Introduction

What kind of teachers do we need? In the United States in 1985, the National Commission for Excellence in Teacher Education stated that the requirement was for teachers who are:

"Competent in their subject areas, skilled in teaching, informed about children and their development, knowledgeable about cognitive psychology, schooled in technology...informed about the latest, most relevant research, able to work with peers and others in diverse environments...and confident of their roles and contributions."

Over time our expectations of teachers have changed as the following quotations illustrate:

"So Mr M'Choakumchild began in his best manner. He and some one hundred and forty other school-masters had been lately turned at the same time, in the same factory, on the same principles, like so many pianoforte legs. He had been put through an immense variety of paces, and had answered volumes of head-breaking questions. Orthography, etymology, syntax, and prosody, biography, astronomy, geography, and general cosmography, the science of compound proportion, algebra, land-surveying and levelling, vocal music, and drawing from models, were all at the ends of his ten chilled fingers. He had worked his stony way into her Majesty's most Honorable Privy Council's Schedule B, and had taken the bloom of the higher branches of mathematics and physical science, French, German, Latin and Greek."
He knew all about all the Watersheds of all the peoples, and all the names of all the rivers and mountains, and all the productions, manners, and customs of all the countries, and all their boundaries and bearings on the Go and thirty points of the compass. Ah, rather overdone, M'Choakumchild. If he had only learnt a little less, how infinitely better he might have taught much more."


In contrast, the second illustration describes a different kind of teacher:

"These girls formed the Brodie set. That was what they had been called even before the headmistress had given them the name in scorn, when they had moved from the Junior to the Senior school at the age of twelve. At that time they had been immediately recognizable as Miss Brodie's pupils, being vastly informed on a lot of subjects irrelevant to the authorised curriculum, as the headmistress said, and useless to the school as a school. These girls were discovered to have heard of the Buchmanites and Mussolini, the Italian Renaissance painters, the advantages to the skin of cleansing cream and witch-hazel over honest soap and water, and the word 'menarche'; the interior decoration of the London house of the author of 'Winnie the Pooh' had been described to them, as had the love lives of Charlotte Bronte and of Miss Bodie herself. They were aware of the existence of Einstein and of the arguments of those who considered the Bible to be untrue. They knew the rudiments of astrology but not the date of the Battle of Flodden or the capital of Finland. All of the Brodie set, save one, counted on its fingers, as had Miss Brodie, with accurate results, more or less."

Muriel Spark, "The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie"

The difference in these two teachers is in terms of what they consider is worthwhile knowledge for passing on to their pupils. It is "distinction" between filling empty heads with 'required' knowledge,
sometimes called 'training', and sharing and developing a wide range of knowledge with pupils, this is "teaching".

In considering training for quality in early childhood education it will be more useful to focus on quality of teaching rather than training. The reason for this is that the word 'training' is synonymous with instructing. Teachers do more than this, they 'teach' and as a result 'educate'. As Peters (1966) points out, for education to be considered as worthwhile it must be distinguished from training, teaching must be distinguished from instructing, and the content of education must be wide ranging enough to cover forms and fields of knowledge rather than merely skills and techniques. It is the purpose of this paper then to argue that to consider quality in childcare provision we must broaden our discussions to incorporate education and teaching.

Others have made reference to quality in early childhood programmes. In these there is provision of environments which support the developmental needs of young children. There is appropriate equipment and materials and efficient use of space and time and personnel. Teachers do more than train and instruct. Proponents of this type of approach assume that the basic structure of responses which constitute a child's mind result from the structure of his environment and that learning can best be achieved by a controlled programme of stimulation and reinforcement of the desired responses by means of rewards and punishments, the child is a passive recipient. Emphasis is given to the desirability of a rich pre-school environment providing for the development of emotional and cognitive abilities. However evidence seems to cast doubt on the value of specific training according to S.R. principles. Whilst much learning of a certain type does take place in this way (eg. habit formation, verbal training, mechanical skills) real learning in the form of understanding tends to be more age/stage specific. Whilst for maturationalists, specific training cannot make up for the child's neurological immaturity, others believe that specific training cannot compensate for lack of general experience. It is this latter view which has dominated educational thought in more recent years. Teachers are educated to follow this approach.
Teachers then, being the prime instigators of appropriate experience and environments, are set great expectations and goals. To achieve these they must perform with certain behaviours and qualities required for "excellence". What then constitutes quality teaching and quality teachers?

