
St Kitts and Nevis

In recent years teaching has become less attractive as a profession. The moral rectitude is still required by society; the workload has increased as parents abdicate more of their responsibilities to the school; the salary and working conditions are unsatisfactory and respect and co-operation from the public are on the decline.

(Foundation for the Future: OECS Education Reform Strategy, 1991, p. 87)

Background

Teacher education in St Kitts and Nevis is offered primarily through the Division of Teacher Education, College of Further Education. The Division's main task is the training of full-time student teachers following the two year programme of the University of the West Indies, Cave Hill Campus.

Previously, teachers accepted into the programme had already had at least three years 'teaching experience' in the classroom. However, in recent years teachers have been accepted after one year or even less in the classroom, and in 1993 one student was accepted straight from the sixth form.

The Division also performs a supervisory role in classroom teaching/learning in primary and secondary schools. Supervision covers teachers' substitutes, untrained and trained. Through these sessions teachers are given on-the-spot assistance individually, mainly in relation to methodology and class control. In addition, weaknesses noted may be addressed in workshop sessions as necessary, whether at school, zonal, or national level.

Programmes

The Division offers two training programmes – one for teachers at primary level, kindergarten to Grade 6 (ages 5-11+), and the other for

teachers at secondary level, Forms 1-3 (ages 12-14+). However, as from September 1994, the secondary programme is offered through an in-service arrangement, with student teachers attending the Division on a part-time basis.

Primary programme

The courses offered are of two types – required courses and optional courses.

Required courses

- Education theory
- English language
- Mathematics
- Science
- Social studies
- *Health and family life
- Teaching practice
- Individual study (research)
- **Library skills

*First year course

**First term course

Optional courses

Any ONE of:

- Art
- Music
- Agricultural science
- Industrial arts
- Home economics
- School librarian ship

Secondary programme

Required Courses

- Education theory
- Use of English
- Social issues
- Two specialist subjects chosen from the subjects in the secondary curriculum: English, mathematics, science, social studies, French, Spanish, business education, industrial arts
- Teaching practice
- Individual study (classroom research)
- One optional subject (same as primary programme)

Certification

The programmes followed in the Division are moderated by the Faculty of Education, University of the West Indies, Cave Hill Campus. Successful completion of the course is certified (a) locally and (b) by the University of the West Indies.

A local/national certificate is obtained by student teachers who have fulfilled local requirements. These include attendance over the two years of at least 80 per cent, completion of all major assignments and an overall grade of not less than D.

UWI certification is issued by that institution on successful completion of the written examinations and practical teaching examinations which are jointly assessed by the University and the Division. Candidates must pass as follows:

- 1 • Teaching practice
 - Education theory
 - English language
 - Individual study

In at least one of which the grade must not be less than C.

- 2 • Mathematics
 - Science
 - Social studies

In at least one of which the grade must not be less than C.

- 3 • In one subject from the programme of optional subjects.

Issues and concerns

1 Generally, student teachers are admitted based upon the qualifications required by the UWI (four 'O' levels including English). However, with the wide range of subjects now being offered by the various examination boards, teachers entering the Division may or may not have the basic content in the subjects being offered in the Division's programme, even though they meet the requirements.

As a result, a considerable amount of time has to be spent upgrading the basic content which these teachers have to teach before the more advanced aspects of the prescribed programme can be tackled. This is the case particularly in the primary programme, where teachers have to teach all subjects on the curriculum, and must sit papers in the four core subjects for the final examinations.

2 In some cases student teachers have attained the necessary qualifications over a period of years. They therefore find it difficult to cope with the volume of work in the College programme, since they lack study and organisational skills as well as the discipline necessary for tackling all subjects of the programme simultaneously.

3 The time spent in the actual development of the 'skill of teaching' within the two year programme is very limited – twelve weeks including the final examination. The programme is heavily theory oriented, with very little opportunity for the application of theory into practice, within the classroom setting. In addition, there is very little space and no equipment for micro-teaching activities.

4 As a result of the heavy emphasis on the acquisition of the 'knowledge of teaching', in many instances the teaching practices of tutors themselves come into question, for even here theory is not always translated into practice.

5 On the return of 'newly trained' teachers to full-time classroom teaching, there is insufficient support given through supervision. There is the notion of 'having completed training' and yet their efficiency and effectiveness in the classroom in some cases decrease rather than increase after formal training. Given the limitation of tutors' time for supervision (a maximum of one day per week) and the fact that this is greatly hampered during the second half of the academic year, supervisory activities are not as effective as they could be.

6 Although the Division is involved in workshops and seminars organised by the Early – Childhood Division to address aspects of training for pre-school supervisors and teachers, there is no formal training programme offered by the Division of Teacher Education in this area.

7 There is a need for training and re-training of teacher educators, as well as opportunities for on-going development, for example, through sabbaticals and exchanges.

8 Indications so far suggest that student teachers are not coping well with the secondary in-service training programme. This may be due to poor time management, having to teach (albeit a reduced timetable) and study,

as well as to gaps in knowledge which result in difficulty in coping with some modules.

Future directions

A first phase of teacher education should address the knowledge base of teachers in the various subjects/disciplines of the curriculum which they are expected to impart to students. Some efforts have already begun through a distance teaching programme administered through the Ministry of Education, Adult Education. There is the possibility of using the modules developed to help trainees upgrade their knowledge and skills. Suggestions have been made to the University for reorganisation of the two year programme to facilitate an extended period of practice teaching, during which trainees can be systematically carried through a process of discovering or identifying relationships and connections between the theory learnt and the practice of teaching.

However, this reorganisation at the UWI level will take some time to be instituted, and thus at the division/local level plans are being made for more regular micro-teaching experiences whereby trainees can, through peer evaluation and self-evaluation, improve their skills and relate theory to practice.

The present secondary in-service programme has this component in-built; however this is not without its problems. Continuous evaluation of this programme, which has been running for approximately one term, shows the need for some intensive teaching of theory and content prior to the clinical supervision in schools. Plans are therefore being made for a reassessment of the programme and possible modifications to be made in terms of delivery.

Discussion is also taking place on the possibility of offering a programme for pre-school/early childhood teachers with certification by the University of the West Indies.