
Teacher education at the University of Guyana

If one talks of educating a teacher to become a 'reflective practitioner', one needs to consider that the process may not be all that easy if the teacher trainee has come from a system of education that has not emphasised reflective thinking, if the teacher educators are themselves used to a fairly authoritarian mode of teaching and are weak in the knowledge and understanding of the subjects they have to teach, if the resources of the institution (books, aids) are inadequate and if the contacts with the schools are not well established. Changes on all these fronts are obviously difficult and costly, especially if the teaching conditions are such that capable students will not consider entering training because of what awaits them at the end of the road.

(Initial Teacher Training: South Asian Approaches, 1993, Commonwealth Secretariat p. 61)

Background

The only institution in Guyana which has been training teachers to graduate level is the Faculty of Education, University of Guyana. Within the first eight years of its establishment (1967-74), 200 teachers graduated with the Diploma in Education.

Programmes

The Certificate in Education programme was introduced in 1972. In more recent times, the Faculty has also been offering the Bachelor of Education for teachers at the nursery, primary and secondary levels. Teachers may now specialise in the traditional school subjects as well as in administration and teaching, the teaching of reading, allied arts, business education, and measurement and evaluation. The postgraduate Diploma in Education offered by the Faculty of Education is of two years' duration, with classes held on Saturdays only, and with a one

week teaching clinic. The Bachelor of Education programme is of five years' duration for persons who hold normal university entrance requirements, but who are not trained teachers. Trained teachers may complete the programme in four years, since they are exempt from the first year. To graduate with B. Ed. a student must acquire a minimum of 120 credits. Roughly two-thirds of this number is made up of content courses, while the remainder comprises professional courses. Generally, students have to do an average of 14 hours of class per week. Science students usually have to do a higher number largely because of laboratory work. Supervised teaching practice experiences are worth ten credits. The Postgraduate Diploma in Education may be acquired after obtaining 30 credits from professional courses, including teaching practice. All of the programmes are part-time. Students normally carry out their teaching responsibilities in school when they are not at classes. The Ministry of Education grants official release for teachers to attend classes.

The goals of the Faculty's teacher education programme are, in summary, to expose teachers to an advanced level of content appropriate for their area of specialisation, to provide them with experiences which will enhance their professional growth, and to increase their ability to evaluate their own performance so as to give direction and quality to their professional interaction with learners. Much emphasis is placed on the development of research skills and on curriculum planning and evaluation within the context of the area of specialisation. The programme for school administrators devotes much attention to developing students' skills, knowledge, and attitudes regarding clinical supervision, staff development, and leadership.

Students of Administration also have to do teaching practice in a selected subject area.

Formerly, student-assessment was based on a combination of course-work, which was usually worth 40-50 per cent, and a final examination worth 50-60 per cent. However, from 1993, the Faculty began to follow the semester system. As a result, much more emphasis is placed now on a system of continuous assessment, with assignments of various kinds – quiz, book report, project, interview, in-class test, class presentation, research paper – spread out across the semester. There is generally no longer the heavy weighting on the final assignment.

The number of teachers who graduated from the Faculty of Education, 1982-1994, is shown in Appendix 10. An analysis of the numbers show that of the 709 who graduated between 1982 and 1994, 431, or approximately 60.7 per cent, were female while 278 (39.2 per cent) were male. The tendency in recent years has been for more females to seek entry for training. During this period 396 (55.9 per cent) graduated with the B.Ed. degree while 216 (30.5 per cent) graduated with the postgraduate Diploma in Education. The evidence reveals that in both cases females outnumbered males, more so at the B.Ed. level. The only programmes offered at the Certificate in Education level during this period were the Certificate in Technical Education and the Certificate in Special Education. The Master of Education programme was reintroduced in 1991, with the first graduates appearing in 1992 and, as can be seen, here too females outnumber males almost two to one overall. The Certificate in Education for all subject areas was introduced in 1993. The first graduates from this programme are expected in 1995. The programme is of two years' duration for persons who were already non-graduate trained teachers, and three years' duration for untrained teachers. Dividing the B.Ed. into two parts, with a Part I being the Cert.Ed., was an attempt to attract more students and to offer an incentive to persons who might consider four years too long to have to wait for a university professional qualification.