Quality Teachers and Quality Teaching

Teachers have many roles and duties, and employ many strategies. Quality teachers of very young children know that observing young children is a most important strategy. By making numerous observations and engaging in discussions of these observations with other teachers they are able to develop greater insights into the needs of children and the appropriateness of the programme. Building relationships with young children is also an important strategy for quality teachers. The young child spends a good part of his day with his teacher and she can therefore have an important influence on his learning and development. Clearly, what the teacher of the very young child is like as a person may be just as important as what she teaches. She not only provides opportunities for decision making, exploring, discovering, problem solving and learning but for personality development in addition. Developing a sense of trust is the first step in the development of the young child's personality (Ericson, 1970). It is important then that a sense of trust is evident in the teacher/child relationship. The next step is a sense of autonomy which overrides dependency. The teacher then, will provide opportunities for independence to grow and develop. The next step is a sense of initiative outweighing doubt and guilt. The quality teacher will encourage a striving for achievement and respect for self. She will be sensitive in her use of authority and will encourage dialogue and reason. Other strategies a quality teacher stresses in her relationship with her children include helping them to accept and face failure and things unpleasant. She accepts and respects each individual child. She teaches them to see others' points of view and to look for reasons and solutions to conflict situations. The teacher acts as a model in terms of the way she manages herself and the environment of the centre.
A quality teacher is a professional. Professionals exhibit the types of behaviour which are specific and special to the role. For a teacher this means looking for meaning, finding the answers to the "W" questions: Why? Where? When? What?. Lilian Katz (1972) suggests that teachers become professionals in stages. Stage one is survival. Here the teacher comes to terms with what she expected and what is reality. Stage two is consolidation – the accommodation of what she has come to know about young children and the assimilation of new knowledge. Stage three is renewal. This is manifest in the teacher's thirst for new knowledge, skills, and techniques. Finally after several years the stage of maturity is reached. Yet a true professional does not stop in her pursuit of knowledge. Once she becomes complacent she fails to be so effective.

To maintain motivation and striving, it is important for quality teachers to search out opportunities appropriate to their needs such as these adapted from Robison and Schwartz (1987):

**Professional Affiliation**

1. Joining a professional organization, such as the National Association for the Education of Young Children and the Organisation Modiale pour L' Education Prescolaire (ONIEP) and the Preschool Teachers' Association.

2. Attending professional conferences and workshops.

3. Subscribing to professional journals and newsletters.

**Continuing Education**

4. Working toward other certificates in Child Development.

5. Planning ahead for future study, possibly a degree.
Job Market

6 Investigating career opportunities in the field.

7 Preparing and updating a professional resume. Preparing well for job interviews.

Activities for Professional Renewal

8 Visiting other early childhood programmes.

9 Participating actively in staff meetings and in-service training sessions.

10 Participating in the centre accreditation process recently developed.

11 Keeping an up-to-date curriculum activities file.

12 Maintaining comprehensive files of books, articles, pamphlets, clippings, and ideas for oneself, for colleagues, and for parents.

13 Participating in research projects.

Other aspect in the maintenance of professional conduct would include good mental and physical health. In fact stress management is well researched. Whitebrook et al (1982) indicate four key factors which they claim emerge as a cause of stress for staff in Centres: Staff turnover; the nature of the work itself; the working conditions; and low status. Clearly then, establishing some local support systems could be useful in minimizing the effect of these factors.

