

## **Background**

### **Management of schools**

The establishment of the first school marked the introduction of the present system of governance of schools in Belize. The Honduras Free School was supported by voluntary subscriptions from the inhabitants and subsidised by public funds. It was managed by a committee consisting of His Majesty's Superintendent (the officer administering the government), seven magistrates, and all subscribers of £10 or more annually. The greater share of running the school fell on the government in those early years. By 1850, the Board of Education was set up and to it was entrusted the control and management of all government and government assisted schools. In 1896, the Board of Education was abolished and its powers transferred to the Executive Council of the colony. Throughout the years that followed, the question of the management of schools was often a topic for discussion with support for both sides of the argument. This partnership in education continued nonetheless. Today, the government contributes 100 per cent of the salaries of primary school teachers, a supplementary grant at a fixed rate per pupil, 70 per cent of capital costs and 50 per cent of the cost of maintenance. Churches are involved in the management of schools and the provision of the remaining capital and operational costs.

At the secondary level government contributes 70 per cent of the salaries of teachers in all government aided schools. The government also contributes 50 per cent of the capital costs for which approval was received.

### **The development of teacher education in Belize**

#### ***The pupil teacher system***

While the school system remained small there was no need to establish any kind of formal teacher training programme, but by the end of the century the need for a greater supply of local teachers was felt and this need called for some kind of preparation for recruits into teaching. In 1894, the Board of Education Rules introduced the pupil teacher system of recruiting and training of primary school teachers.

In its established form the pupil teacher system was operated as follows: a pupil teacher in conjunction with his parents or guardian, entered into a four year engagement with the manager or the head teacher of the school, free of charge from the date of the engagement. At least four hours of personal instruction from the headteacher or some qualified teacher on the staff was given during regular school hours each week. The pupil teacher was also allowed at least one hour of study each day. During his engagement a pupil teacher had to take two examinations: the First and Second Pupil Teacher examinations. If these were successfully completed, the pupil teacher went on to sit the Second Class and First Class Teacher's Certificate examinations.

This was not a satisfactory procedure for the professional preparation of primary school teachers. A few years after it was introduced, the system was criticised on the grounds that (a) the method of instruction was inadequate; (b) pupil teachers were required to teach as regular teachers and (c) the private study of pupil teachers was not properly supervised. Nevertheless, the pupil teacher system became the accepted route by which teachers moved through the ranks in teaching.

The pupil teacher system was later replaced

by the uncertified teacher system. Under this system, the First Pupil Teacher and Second Pupil Teacher examinations were abolished and the First Teacher's examination was introduced. Teachers then moved on to do the Second Class and First Class examinations. In 1951, the probationer system was introduced in an effort to recruit secondary school leavers into teaching. Under this scheme, candidates holding GCE qualifications or the equivalent were not required to become pupil teachers but were eligible for engagement as Grade 1 probationers. Such teachers were then required to take First Class Certificate examinations. A secondary school leaver who did not possess the GCEs but who successfully completed high school was classified as a Grade II probationer. Such a candidate was allowed to sit the Second Class examination, after which, if successful, he or she was allowed to sit for the First Class examinations. Preparation for these examinations was done on Saturday mornings. Classes were conducted by education officers and other selected lecturers and held mainly in the district town and in Belize City. Attendance at these classes was not compulsory.

This scheme continues but has met with only limited success because many rural teachers are unable to attend classes.

In 1962, the Intermediate Training Centre was inaugurated for the purpose of providing a twenty week in-service course for candidates preparing for the teachers' examinations (outlined above), as well as providing basic teaching skills to young teacher recruits who had just completed their secondary schooling. The Intermediate Training Centre was later merged with the Belize Teachers' College (established in 1965). In 1972 'INTERIM' was eventually phased out.

In 1964, the Roman Catholic management instituted a correspondence course which was open to all teachers regardless of the denomination of the school they were teaching in. When the Belize Teachers' College was inaugurated in 1965, the correspondence course was transferred to that institution. The scheme was eventually phased out because it was considered to be an unwarranted burden on the already strained resources and manpower of the Belize Teachers' College.