Apart from low numbers generally, some observations which are rather striking for the period 1990-1994 include the following:

- no male student graduated with the B.Ed. in English
- no male student graduated in home economics education
- only one student graduated in Modern Languages Education

- mathematics and science education only had eight graduates each
- there were no female students for technical education
- for 1993 and 1994, there were no graduates in agriculture
- home economics, social studies, and educational administration, in that order, were the options which produced most of the graduates.

The situation is generally very worrying, but perhaps more so with respect to modern languages. Over the last few years it has become very difficult to attract persons into this option. It appears that modern language teachers who graduate from the Cyril Potter College of Education opt to enter the Faculty of Arts where they do a straight content degree (with no professional courses). But the B. Ed., as can be seen from the Faculty regulations, constitutes a reasonably balanced combination of content courses and professional courses.

With respect to the Diploma in Education for the period 1990-1994, the majority of students (29) specialised in educational administration with female students outnumbering male students almost two to one. The next highest group of graduates during the period was science (12), again with females outnumbering males two to one.

Concern must be expressed again about the very low response received from modern language teachers. The subject does not seem to be popular at school. This is noticeable in the low number of students who take the Caribbean Examinations Council (CXC) examination in foreign languages. In view of such an undesirable situation, the Faculty of Education has introduced a Year I programme for students who might wish to enter the Cert.Ed. programme directly from school, that is, without first completing a programme at the CPCE. In addition, the Faculty has proposed to the Ministry of Education a project through which persons who are not teaching Spanish, but who are qualified to enter the university, may be recruited to a special intensive programme in the foreign language country for a three-month period and at the Institute of Adult and Continuing Education (IACE). Such courses would expose the prospective teachers to the professional aspects of teacher-training.

The Master of Education programme was reintroduced in 1991 as a specific attempt to meet the identified needs of the education

system. So far, courses have been offered in curriculum development, language education, management and supervision and, more recently, in measurement and evaluation, and guidance. It is normally a two-year programme. Apart from the fact that the number of graduates is low, it is of note that females again out-number males almost two to one and that graduates from the language education option are all females.

While the Faculty certainly hopes and expects that many more students will come forward for training as teachers, it is recognised that there will be a much greater need for teacher-educators to cope with the supervision of teaching practice or the practicum.

The Faculty has had some difficulty ensuring adequate supervision of teachers during teaching practice. The present model of supervision at the Faculty of Education involves, mainly, a supervisor going to the school, observing the lesson(s), making comments, and suggesting improvements. In addition, he/she asks for a log book or a journal at the end of the period of supervision, and a sample of notes of lessons. On the basis of this information, a grade is given. However, for a variety of reasons relating both to the schools' activities and to the supervisor's other commitments, timetables and responsibilities, the supervisor rarely ever sees the student as often as required. It is often difficult for the supervisor to relate the lesson fairly to the ongoing context in which the teacher finds himself or herself. It is also a problem to make clearly defined allowances for the disadvantages or advantages a teacher has at one school as compared to a peer at another school; the supervisor may also have no system for carefully monitoring the development of the teacher on a continuous basis; and, the student-teacher is rarely guided toward developing a method to monitor his or her own performance.

The Faculty of Education recognises that supervision should be geared towards monitoring and improving the performance of teachers during their educational and professional interaction with students. For the teacher, the expected outcome is increased acceptance of teacher accountability, recognition of the need for professional growth and teacher effectiveness, and an awareness of how to assess teaching performance. Clearly, the process can be significantly enhanced by strategies and by technology which allow the supervisee to

develop a reliable method of self-evaluation, and to contribute without reserve to the development of a personal teaching style which is both pedagogically sound and professionally acceptable.

