

II. THE ROLE OF THE TEACHER IN EDUCATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Determinants of educational policy and practice

The varying forms and nature of educational provision in Commonwealth countries reflect the different purposes of the providers over time and distance and the different intentions of the many educational agencies. A complicated and kaleidoscopic set of variables influences policy and moulds practice. New social, political and economic circumstances elicit reappraisal, innovation and change in education. The translation of policy into practice is often influenced markedly by factors related only indirectly to educational desirability. Within the matrix of influences the specific contribution of the teacher is often difficult to identify and impossible to quantify.

Sources of change originating outside the educational system itself are multifarious, including demographic features (an increasing population of young people requiring more schooling, probably coupled with a high rate of urbanisation calling for changes in educational approaches); political developments, such as the advent of independence or the adoption of a new political direction; and social factors, including the growing emancipation of women, the acceptance of the need to make special provision for underprivileged groups; and increasingly articulate public opinion. Other major influences on educational policy and practice range from improved nutritional standards (now believed to have a positive correlation with mental ability) to manpower plans, from conditions imposed by external aid donors to the direct and indirect effects of the mass media, from the world trading situation to the availability and calibre of personnel at all levels.

Specific agents of change are also numerous: not only cabinets and the mass communicators but employers, parents and the pupils themselves induce new elements in the education process. Within the wider framework of education many agents operate; universities, institutes and colleges of education; examining boards; voluntary bodies and foundations; inspectors and headmasters; and the general corpus of teachers, acting severally and jointly.

The role of the teacher

The teacher has a major role in educational development whether he approaches his work actively or passively. He can influence development adversely by opposing innovation or merely remaining mute in the face of a growing need for reform; on the other hand he can participate actively as an initiator himself or an interpreter of the plans devised by others. Local circumstances will dictate the emphasis which any teacher gives to each of the two roles of initiator and interpreter.

Educational innovation remains unfulfilled without the active co-operation of the classroom teacher. It is essential therefore, to decide the stage at which the teacher should be drawn in to the innovatory process. In some circumstances, innovation may originate in the classroom, becoming generalised and codified later. In such cases it may be that the role of the specialist curriculum developer becomes that of making the inspiration of the individual teacher available to all. The fact that a

teacher is not also specially qualified in the theory of child development and the intricacies of the teaching-learning process should not detract from the regard in which he is held or his right to participate in development. If the interdependence is recognised of all those engaged in the development and execution of education change, the distinctions of status and merit now drawn between the different partners could be greatly reduced, perhaps largely eradicated.

When considering the potential role of the teacher in educational development, however, one factor remains of prime importance. Innovation can represent both a criticism of the teacher's existing practices and a threat to his livelihood, yet innovation cannot be implemented without his co-operation and support. If for no other reason, therefore, expediency and efficiency require that the willing participation of the teacher be sought. This can best be achieved by involving him in the development process, so ensuring that he becomes both agent and instrument.

Educational development affects content, method and structures and teachers may be associated with specific activities as individuals or as members of smaller or larger groupings. The contribution which they are able to make will be related to their educational philosophy and professional competence. A prerequisite of effective development, therefore, appears to be the formulation of a code of ethics and the recognition of the need to maintain appropriate attitudes. If teachers are to achieve full participation in educational development and be accepted as equal partners by controlling authorities, it seems highly desirable that they should devise a code of ethics by which to conduct themselves. This should be attempted despite the extremely difficult problem of enforcing effective sanctions against those who transgress the code. As a corollary and as a partial consequence of the adoption of such a professional code, there would need to be encouraged a recognition of the necessity for each teacher to exhibit professional attitudes. To some extent these would be self-generating. A more professional approach by teachers should lead to higher status, for status is awarded by public opinion: it must be won, it cannot be claimed. Professional self-confidence based on a realistic appreciation by teachers of their technical ability and professional competence may well lead to the acceptance by others of the value of their opinions and the soundness of their judgement. In more practical terms, better conditions of service more often reflect enhanced status than they create it. The roles of trade union and professional association are not mutually exclusive. If teachers' associations exert professional influence on their members some of the "trade union" benefits may more readily accrue.