### **Full-time training of teachers in Belize**

The West India Royal Commission, appointed in 1938 to investigate the social and economic

conditions of the country, recommended that the pupil teacher system be replaced by a more systematic method of training teachers. The Moyne Commission followed shortly with a recommendation that teachers be trained in Jamaica. In 1941, the scheme was introduced and the first set of teachers left to take up studies in Jamaican teachers' colleges. In 1947, the Evans Commission recommended the establishment of a local training college. In 1954, two teachers' colleges were opened – one a government training college and the other a training college run by the Roman Catholics. The two colleges offered the Two Plus One Certificate Programme (two years of studies on campus, followed by one year of internship in schools across the country). The UNESCO Commission of 1964 recommended the merger of these two institutions and the stepping up of the teacher education programme to increase the output of trained teachers into the primary schools.

In 1965, the teachers' colleges were merged to form what is now the Belize Teachers' College (BTTC). In that same year, the Governments of Belize, Bahamas and Jamaica entered into an agreement and formed the Joint Board of Teacher Education (JBTE) with offices at the Mona Campus of the University of the West Indies. The main responsibilities of this board were to establish standards, to monitor the training programmes in the territories and to provide certification for teachers who pursued courses at the teacher training institutions in these territories. The Board continues to operate today and Belize Teachers' College continues to be a member. Besides acting as the accrediting body, the Board also provides support through various staff development efforts.

The college continued to offer the Two Plus One Certificate Programme except between 1966 and 1969 when a one year course was offered for more mature students and a course for teachers at junior secondary school level. Both these courses were discontinued in 1969.

Recognising the need to encourage pre-service education of teachers, and to address the issue of the percentage of trained teachers in the system, the government in 1988 approved the proposal to admit high school graduates into BTTC immediately after graduation. Since these students are not attached to any management, a bursary was approved to help candidates to meet the cost of board and lodging.

Teacher education is free. The government pays the salaries of all teachers attending the full time programme and also awards an annual book allowance.

Belize Teachers' College (BTTC) continues to be fully funded by the Government of Belize and has the training of primary school teachers as its main responsibility. From the time of its establishment in 1954 up to 1992 the College offered the Two Plus One Certificate Programme described earlier. The College currently offers the Certificate Programme with School Experience. The change came with the implementation of the Belize Primary Education Development Project. The Primary Education Development Project introduced in 1992 is a major initiative in primary education with teacher training as one of the main components of the project. It is hoped that with the recommended changes in policies and the programmes being developed, Belize will be able to achieve an 80 per cent trained primary teaching force by 1998.

For a brief period in the 1980s the College also ran a three year diploma programme for secondary school teachers. Sixth Form graduates as well as high school graduates were admitted. The length of the training programme was therefore dependent on the entry level. Secondary school graduates with four CXC's had three years in which to complete the programme. Sixth form graduates were able to complete the programme in one or two years, depending upon the number of 'A' levels they held as well as the programme they pursued at the sixth form or enrolment. This was a direct result of the establishment of the University College of Belize (UCB) which began offering an undergraduate degree programme in secondary education. The secondary programme requires two to three years of study for the award of a degree in secondary education. It is now generally understood that BTTC is responsible for primary teacher training while UCB is responsible for secondary teacher training.

## **Programmes**

Some of the current programmes being offered are outlined below.

### **1 The Certificate with School Experience**

This is a full-time programme offered at the

Belize Teachers' College for untrained teachers in primary schools. The programme is delivered at two levels. The first level consists of one year (two semesters and one summer) of academic work. Teachers then return to the classroom for one semester of supervised student teaching where they are required to teach a class independently. Teachers remain in the classroom for one to two years to obtain some experience before returning to Level 2 which is also one year of academic work.

A local Certificate in Teaching Level 1 is awarded to teachers who successfully complete the academic and the student teacher components of the Level 1 programme. A Certificate in Teaching awarded by the Joint Board of Teacher Education Level 2 is awarded to teachers who successfully complete the academic and student teacher components.

