
Dominica

The society depends on teachers to mould the personalities of the youths so that they can contribute to the spiritual, moral, social, cultural and economic progress of the community. Teachers are not only the key element in the provision of good quality education and therefore critical to the success of any strategy for human resource development, but they are the chief standard bearers of the efficacy and chief agents of the effectiveness of the educative process. Who the teacher is and how the teacher is perceived in society, are as important as what the teacher does. How the teacher and the teaching profession are perceived is critical to the success of the educational enterprise. Recruiting and retaining good teachers who are appropriately educated and trained is vital to the provision of good quality education and for the development of human resources in the sub-region.

(Foundation for the Future: OECS Education Reform Strategy, 1991, p. 86)

Programmes

Primary teachers in Dominica follow a two year certificate programme designed by the University of the West Indies Faculty of Education, Cave Hill, in collaboration with Eastern Caribbean teacher training colleges.

Dominica faces severe constraints in the financing of its educational system. Consequently, teacher trainees spend only four terms in college, unlike most other countries where trainees attend college full-time for two years with eight weeks of teaching practice included. During the practicum which extends over two terms, trainees are teaching full-time in their respective schools. The individual study is also written during this period.

There are advantages and disadvantages to this system. One disadvantage is that trainees

are confined to one grade level throughout the practicum. The advantage is that trainees have the opportunity to see the education process as a continuum. They are able to diagnose and plan, to develop skills in constructing schemes and units of work and in lesson planning. At the end of each term they can realistically evaluate students' progress and the effectiveness of their instruction.

At secondary level an USAID funded programme enabled 49 secondary teachers to enrol in a two semester course of study in Education for Teaching at New Mexico State University (NMSU). Phase 2 of the programme involves a six month practicum in Dominica, successful completion of which will result in local certification. Most of the 49 teachers selected had already completed a two year programme at an 'A' level institution and had gained at least one 'A' level. All 49 trainees have returned home from New Mexico. Groups 1 and 2 have started the practicum.

Issues and concerns

1 Multi-grade teaching

About 49 per cent of our primary schools require multi-grade teaching. Declining rural population due to emigration as well as to rural-urban migration has signalled a need for rationalisation in the staffing of schools. Recent recommendations from World Bank consultants have indicated that multi-grade teaching will be around for a long while. Consequently the College has been asked to address this need specifically. The contention lies in determining whether the methodology and skills addressed in the current programme are adequate or whether there are additional theories, strategies and techniques required for multi-grade teaching which have yet to be addressed. Expertise

in the area of multi-grade teaching is therefore a concern, as is the financing for support materials which will be required for effectively addressing the problem.

2 The annual output of trained teachers.

Out of a total of 647 teachers in the primary system approximately 350 are untrained. On average, 22 teachers successfully complete the training programme each year. It is imperative that the rate of training be significantly increased if we are to improve the quality of education in schools.

In the secondary system about 186 out of 251 teachers are untrained. This figure includes 45 graduates. Even with the successful completion of the NMSU programme, there will be over 100 secondary teachers still to be trained.

3 Selection for college

There are a number of particular concerns here:

- The length of time in teaching before training begins. On average trainees are in the system for five to 10 years before a training opportunity becomes available.
- Public service regulations which insist that persons must be permanently appointed civil servants in order to benefit from teacher training.
- A number of persons with weak academic backgrounds and/or poor attitudes enter college and are unable to benefit fully from training. Trainees who fail to meet the standards required for certification remain in the teaching service.
- Entry requirements: English and any three other subjects. This should be changed to ensure a satisfactory academic background in the core subjects of mathematics, science and social studies.

4 University of the West Indies requirements

Time

There is much pressure exerted on tutors and trainees to complete the UWI programme in four terms.

Content

The College has difficulty with a programme requirement which compels trainees to devote time and effort to writing an individual study when basic teaching skills have not yet been perfected. The benefits of research skills to the teacher are unquestionable but the College would wish to see this aspect removed from the initial teacher training programme and incorporated into a higher level diploma programme which would allow for more meaningful research.

5 The legal status of the College

This problem is of local concern but is mentioned here only in so far as it affects the ethos of the College. The absence of a legal base prevents the College from enforcing rules and regulations apart from those of the Public Service. Consequently, there is not much latitude for cultivating the tone and atmosphere which the College deems appropriate.

