New Challenges to Teacher Education

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The general concern of the American public for the quality of education has tended to center on teacher education. Within the past decade, lay citizens who formerly had taken the preparation of teachers pretty much for granted have become acutely interested in everything about the way teachers are selected, prepared, and utilized in elementary and secondary schools. No question in this field is too small, too involved, or too intricate to be beyond the concern of lay citizens who seem suddenly to have grasped the significance and relationships between the quality of teachers and the quality of education. With the spotlight on teacher education, the drama of its dilemmas and developments has unfolded to the point that the existing situation is coming to be widely known, partially understood, and hotly debated.

The Situation

For over a century teacher education has been enmeshed in a prolonged battle for control. The controversy deals primarily with who should make policy—prescribe programs and standards—for teacher education in colleges and universities. On one side are found professors of education, officials in state departments of public instruction, and leaders in the organized teaching profession; on the other are professors of liberal arts and academic and specialized subjects in colleges and universities, political leaders, and, one might presume, much of the general public. The professional educationists and their followers presently are in control of programs of teacher education. The others feel that they should have something to say about how teachers are prepared.

The controversy in teacher education, as Dr. Conant has pointed out, is more political than educational. It concerns essentially the control and manipulation of forces external to institutions of higher learning—licensing of teachers and accreditation of teacher education programs—that ultimately delimit faculty autonomy as well as generate antagonisms among faculty colleagues. Despite numerous efforts to develop a negotiated peace and professional cooperation between the contesting groups, it is fair and honest to say that the resolution of the conflict has yet to be achieved. Yet, it should be pointed out that on some campuses, and in some states, patterns of cooperation have developed that suggest the century long battle could be speedily ended if faculty autonomy were returned to colleges and universtitics and control democratically shared by all faculty members who help to prepare teachers.

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A new and potent force injected into the controversy over teacher education has been the developing concern of the general public. Until recent years the quarrel was assumed by most laymen who had heard about it to be an internal matter—a battle of vested interests—within institutions of higher learning. With the sharpened public sensitivities that have developed, however, an awareness is coming about that the altercation has of necessity become a matter of public concern—since the continuation of the tension or the manner in which it may be resolved will affect all. In some states the public actually has joined the battle. Representatives of the public in at least two states, California and Hawaii, have taken legislative action to achieve objectives in teacher education programs that are endorsed by the general public as well as segments of the academic community. In other states, representatives of the informed public at least have practically organized into rooting sections to cheer for points of view and objectives considered important. Press reports of developments in teacher education are almost as lively and as eagerly consumed by the reading public as are stories of sporting events.

That the public ultimately would become involved in the controversy about teacher education was a predictable development. With public interest at stake, and competing professionals unable to resolve the conflict, the public quite naturally would become frustrated and disgusted to the point of taking matters into its own hands. The situation documents anew a characteristic truth about democratic government: what the designated officials can’t or won’t take care of, the public ultimately will.

It isn’t that the professionals who control teacher education don’t want to bring the conflict to a congenial, compatible, and workable conclusion; they desperately do. All are embarrassed about the public image held of teacher education and professional educationists. All are aware of the damage that results from faculty friction over the way teachers are prepared. Most concede too that the exclusive control of teacher education by educationists must come to an end, but not all agree that full democratic sharing of responsibility for teacher education should be permitted. The coalitions of professional educationists in colleges and in the field who control teacher education have negotiated in recent years among themselves and with colleagues in liberal arts and the subject fields about modifications that might be made in control patterns. As they have, it has been constantly clear that the educationists are extremely reluctant to relinquish the controls—prerogatives for program development—that have been won and defended with such vigor over the years. It is clear also that full use will continue to be made of external pressures such as teacher licensing and accreditation of programs to preserve as much of the status quo as possible.