Tokenism

The teacher can participate in the development process as an individual or as a member of a professional group; either may be appropriate in given circumstances. On whatever basis teachers become involved, however, they should seek to avoid the dangers of tokenism; their participation should be on a basis of equality. It is not unknown for teachers to be invited to take part in the policy-making process but be permitted to exert little real influence because consultation is patently not between parties of equal standing. Overcoming this may take time, as teachers' representatives become recognised as competent to offer advice and are known to be backed by a consensus of their colleagues. If this acceptance is to be gained, the criterion for the selection of teachers' representatives

must be their ability to contribute to the deliberations and not the desire on the part of their colleagues to reward long service or loyalty.

The role of the teachers' associations

Opportunities to participate in the development process are not always recognised by teachers, and even when recognised are not always taken. This situation reinforces the argument for the existence of an efficient organisation to represent teachers' interests and ensure that opportunities are maximised. Teachers' associations should endeavour to establish their right to be consulted fully at all levels of the policy-making and planning stages of educational change, because once policy is decided and made public it is usually too late to put forward suggestions for alterations and amendment. Teachers' associations can influence policy-making in several ways, directly and indirectly. They can, for example, be highly effective in influencing public opinion by making known their members' views on particular topics and publishing information relating to current issues. Their members, too, can express themselves in their other roles in the community, as parents, taxpayers and concerned and responsible citizens. In order to arrive at a policy position, however, associations should establish machinery to ensure that they reflect accurately the views of their members.

In some circumstances, special groups of teachers may be able to exert more influence than a general association. There are, however, inherent dangers. If subject associations, for example, are too strong and too rigid, they may inhibit the development of integrated curricula and inter-disciplinary approaches. If associations represent certain categories of teacher, and particularly if they represent teachers working with different age-groups of pupils, the unity of the profession may be damaged and undue efforts expended to establish hierarchies within the teaching force.

Teacher participation in educational development, then, should spread from classroom practice to national policy-making and may be by individuals or representative groupings. The teacher can thereby influence the development of the curriculum (or "programme", which has been suggested as a more appropriate term), the method of its implementation and the narrower and broader setting in which it is undertaken.

Participation in curriculum development

A special contribution of teachers may be found to lie in the areas of curriculum development, syllabus construction and materials production. Where central authorities issue close specifications, however, it may take time for the teaching force to win participation. Where curriculum development is the responsibility of the controlling authority, teachers and their representatives should attempt to demonstrate the valuable contribution which can be made by those who will be required eventually to carry any reforms into effect. Where curricula are not centrally prescribed, classroom teachers should seize the implied opportunity to seek to improve their current practice. One problem arises. This relates to the possibility of educational provision becoming unacceptably uneven if inadequate control is exercised over experimentation and individual enterprise; some agreement must be reached on the acceptable extent of deviation from the norm within any overall system.

The teacher has an essential role to play in curriculum development by identifying the issues needing revision or development and by planning field trials and small scale research, undertaking investigations, experiments, demonstrations and the preliminary assessment of results. Elements of research, such as that comparing the performance of trainees in college with that of their subsequent performance as classroom teachers, for example, could readily be carried out by teachers. The teacher must also compensate for the inevitable time-lag in the introduction of new curricula, leading his pupils progressively to the new content and approaches and preparing parents to accept the changes. The teacher who is entrusted with those responsibilities is likely to be that much more committed to ensuring the success of the innovations.

