent, while being taught certain general principles of methodology for the teaching of groups of related subjects;

d) To cater to special needs of schools each student has to study a co-curricular subject from the group of subjects comprising teaching of music, librarianship and art: PE is a compulsory co-curricular course for all.
e) Evaluation was to be diversified through the introduction of academic exercises, progress ratings and observation schedules; examination papers were reduced in number. The academic exercises are an innovation aimed at giving students an opportunity to study their pupils’ needs in the “human laboratory”, viz., the classroom and the school. They also help to develop special insights and are a means of training in investigation.

f) To improve general pedagogic skills, lecturers at the Institute will be required to return as teachers to school for one month each year to maintain their own practice and to keep in touch with the changing scene.

Human relationships

Educational institutions in their conserving roles sometimes miss the main stream of change, albeit unwittingly. This happened to be the case with T.T.C.

Ever since 1959, it has been an important objective of Government’s education policy to encourage integration among the multi-ethnic groups of Singapore. While the administration at the T.T.C. ensured that the needs of all major ethnic groups for training were properly met through the institution of multilingual courses, its perception did not extend into the area of integration.

Four sets of lecturers were appointed for the four linguistic streams within the college and were made responsible for the conduct of courses which purportedly led to the same qualification, but in actual fact were assessed separately. The staff of the four streams kept much to themselves. Student activities were arranged strictly on linguistic lines so that there was fourfold of almost every society in the College.

When the new principal came, it seemed to her incongruent with the national goal of integration to allow such a situation to persist. Since most students and staff were already bilingual (at least orally) with English generally as the common language, the formation of a single Students’ Council to embrace all streams was encouraged. Likewise at the level of the staff a Senior Common Room was set up for the common benefit of members from all streams.
The aims of such an effort are difficult to come by. There is always the carelessness bred of a spirit of complacency on the part of the majority which the hurt pride of an insecure minority perceives as intended slight. To get persons to understand one another is no easy task. Unless this begins, however, in the Institute, it is unlikely that those who go out from it can appreciate the importance of living together as people of one nation with common goals and aspirations or will be able to help to promote such an objective.

Through effective human relationships attitudes are more easily developed. A new aspect of the extra-curricular programme has been the institution of a forum series which brings together the Director, staff and students in a dialogue over contemporary and local issues. It is hoped through these encounters that students will become more interested in the problems of society and develop insights which will help them to think through these problems with more informed rationalism.

Administration

Whereas much of the decision-making rested previously with two senior officers at the T.T.C., the Institute provides for regular participation of heads of departments and representatives from the lecturer ranks in the determination of courses, programmes and activities. Only through the sharing of decision-making can there be place for accountability. As responsibility is delegated through due process, the institution becomes no longer the sole concern of the chief administrator. It is everybody’s as well. Through this there will develop a stronger sense of common purpose.

Consistent with this and other changes, the divisional structure is reorganised into Schools in place of Linguistic Sections. Within every School there are bilingual lecturers to cater to subject teaching in the language of the student’s choice.

A new development in the structure has been the setting up of the School of Continuing Studies to plan programmes for teachers and educators who have realised that in some way the continuing increase in knowledge has exposed vast areas of ignorance. It is envisaged that in the professional life-time of a teacher he may need to return to his studies at least four to five times. A Committee is presently studying the sort of study sequence which will best benefit the teacher should he wish to take seriously the importance for continuing education, not so much to
acquire more certificates but rather to keep within the main stream of the learning society.

Because the Institute has responsibilities in research and in disseminating information related to current problems it is intended that three special educational laboratories should be set up – a psychological guidance clinic to serve school children with problems, a reading clinic catering mainly to those with reading difficulties in the first year of school, and experimental classes for PSLE repeaters.

Admissions

Admissions criteria are generally subject to changing needs and circumstances but there are two which are sine qua non if the objectives of quality education are to be fulfilled. The would-be teacher must be a person interested in things going on around him and must possess at least some of the tools which may be sharpened during the course to enable him to perform his tasks effectively in the classroom.

As part of the admissions procedures, therefore, we have instituted (1) an entrance test to assess proficiency in the use of language (both oral and written) and ideational fluency and (2) an interview to assess the candidate’s knowledge ability of contemporary events, locally and abroad, his particular interests and his general attitude (though this last is always difficult to gauge and should not carry too much weight at entry point).

The particular emphasis on having students with more than School Certificate qualifications is consistent with the desire to upgrade quality, more particularly now as the pool of available persons is larger. Also the pupil population in our classrooms is better informed to-day. There is advantage in having more mature persons who have had the advantage of a further two years in school. This is the prime consideration in the change of expectations regarding entry qualification, not so much that the HSC will ensure better command of knowledge.

Have we succeeded in achieving our objectives through these changes?

Time will tell. There is still far to go in order to change styles and attitudes even at the level of the teacher educators. Just as at school the failure or success of a programme depends not on the design or planning but on the teacher who executes it, so at the Institute. Change requiring change brings trauma. The old ways are not easily discarded and, too
often, the new continues to be interpreted against traditional practices and criteria.

This year, I introduced, for the first time, an evaluation form for the rating of our courses introduced in July, 1972. All students completing the forms have already sat the examinations for these courses. About half the student group have responded to date and the forms are still coming in. The sort of evaluation they have made is something which is more or less to be expected. The major criticisms show that old habits die hard:

Too much theory without illustrative example
Incoherence on the part of some lecturers
Disconnected discourse
Boring
Lack of demonstration in practice (and this, despite my personal plea to teaching staff to demonstrate)
Methodology courses generally uninspiring
One student claims that the most helpful source during teaching practice was a book entitled, “Teaching as a Subversive Activity.”

So the question of “Who educates the educators?” still remains. Still, this is not a strictly Singapore problem. So long as staff can maintain open attitudes to criticism, improvement must come.

On the positive side, students are generally in support of the new structure of the curriculum. Most of them feel that there is a strong likelihood that they will be able to apply what they have learnt. They have also found the attitudes of supervising lecturers generally very helpful.

This reference to evaluation is meant to stress the importance of openness to the views of others – of seeing ourselves as others see us.

Improvements will take time. In the meantime those already in the field can help to improve the quality of education by setting a good example to new recruits in the way they meet the challenges of the classroom, the way they take an interest in their pupils and the spirit of
inquiry which they show in continuing to seek to improve their own
knowledge.

Towards this end, I should like to suggest the setting up of an
institution somewhat analogue to the Royal College of Surgeons or the
Royal College of Practitioners in Medicine. Those who seek membership
should show proof that they are worthy members of the teaching
profession in terms of teaching ability and the spirit par excellence, which
refuses to brook disappointment, but perseveres for the sake of those
who are their specific charge – their pupils. The sine qua non for entry is
ability to teach. Past practice has so conditioned us that the higher in
rank and qualification one goes up the Education Service ladder, the less
one can teach. Let us all be teachers first and other things afterwards.
For afterall, concern for good administration, for community service and
so forth stems first from an appreciation of the needs of our pupils whose
concern and welfare a good administration will help to improve and whose
circumstances arouses us to insightful awareness of what needs to be
done to ameliorate their lot and that of the community from whose midst
they come.