The Prospect

It is unreasonable, one must concede, to expect a professional group voluntarily to relinquish controls that have been carefully established and which are considered by members of that group to be vital to the interests
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of teacher education. Negotiation and compromise are likely to come only when pressures are sufficiently great to bring the warring factions to the conference table. These negotiations are likely to take place on a campus-to-campus and state-to-state basis. However the negotiations may go, one prospect has been fairly well documented by the history of the past hundred years: the conflict over teacher education will continue until vested interest domination is either relinquished or destroyed. In its place, one can predict, will come an interdisciplinary partnership for control of teacher education policy and programs—a union that will give to professors of liberal arts and the academic and specialized subject fields shares of responsibility for policy making and program development comparable to the proportion of the load carried in teacher education programs.

External prescriptions for programs in teacher education will be minimized. Requirements for teacher licensure in the various states and criteria for accreditation of teacher education programs will become more respectful of institutional autonomy and less controlled by the pedagogical vested interest within institutions and the profession of teaching. The approved program approach already adopted by most state departments of public instruction represents a step in this direction. The restricted state approved program approach recommended by Dr. Conant—that would place greater responsibility on institutional faculties for judging competence to teach and accepting responsibility for the quality of teachers developed—represents a further modification that has promise. Criteria and standards for accrediting teacher education programs in colleges and universities may be expected to become less prescriptive, less monolithic, and less concerned with the internal organization and operation of teacher education programs in institutions of higher education.

If accreditation is to succeed, it must also be sponsored by an interdisciplinary partnership of scholars in the liberal arts and the subject and specialized fields, as well as by professors of education, and must become more responsive to the institutions to which it is properly accountable. The continuation of a program of national accrediting as a useful resource for improving the quality of teacher education will require the limitation of accrediting efforts to the task to which they can best contribute: providing guidance to and judgments about new programs of teacher education, rather than prescribing patterns of conformity for established programs. Reciprocity among states for teacher licensure, a desirable objective, will be achieved on grounds other than conformity to accreditation standards. The new regional coalitions of state departments of public instruction to improve standards of education may well be the instrument by which formulas are worked out to permit teachers to move easily from state to state without licensing harassments or loss of tenure and retirement benefits.

Two parallel forces currently are impinging on teacher education: a rapid expansion of knowledge in all fields that underscores the importance of the subject content in the school curriculum, and renewed concern for making the benefits of education available to all children and youth that underscores the importance of professional preparation that makes individual differences in
students a reality for the planning of programs and techniques of instruction. The expansion of knowledge prescribes a greater degree of specialization for teachers in the subjects to be taught. It also reduces the possibility that the educationist-generalist, whose major qualification is familiarity with school programs, will be able to make sound judgments about the subjects that prospective teachers ought to study in their specialized fields. Renewed concern for the differences in students—in culturally induced interests, background, motivations, as well as intelligence—motivates interest in tapping all the interdisciplinary resources of the scholarly community in institutions of higher learning to design educational programs that educate all children and youth.

Inasmuch as quality in teaching has yet to be defined adequately and satisfactorily, programs to prepare teachers will, with wisdom, aim at general objectives and generate broad emphases that hold the most promise for contributing to the kind of intellectual, scholarly, and professional backgrounds from which teachers can move with flexibility and effectiveness to deal with specific educational problems. The general areas of emphasis in collegiate programs that have come to be recognized as most valid for the preparation of teachers include the liberal arts and sciences, specialized scholarship in the subject field or fields in which teaching is contemplated, knowledge about education and its processes, as well as clinical practice for teaching.

Research and innovations to strengthen teacher education may be expected to increase. Support for such efforts hopefully will come from the federal government as well as from philanthropic foundations that have over the past years expressed substantial interest in this field. As innovations develop, multiple routes to prepare for teaching are expected to prevail within institutions as well as among institutions. As the lockstep of standardization in teacher education programs is broken, ideas for its improvement will have a fair chance to compete against each other to demonstrate better practices.

Developing Trends

The following trends appear to be developing in teacher education:

1. The control of policies and programs of teacher education is becoming interdisciplinary in character and functionally accountable in terms of the quality of graduates produced.

2. Higher standards for the selection of teachers are evolving. It may be expected, for example, that prospective teachers will soon come only from the upper half or one third of college populations as measured at the beginning of the third or junior year of college.