The success of curriculum development activities depends on the co-operation of three types of agent: the facilitators (governments and other controlling authorities), the operators (teachers and others working directly in education) and the consumers (pupils, parents and employers). An appropriate balance must be established among these parties, allowing full participation by teachers. A supportive mechanism could be envisaged which would encourage and finance innovatory projects and record and publicise results, as is already the practice in a number of countries. When planning the introduction of new curricula and syllabuses the use of pilot projects and trials should be considered. These give teachers the opportunity to participate actively in the innovatory process and obviate the possibility of their feeling that they are being induced to accept material in the construction of which they played no part. Trials also provide for the refinement of new programmes before they are implemented generally.

The institutional environment

Teachers cannot ignore the situation in which they operate. The setting of school offers the pupil a range of environmental experiences. In the traditional school he will probably learn to co-operate with a group and accept authority; the "hidden curriculum" and his peers will educate him perhaps as much as the organised experiences to which he is exposed. In developing curricula, teachers must be aware of this. Their relationship with their pupils is as much part of the educative process as the content of their teaching and this relationship will be affected by the teacher's interpretation of his objectives. Some familiarity with the elements of child development is essential if the teacher is to work effectively, provide appropriate experiences for his pupils and experiment with revisions and improvements of his techniques. In many cases the teacher will have to overcome the disadvantage of being a "stranger" to his pupils; he may come from a different geographical area or social background or ethnic group. Establishing a working relationship will require individual adaptation in every situation. The fact that this is carried out alone and is unlikely to be replicated does not make it any less a contribution to educational development.

Participation in institutional change

The teacher has a role both as conserver and innovator. While attempting to respond to change and anticipate likely trends he must also try to ensure that in so doing he does not leave his pupils disoriented, drifting between a discredited past and an uncertain future. He must

strike a compromise, too, between the varying aims of the different users of education and in so doing manipulate structural changes to meet evolving needs. To be successful, the teacher must have competence in management and administration skills, enabling him to determine the pace of structural change with which he can deal without unnecessary disruption. He must also have the ability to evaluate the success of his undertakings and assess the success of others whose experience might be adaptable to his needs.

Non-disruptive institutional change will depend on effective linking of the agencies involved in change. Colleges and universities must build a close understanding with the schools; non-formal educational agencies should be brought within the orbit of educational provision so that their contribution may be taken into account while not being arbitrarily redirected. Links must be established, too, with official bodies which have educational functions but do not regard themselves as primarily educative. In building such links at government level, both advantages and disadvantages may accrue from the fact that a high proportion of politicians (and in the developing countries, senior administrators) have had experience as teachers.

Constraints on teacher participation in educational development

The fact that so many individuals claim experience with regard to education is but one of the many constraints which limit effective teacher participation in educational development. The low quality of a proportion of a teaching force can militate against recognition and acceptance of teachers in general as equal partners in the field; the quality of teacher training in some places gives little cause for optimism that this situation will be soon alleviated. A high turnover of teachers, too, in areas where many of them regard teaching as a bridge to better employment and positions of higher status, can also detract from the image of the profession in the eyes of the public at large.

Other constraints are perhaps more easily remediable with the active participation of the teacher. Among these is the question of the provision of resources to enable the teacher to carry out his duties. Education is a labour-intensive operation, by far the largest proportion of total recurrent costs being taken up by salaries. It seems shortsighted, therefore, for controlling authorities to seek to pare expenditure on equipment and buildings in an endeavour to economise, since this can affect the total budget only marginally. Industriable workers rarely have to bargain over the supply of appropriate tools for their job because employers recognise the clear link between these and their workers' output. Teachers, on the other hand, are criticised frequently for shortcomings which are due essentially to the inadequacy of the facilities available to them.

Among the principal items of equipment are books which, if produced for the sake of economy in large numbers, can often be irrelevant to specific local situations and frequently remain in print long after they are obsolete. In many instances teachers could participate more effectively in the production and assessment of materials and teaching aids. They could also seek closer identification with the planning and development of school buildings and furniture. Unsuitable buildings prejudice education by hampering the work of teachers, however well trained and dedicated they may be. Teachers, too, can play an important

role in assessing objectively the effectiveness and desirability of suggested innovations. The recent advocacy of a reintroduction for some purposes of a system payment by results (in the guise of "performance contracting") exemplifies the type of situation in which teachers can react forcibly and positively in the best interests of education.