So far this paper has inferred that a quality teacher is also a professional. Certainly given the responsibility of the nation's young this is a heavy burden to bear and a teacher must be well prepared to execute these responsibilities. But what does a quality teacher do? What is quality teaching in the preschool?
Quality Teaching

As we have seen, early childhood teachers do not fill young children with rules and knowledge, that is training and instructing. Teaching is educating and caring for children. Young children are vivacious, spontaneous and natural, unaffected by society's demands. It is important for these qualities to be respected and encouraged. Quality teaching is thus *activity-based* in a materials rich environment. Unlike in our primary schools the preschool environment requires many teaching roles. These roles are well rehearsed by the "mature" stage and the experienced teacher is rarely conscious of which she employs. Rather the teacher selects a role intuitively. Robison and Schwartz, (1972, pg. 79-88) list these roles in terms of their function:

* Nurturer – offering children acceptance and support through praise, affection, interest, and thoughtful attention. One example is cuddling a lonesome child or accepting expressions of unhappiness such as crying, noting to the child that "you must really be unhappy to cry".

* Reinforcer – using selective reinforcement techniques to feature desired forms of behavior and to discourage undesirable forms of behavior through non-reinforcement. One example is praising a child who returns play materials to the shelves and ignoring the behavior of the child who does not put materials away.

* Information Giver – supplying information verbally and by action or gesture to one or more children. Examples include telling two children the time of day, or telling the class the current date and day of the week; demonstrating how to use past; and pointing to the position of a puzzle piece.

* Challenger – creating dissonance, puzzlement, curiosity, and expectation of competence. One example is, when children pre-maturely generalize that a magnet "sticks" to metal, offering them copper, lead, and aluminium to test.
* Tutor – active instruction of a child. One example is helping a child spell her or his name by matching flannel letters to the teacher-written model.

* Observer – watching children without interacting with them or with the material they are using. This may include note taking or active forms of record keeping.

* Evaluator – testing or assessing children’s information, skills, or concepts. One example is asking a child to replicate in beads a color pattern offered in pegs. This role may also include recording children’s performance or scores.

* Participant – active involvement with children in some form of activity, whether in the leadership role or as a member of the group. Examples include singing with children or playing a game.

* Manager – leadership in organizing the room, the materials, the equipment, and the auxiliary staff. Examples include setting out art materials, requesting an assistant to tutor a child, announcing snack time, and determining the temporal sequence of the program.

* Caretaker – providing physical care and safety and emotional security during the day away from home.

The central role is however to plan implement and evaluate quality programmes. In Singapore there is a marked move away from the traditional subject-centred approach, towards one that is based on the needs and interests of young children. Teachers learn how to conceptionalize the programme appropriately. In order to do this they need a thorough knowledge and understanding of the principles of child development. Furthermore knowledge of, and, an ability to plan programmes is essential. Teachers are sensitised to their complex roles in this process, and, in addition to the needs of parents. (No mention has been made of this vital role since this will have been ably covered elsewhere). Teachers are also taught how to design, implement and evaluate curricula which are developmentally and culturally appropriate for the children in their care. Teachers are also
encouraged to operationalize this knowledge and these skills. The on-going understanding and application of early childhood knowledge is intrinsic to the education of teachers. Skills derived as such are continually monitored in early childhood settings. Research findings too are vital to the education of teachers. Change and innovation arise only as a result of dissemination of information and its implementation in teaching. The BvLF research project findings are just one example where teachers are actualizing new teaching strategies in Phase II resulting from the findings of Phase I. Three other examples are the action research projects being conducted by staff in the EC department in IE with the advanced course participants: Study One is looking at strategies for working with parents of children with learning difficulties; Study Two is comparing the effects of different types of programmes; Study Three is analysing the verbatim responses of children's spontaneous utterances for intervention.

Since 1977, the Institute of Education has trained many teachers for kindergartens and Child Care Centres. Our present plans are to continue to teach teachers to be quality teachers who teach quality programmes. We have moved far from the events of the 70's where teachers were trained, according to Dr Ruth Wong (1975), "on a diet of prescriptive methodology not secure enough to avoid prescriptive teaching themselves" (p. 133). We feel now that teachers are well informed, can take initiative in teaching and planning to bring out the best in children. Looking into a crystal ball to discern the future is for the superstitious. For educators the future depends on a thorough evaluation of the present in terms of research and scrutiny. If our concern for quality maintains its current thrust we will continue to change, innovate and improve. We will not build sandcastles but missions with firm foundations.
References