6 Evaluation of the programme

The College has neither the time nor the human resources to monitor its graduates. The lack of a formal mechanism of linkage between college tutors and education officers, who supervise schools, further impairs effective evaluation of the quality of output from the College.

7 Training needs yet to be addressed

The College has recognised the need to expand training opportunities to include programmes for:

- teachers of pre-schools
- teachers of technical/vocational subjects in the JSP programme
- upgrading trained teachers in specialist areas
- the training of principals
- the professional training of graduates.

There are 45 untrained graduates in secondary schools. If trained, these persons could serve as clinical supervisors in school-based training programmes. Currently, there are at least three secondary schools where the principal is the only trained graduate on the staff.

Lack of finance, physical facilities and trained personnel are all constraints to the fulfilment of all these needs.

8 Additional pressures on the teacher training college programme

There is continuous demand from well-meaning agencies to have the teacher training programme address new areas, such as, tourism, drug education, AIDS and environmental concerns. Although these are real and serious issues, at the end of the day they must be addressed within the same four terms, with the same number of tutors and the same recurrent budget. This is a source of much concern.

9 Professionalism

Realisation has come forcibly that content upgrading and pedagogy are necessary but not sufficient conditions for producing effective teachers. There must be willingness, commitment, a genuine interest in children, a love of learning, positive self-concept and flexibility. Are teacher training programmes sufficiently catalytic to develop these qualities in two years? If so, then the programmes need to show evidence that issues of professionalism, social responsibility, values and attitudes are being addressed at the theoretical and practical levels. There must also be sufficient time to develop study skills, to promote the concept of lifelong learning and to inculcate social/communication skills.

At the national level there is a need to pay attention to the empowerment of teachers; to the development of a career structure within the education sector which can serve to motivate and to reward good teachers, to the development of a new image for teachers which allows them to enjoy parity of esteem with other professions.

Also at the national level is the need to ensure that entrants to the teaching service are recruited, not merely to fill a gap, but on the basis of their potential to develop into effective teachers.

10 The training of teacher educators

One direct implication of the issue of professionalism is the necessity to address the question of the training and professional development of teacher educators. In a rapidly changing environment, teacher educators must themselves be flexible, dynamic and willing to continue learning. Training programmes for teacher educators should include the upgrading of professional skills and knowledge and

the widening of work experience. Social skills and management styles are areas for consideration.

A moot point for academic consideration is whether positive, dynamic and creative persons should be recruited into teacher education or whether these skills can be acquired through training.

Future directions

1 Multi-grade teaching

The College intends to address in the immediate future the problem of multi-grade teaching. Research material on the subject is being collected. If the literature supports the need for separate treatment, a workshop for tutors will be required. A summer workshop for qualified assistant teachers at multi-grade schools is planned for summer 1995.

2 Content upgrading programme

An upgrading programme for untrained primary school teachers is to commence in April 1995. The programme uses a distance education mode of delivery and seeks to upgrade teachers without removing them from the classroom. The modules were produced by the Canadian Organisation for Overseas Development through its CTPP project and are designed to prepare persons for CXC examinations in four core subjects – mathematics, science, social studies and English Language. The programme will be managed by the School of Continuing Studies of the University of the West Indies, Dominica.

3 Secondary teacher training programme

This programme is to be commenced by the summer of 1995.

4 Addressing the training needs

It has been recognised that the College can no longer confine its training activity to teachers who function at the primary level, when there is such dire need for training at all levels. Future activity must now include the challenge of planning for and implementing new training programmes with the limited resources available.

Visions

The Dominica Teachers' College has visions of:

1 A pre-service teacher training programme

It is felt that this model will allow latitude for ensuring quality output. However this programme must run alongside a school-based in-service programme which meets the needs of untrained teachers already in the system.

2 Teacher resource centres

Centres at three rural locations will be linked with the College by interactive radio to

facilitate in-service training. There are visions also of a link-up with the University of the West Indies in order to tap the expertise there.

3 Technical assistance

Short-term technical assistance is needed in the college from experienced persons in areas such as multi-grade teaching, the preparation of self-instructional materials, the use of audio-visuals in teaching and the inexpensive development of audio-visual aids. It is essential that such persons are expert teachers rather than 'advisors'.