All innovation is not necessarily progress; not infrequently education development appears to be cyclic rather than linear, often because the experience of the past is unknown to those responsible for planning the future.

Teachers, too, can moderate the effects of educational influence exerted from beyond the school. The transistor radio may well be the greatest instrument for social change of the current decade; the mass media as a whole exert an increasing influence on the attitudes, knowledge and awareness of people of all ages. In the case of many children television is already a major influence in their lives. This being so, teachers should seek to influence the controllers of the mass media so that the activities of the media relate more closely to the general purposes of education. Young people, too, need to be guided into attitudes of critical assessment of the messages relayed by the media and should be assisted to erect a defence against gullibility in the form of the capacity to analyse a situation and form a rational judgment based on common sense, experience and an enquiring mind. Teachers and teachers' organisations can usefully play a part in seeking to educate public opinion and so encourage the providers of radio, television, the cinema, newspapers, magazines and other media to improve the quality of their output to satisfy the needs of a more discriminating audience.

Apart from constraints imposed by the quality of the existing teaching force, physical conditions, the effects of the media and competition for the allocation of limited national resources, the blame for educational conservatism is laid most frequently upon the system of public examinations.

Teachers and teachers' organisations often express concern at the continuing constraints on curriculum change imposed by traditional examining systems. Current trends, however, suggest that teachers are likely to exert increasing influence in this area. As a body of experience and responsibility builds up, it has been found desirable in many countries to locate the ultimate control of school examinations with the teachers. Teachers' organisations often appear to be an obvious point of reference to this end. This said, however, a wide range of consequential problems arise. Alternatives to large-scale systems of external examining are not without their disadvantages. Experience with techniques such as continuous assessment, cumulative records, student profiles, dissertations, and other possibilities have shown in recent years that teacher-controlled assessment may not liberate the school and the curriculum to the extent anticipated. Adverse effects on the student-teacher relationships have been noted, while teachers may also be exposed to accusations of unjustified subjective decisions with regard to their pupils. Nevertheless, it is incontrovertible that since teachers prepare pupils for examinations and frequently act as administering agents for the examining authorities, they should be enabled to play a major role in curriculum development and examination construction. University teachers, too, have a contribution to make.

A superficial consideration of the situation can easily lead to the assumption that education is necessarily good and examinations necessarily bad. Each, however, may be good or bad; in many ways each is a function of the other. The aims of education in most Commonwealth countries today appears likely to be served best by a continuing and discriminating search for the most equitable, accurate and acceptable range of tests and examinations necessary to identify the few destined for further educational advancement and at the same time reinforce the self-esteem of the many for whom the course is terminal, by providing useful information about their achievements and capabilities.

It should be borne in mind, too, that enlightened forms of examinations can be a conscious instrument for educational development. The cry for the maintenance of standards often drowns the more progressive plea for a striving after quality.

Consultation and involvement

The involvement of teachers in consultations does not necessarily imply involvement in decision making. Either may be appropriate in given circumstances. Consultative arrangements can serve a valuable function by enabling those responsible for educational policy to seek the advice of all those interested parties, including teachers, before decision-making reaches an irrevocable stage. Time, effort and resources could be optimised if full consultation is ensured.

Implications for teacher education

If teachers do not have positive responsibility for educational development and innovation, they should at least have sufficient professional awareness and sense of responsibility not to subvert new policies and practices intentionally or by default. This implies that teachers must be educated towards an acceptance of the need for progressive change and their own essential part in it. The growth of professional competence should bring with it a motivation towards teaching and an informed sympathy towards new educational enterprises. For the teacher to assume an effective role in the broad context of educational development he must have professional self-confidence and responsibility based on a solid competence established through an enlightened and forward-looking programme of teacher education.