### **2 Certificate with School Experience Level 1 (part-time – distance)**

This distance programme is similar to the full-time Level 1 programme in its content. Because of the remoteness of some areas, and the unavailability of electricity, the print mode with some audio is the main medium by which the courses are being delivered. Teachers study two courses per semester and are visited twice monthly by a supervisor. The supervisor's main responsibility is to guide the teacher in his or her studies, and to help the teacher to transfer knowledge and skills learned to their teaching. Teachers are also expected to attend the face to face sessions which are held each summer for four to six weeks. Once per month, teachers are required to attend a workshop. At the workshops supervisors make presentations on topics of interest and concern and demonstrate some of the strategies outlined in the modules. These sessions are also tutorial sessions.

The programme is offered in three districts for untrained teachers currently serving in primary schools. The programme is for two and a half to three years. The content of the programme is the same as that for the full-time programme. The final semester is considered the practicum. Students are supervised on a weekly basis during this time. Assessment takes place at the end of the semester. A Certificate in Teaching Level 1 is awarded to teachers who successfully complete the academic programme and the practicum for the Level 1 programme. This is a local certificate.

### 3 Pre-college upgrading programme

This programme seeks to address the issue of content upgrading for teachers through in-service classes. Attendance at classes is voluntary. The programme is in-service and is offered in all districts, to teachers who need content upgrading and are preparing for admission to BTTC. Teachers take from one to three years to cover the material at each of the three levels.

There is no practicum as such. However, candidates taking the First Class examinations are required to write six lessons and be assessed in the teaching of one.

A certificate is awarded by the Ministry of Education for each level that is completed successfully. The First Class Certificate is the highest award and the First Teachers' the lowest.

### 4 Degree in Secondary Education

This is available in the following areas: biology, English, chemistry, mathematics and business education. It is offered at the University of Belize, Belize City Campus, for sixth form graduates with an Associate Degree. The programme is considered to be the final two years of a four year degree programme.

There is a practicum of ten weeks which is held in three phases:

Phase 1: Two weeks. During this period, the student teacher observes the co-operating teacher and becomes familiar with the routine of the co-operating school.

Phase 2: Six-seven weeks. During this period, the student teacher assists the co-operating teacher with lessons, and should teach for two to three days per week.

Phase 3: Two weeks. During this period the student teacher is timetabled for 10 to 15 hours per week and takes full responsibility for lessons.

## Issues and concerns

### Primary level

#### 1 Rate of increase of the trained teaching force and the quality of the intake

Although the rate of output from the College has increased over the years, the rate of

increase of trained primary teachers has been negligible (see Figure 11 below). The percentage of teachers in the system has not moved beyond an average of 50 per cent country-wide. The 1992 survey shows that 47 per cent were trained. Numerous attempts have been recorded over the years to address the percentage of trained teachers, including the introduction of the one year programme for mature teachers between 1966 and 1969 which was mentioned earlier.

**Figure 11** Percentage of trained teachers in the system 1963-1992

Year	1963	1968	1971	1975	1987	1990	1992
%	13	20	27	31	44	44	47

Several factors serve to undermine any efforts to increase the percentage of trained teachers in the system. Some of these are outlined below.

- The salary of primary school teachers was very unattractive until recently. With other government departments using the teaching qualification as an entry requirement for certain jobs, teachers used the profession as a stepping stone to these and other higher paid jobs.
- The practice of admitting unqualified teachers into the system continues. Attempts to address the problem are like trying to fill a bucket with a hole. While the College 'pours' out trained teachers into the system, church and government managers continue to hire untrained teachers.
- Government continues to pay the salaries of all teachers who are in training. It is to the teacher's advantage (financially) to find a job before seeking admission to the College since they continue to receive their salary while in training. The amount is substantially higher than the bursary awarded to high school recruits into the college.
- Teachers who fail the programme at the College are allowed to return to their schools to teach. The school regulations seem to protect these teachers even though many of them can be classified as incompetent teachers.