3. Preservice programs of preparation for teaching are being lengthened to include the fifth year. The primary purpose for the increase in time devoted to preparation for teaching is to provide for a better foundation in the liberal arts and a deeper specialization in the subject field or fields to be taught as well as to make possible a more realistic type of clinical practice; e.g., a full semester internship during the fifth year.
4. Teacher licensure requirements are becoming less specific, with greater responsibility for certification of quality being placed on institutional faculties.

5. State departments of public instruction and local elementary and secondary schools are becoming active and responsible partners in teacher education programs. State departments are assuming the obligation to work with school systems to provide and coordinate the use of clinical stations for interns from various institutions preparing teachers. Local school systems are assuming greater responsibility for the clinical practice, on the analogy of the contributions made by hospitals to interns in the medical field.

6. Preparation for administration and supervision and other specialized leadership positions in education is being postponed to begin after the fifth year of preparation for teaching. Two years of planned graduate study—the six year specialist program—are already required for superintendents of schools. Similar standards are being considered for principals, guidance counselors, and other kinds of specialists.

7. Professors in pedagogical departments who concentrate on providing leadership for teacher education in colleges and universities are maintaining closer ties with the academic roots for the professional field of education. Professors who teach methods and supervise clinical practice, for example, are expected to be reputable scholars in the subject fields in which they work as well as accomplished professional practitioners. Similarly, programs to prepare educational administrators are drawing heavily upon the foundation subject fields such as political science, economics, and sociology, as well as other professional subjects that include law, philosophy of education, psychology, and measurement of learning, among others.

8. The need for programs in liberal education and in the teaching field concentrations to be reexamined is being recognized. The trend is for teachers to be prepared in the liberal arts by patterns that are common to other students, which represents a deviation from the criterion that the educationist should design a separate program of liberal arts for prospective teachers. The recognition that traditional major and minor patterns in the academic subject fields are often too limited in scope to provide appropriate programs for prospective teachers, added to the increasing involvement of professors in subject fields in the planning of programs of concentration for teachers, is leading to new looks at the kinds of scholarly preparation that teachers need to be effective in teaching subjects in elementary and secondary schools. In the field of English, for example, professors of English, often somewhat reluctantly it must be admitted, are joining in partnerships with their colleagues in such fields as linguistics, world literature, speech, oral interpretation, drama, and of course in language when such is separate from literature, to design programs of specialization that will prepare teachers who are well rounded in academic backgrounds for their teaching assignments.

9. The professional sequence has been or is being reduced to include only the basic content courses for which sufficient knowledge exists to guarantee that pedagogical courses will be intellectually stimulating and mutually discrete in content. Philosophy, history, and sociology of education, frequently called
the role of the school in American society, is pretty well established as one foundation course. Educational psychology, with emphasis upon human learning and its motivation, is another. Not yet resolved is what should be done about the very important field of tests and measurements or the evaluation of learning. The tendency in the past has been to give precedence to emphasis on so-called human development, which in itself often overlaps the material presented on psychology of learning. Work in general methods of teaching is being merged with specialized methods courses. For elementary school teachers the isolated and separate methods courses, which typically have been highly redundant and thin in content emphasis, are being condensed and merged into fused or integrated approaches to methodology for the elementary schools. And finally, a full-time internship for eight weeks to a semester is replacing the type of student teaching which was scheduled for an hour a day for an entire year or for a half day for one semester.

Opportunity and Challenge

These are exciting times for all interested in teacher education. We move ahead with our efforts in the floodlights of public interest and concern and with the full interdisciplinary help of all partners in the enterprise. The specialist in the teaching of a subject field such as English plays a central role in leadership to improve teacher education. He works in an area that is generally endorsed by all as being vital to the preparation of teachers. He also serves as the liaison between the pedagogical departments and the subject departments within the university and has constant contact with schools in the field. The opportunity and challenge that confronts all is to develop teachers so well grounded in the liberal arts and so well qualified in the subjects they teach, so knowledgeable about education and its processes, and so skilled in the art of teaching that they will be fully qualified to develop programs of learning for children and youth that are characterized both by high standards of quality and effective contributions to all students.