With the above in mind, the Faculty of Education is planning to implement the following measures:

- conduct a survey to determine areas in which teacher-trainees need help and guidance, especially since most are already trained, and many would have been teaching for a number of years
- make peer teaching a required part of the methodology courses, and use the experience to help students develop a positive attitude to practice teaching, and a supportive attitude towards one another, as well as take feedback on performance in good spirit. Such sessions could be graded by the group alone, or by the group and the tutor
- require that teacher-trainees complete and submit weekly, for a specified number of weeks, a form or a document which describes their activities during the previous week, under headings such as: assessment of performance during that week (strong and weak areas of performance); plans to modify or improve teaching in the light of the assessment of performance; and time spent on various teaching-related activities.

Such a strategy allows the teacher to monitor his or her own performance, keeps the college tutor informed on a continuous basis without having to be actually observing all the lessons and ensures feedback in cases where, for one reason or another, the tutor could not reach the school. Communication is always maintained, a record is kept and the Faculty knows sooner which teachers need most attention, which methods discussed in class are being used, and with what success. The teachers also have the opportunity to develop a model of assessing themselves. This strategy does not rule out notes of lessons, or visits from the faculty tutor and works best if there is someone at the school level who will initial or sign the form to indicate that the information was noted. The Faculty believes that the strategy described above could become the basis for an organised, structured, system of peer supervision, with teachers serving both as facilitators and as observers of teacher-trainees. Data gathered could also be used for research into ways of making the teaching practice

experience more effective and more acceptable to the teachers.

The assessment of the practicum experience might also include assignments such as a report on an interview relating to teaching method, preferably with an experienced teacher in the field; findings from discussions with the head of department on the management of a department; how behavioural problems are dealt with; a staff development session, peer-teaching and lessons the teacher-trainee observed. Some of these activities are clearly more meaningful if the student teacher is placed in an unfamiliar environment.

Bearing in mind that schools vary in their hospitality, their climate, and their facilities, among other things, it is perhaps preferable that, in the interest of fairness, the practicum should not be given a letter grade, but should be assessed satisfactory or unsatisfactory. A student should be able to accumulate additional credits depending on the number of hours beyond the minimum he or she is willing to work. The assessment instrument would be one which is appropriately focused, and which allows for modification in accordance with the needs of the particular student. It has already become the norm for staff members to observe lessons and offer assistance in a wider range of areas outside their particular specialisation. Some degree of standardisation and communication among staff has of course been necessary in order to make comparisons across subject options. The Faculty is planning a handbook on the practicum which will give guidance and information to staff, student-teachers, and schools which co-operate in the teaching practice exercise.

Despite the constraints and the commitments alluded to above, future plans for the Faculty of Education include the formal establishment of distance teaching; expanding the range of options offered at the Masters level; continually reviewing the teaching-practice assessment procedures to include a significant input of school-based assessment; improving the quality of the Education Journal so that it meets international standards; upgrading the qualifications of staff so as to be able to offer a doctoral degree in the near future; and conducting research that is more meaningful in the national and regional context.

Issues and concerns

Observers and analysts have commented repeatedly on the general state of crisis in which education in Guyana has found itself in recent times. For many, the crisis is noted in several areas: shortage of teachers who are competent in their subject areas and professionally qualified; poor physical conditions of school buildings; a lack of adequate books and other teaching materials; low morale of teachers; poor examination results at external examinations in some areas; overcrowded classrooms and inappropriateness of the curriculum for some schools. These seem to be the areas which are in need of most urgent attention. In 1990, for example, the Ministry of Education estimated that an average of 60.5 per cent of the teachers in the system were untrained. Although training institutions have been making every effort to increase the numbers of persons who come forward for training, they have not really been able to attract the numbers required to service the system adequately. Moreover, many teachers, especially at the graduate level, once trained, migrate to countries in the Caribbean or elsewhere to seek better salaries and working conditions. Others may opt out of teaching completely to take up more lucrative jobs in the private sector.