It is interesting to note that in the development of the recently introduced PED project,

mention was made of the paradox of admitting unqualified persons into teaching, while these same persons were not qualified for admission into BTTC's training programme because they did not meet the entry requirements. The College has been blamed for ignoring the very people who need training and there are recommendations from some quarters that perhaps the College ought to have a more open admissions policy to accommodate teachers in service. While the rate of increase of trained teachers has been slow, an open admissions policy would not solve the problem. In fact, it could serve to undermine any efforts to improve the quality of teaching. Teachers should have a good grounding in the subject matter they teach and they must be able to use a range of methods. They are also expected to acquire and develop social skills and attitudes with which to deepen an understanding of the communities in which they will serve. If the College is to put greater emphasis on the development of pedagogical skills as the PED project commends, then teachers need to come to the programme with the appropriate content background. It must also be noted that the Ministry of Education controls the employment of teachers, so correcting the paradoxical situation is within its power.

### ***2 The role of principals in the training of teachers***

There is greater demand for principals to act as instructional leaders in their schools. Principals tend to focus more on their administrative responsibilities than on staff development. The new training programmes at the College are currently addressing this issue with the introduction of a course in educational leadership and administration.

### ***3 The training programme and the primary school curriculum***

There is not always a desirable match between the methods taught in the College and those encouraged by principals. Tutors have tried to keep abreast of developments in their fields and have amended their courses accordingly. This has caused problems especially for teachers on student teaching. They have complained that principals are not often disposed to trying out new ideas. Principals want trainees to stick to familiar methods. This has been the cause of much frustration and sometimes teachers have requested deferral from the internship

programme or a transfer to another school. The Primary Education Project, introduced in 1992, is addressing the revision of the curriculum guides as well as the teacher training programme. A series of in-service workshops is being conducted countrywide to help teachers to understand and use the new guides. With the collaborative work of the Education Development Centre (EDC) and the College, teachers should be better prepared for teaching.

### ***4 Certification of teachers***

Certification of teachers is a joint effort between the JBTE and the College. While some teachers work diligently during internship, principals complain that most teachers relax once they have completed the training programme. What is needed is a system of continuous re-certification which would ensure that teachers take the necessary steps to upgrade themselves after they pass through the training college.

### ***5 The need for a clear teacher policy***

Teachers are posted by respective managers, but there are no clear policies to regulate how this is done. As a result it is often difficult to find teachers to serve in remote villages. The teachers who are willing to do so are often residents of the communities or untrained teachers from the area.

### ***6 Training teachers to meet the demands of teaching in multi-grade schools***

### ***7 The use of technology in the elementary classroom***

With the heavy emphasis on academic study, time is not available to give adequate treatment to this area.

### ***8 Meeting the needs of exceptional children in the classroom at both ends of the continuum***

More attention is being given to the slow learners and not enough to gifted children.

### ***9 The need for greater emphasis to be given to aesthetics***

The College's overcrowded timetable does not provide time for this.

*10 Teachers need to have a fuller understanding of assessment and evaluation processes*

*11 Addressing the need for training teachers in second language techniques*

With the current ethnic composition, the training programme will need to address the issue of second language teaching.

*12 The need to train school counsellors is increasing with the societal problems facing us.*

### Secondary level

1 Increasing the number of trained graduates teaching in secondary schools. Figures for 1991-92 showed 622 teachers in secondary schools. Of that number 41 per cent were university graduates and 35 per cent had pedagogic training.

2 Determining the content of the secondary teacher training programme to prepare teachers to face the challenges of a changing society.

### **Future directions**

1 To meet the needs of teachers who are preparing for admission to BTTC through the upgrading programme, BTTC has submitted a proposal to the Ministry to offer this programme by distance learning, using materials developed at the CXC level in other Caribbean territories.

2 An INSET programme for the training of primary school principals is being developed through the PED project to prepare them to be more effective instructional leaders.

3 In collaboration with the University College of Belize, BTTC is developing an undergraduate degree programme for teachers who have completed the programmes currently being offered by the College.

4 The focus of BTTC's programme has shifted to a more child-centred approach, with greater emphasis being given to development of teachers' pedagogical skills.