Efforts to accelerate the training and availability of teachers for the local education system have led to an increase in short intensive courses; the modification of entry requirements at teacher training institutions; the provision of upgrading programmes especially for prospective teachers at the non-graduate level; the move to more school-based training and, particularly for the purpose of reaching persons in outlying and remote areas of the country, the planning and preparation of distance education programmes and programmes which would allow persons to obtain higher qualifications through external studies. The Faculty of Education, for example, is currently working towards the launching of its Certificate of Education by a combination of distance education and intramural studies by 1995. The programme is aimed initially at teachers for the nursery and primary levels.

Perhaps it is useful to recognise at this point that one concern expressed by the Ministry of Education relates to ways of harmonising the training programmes being offered by the various teacher training institutions such as the

Cyril Potter College of Education, the National Centre for Educational Resource Development, the Institute of Adult and Continuing Education, and the Faculty of Education, University of Guyana. The purposes of the training which these various institutions offer may also have to be clarified. It is the view and concern of some teachers that the skill, knowledge, and training which they acquire are at times not relevant to the classrooms they encounter, particularly if the classroom is one which is dedicated to covering the syllabus and to ensuring high passes at external examinations as its priority, no matter what the cost to the student as a person. A related concern points to the unwillingness of classroom teachers to conduct action research which would inform them about events taking place in their classrooms, and about what strategies could be used to cope with the situation.

Problems relating to the environment in all its aspects have also raised concerns about the kinds of priorities which must guide the teacher education curriculum. Teacher effectiveness could be significantly hampered by behavioural and cultural patterns which are manifested in the school setting. Balancing the academic, the professional, and the interpersonal aspects of the curriculum becomes a matter of serious concern. Guidance and counselling, formally introduced in the early 1970s, and either de-emphasised or completely removed from some schools by the late 1980s, are to be re-introduced. The Faculty of Education had always been aware of the importance of guidance and counselling in the curriculum of teacher education. Although, mainly because of staff shortages, it was forced to discontinue studies in this option some years ago, the Faculty is again offering a specialisation in guidance at the Master of Education level. The programme is carefully tailored to meet the needs of the local situation.

Another area of concern within the general education system is literacy. Concerns in this area, which are clearly not restricted to Guyana, have influenced the Faculty of Education to offer a more structured and elaborate programme in the teaching of reading and in special education. These programmes have already been prepared and student teachers can now specialise in these areas. Currently, there is a project aimed at assessing the level of literacy across the nation.

Future directions

The Faculty of Education recognises the need to prepare teachers for technical and vocational education. The Bachelor of Education programme in technical education, and in business education, are steps in the right direction. However, there is a need to organise and offer more sophisticated programmes that seriously recognise the full nature and extent of the use of modern technology in today's world of work. The Ministry of Education is sensitive to this issue when it calls for new and creative strategies which would address concerns of access, partnership arrangements with industry and the private sector, and career opportunities. The major questions which teacher education will have to address are as follows:

- How to establish and maintain a core of competent and highly motivated educators possessing the skills, abilities, attitudes and cultural sensitivities needed to prepare young people to cope with the immediate challenges, as well as with those of the 21st century.
- What are the appropriate recruitment and selection strategies that will result in the objective implied above?
- How to develop appropriate learning/working environments in schools.

Clearly, such considerations will inform the future directions and curriculum decisions of the Faculty of Education. Interestingly, many of the strategies which the Ministry of Education has proposed for achieving its major goals of improving the quantity and quality of teachers are compatible with the initiatives which the Faculty of Education has identified. These include the development of a relevant curriculum, use of distance teaching, mounting of appropriate intensive short courses, rationalising the relationship between the Faculty of Education and the Cyril Potter College of Education, and moving towards a more school-based form of teacher training and supervision. The Ministry of Education also plans to implement a pupil-teacher training programme immediately, a move which clearly underscores the urgency with which trained teachers are needed.

Although the general situation in education may not seem too encouraging as far as meeting the full needs of the system is concerned, the university is optimistic that having identified the areas where special attention is

needed, and having taken steps to reach many more potential teachers through distance teaching methods, and through alternative ways of entering teacher education, Guyana

will soon be moving much closer to meeting its objective of having at least 80 per cent of teachers trained by the year 2000.