

Teacher Training Models for a New South Africa

By P. M. Kachelhoffer

Summary

During the past two or three years, due to a multitude of factors, education in Southern Africa has come to an almost standstill. In terms of education, there is talk of a lost generation and almost all educational structures are, in effect, inoperable waiting for a political settlement in South Africa. Probably the majority of the population have the perception that a new constitution is a prerequisite for an effective educational system and that it will indeed bring about an effective educational system. There are high expectations for a fair and just as well as a prosperous society in South Africa.

These expectations may prove to be too high for education alone to meet, and much wisdom will be needed to fulfill the country's educational needs. At present six per cent of the BNP or about 21 per cent of the national budget is spent on education. Population growth alone is of such magnitude that the total budget for education is not even sufficient to pay for free compulsory primary education for the whole population.

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Given the financial restraints, population growth, and the population's perceived educational expectations, different models for an educational system for South Africa must be designed if schooling is to be provided. Whatever model is implemented, it will have to be serviced by teachers. In this paper teacher

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training models suitable for a developing country such as South Africa, will be discussed.

Introduction

Especially since 1990 and the dawn of the DeKlerk era, major social changes have taken place in South Africa. The “apartheid” system is gradually being dismantled and this has created a freer and more open society. While the country is moving into a more democratic political dispensation, political players are using this interim period to score political points. Much of what is happening in the country at the moment is the result of a power struggle between political parties and groupings. It seems unfortunate that some politicians conduct their business without any social responsibility. The effect that their actions have on individuals does not concern them.

One of the most affected social areas is education. In some parts of the country, education has virtually come to a standstill. While education does continue in some classes, there is almost no educational or curriculum development. All efforts go into restructuring and realigning the system. Even these efforts bear no fruit, since probably the majority of the population see a new constitution as a prerequisite to a new educational system (Mc Gregor, 1993:3). The people believe the politicians are dragging their feet and time passes unproductively. Meanwhile, people in education are waiting for the politicians before they can really continue with their task.

Schoolchildren and even teachers have always been on the forefront of the political struggle. Approximately one million Black youths (Kachelhoffer, 1991:2) have had almost no schooling and are now functionally illiterate and unemployed. Apart from their political activities, it is suspected that many of these people have resorted to criminal acts to sustain themselves. This aggravates the already difficult situation in the country.

There are very high expectations set for a new South African constitution. Likewise the perception exists that a new fair and just educational dispensation in conjunction with a new constitution will eradicate all the evils from the past and will create a prosperous future for South Africa. These expectations may prove to be too high for education alone to meet and fulfil the country’s educational needs.

The question can then be asked: What is South Africa’s educational reality at the moment, how can perceived educational needs be addressed, and what teacher training is necessary to facilitate an effective educational system?

Educational Realities in South Africa

At present South Africa has 15 Education Departments for the different population groups (RIEP, 1992:3). The majority of black teachers are trained accordingly to a three-year curriculum at a teachers college for primary and

secondary education. The majority of white teachers are trained at teacher's colleges for primary education and at universities for secondary education—both programmes are offered over four years. The teacher's remuneration system is linked to qualifications. There are presently very few white teachers in schools below category D—four years and postsecondary education accepted as the norm for the properly trained teacher (Travers, 1990; Lasley & Payne, 1991; and Vonk, 1991). However, about 45 per cent of black teachers in school have less than three years training (Niebuhr, 1992).

The relatively poor qualifications of black teachers apparently not only affect black matriculation results (this will be discussed later), but also create a misconception about the distribution of government educational funds between the different education departments.

Depending on the grouping of education departments, South Africa spends more or less six per cent of its BNP or about 21 per cent of the national budget on education (DNE^b, 1992:112). About 70-75 per cent of the typical education department's spending is teacher salaries. If one takes the school going population of 10.8 million in 1991 (DNE^a, 1992) which is comprised of approximately six million black pupils and considers the amount of black teachers, it can be said that the per capita spending rate on each black pupil is R1 194-00, while about three times that amount is spent on each white child (McGregor, 1992:5). This inequality is further enhanced by the fact that 73 per cent of students in the black education department are in the primary school, in contrast to only 53 of students in the white education department. It must be noted that primary education is substantially cheaper than secondary education (DNE^a, 1992:49), notwithstanding the base of the calculation, the inequality in per capita spending is politically unacceptable. To correct the situation is not that easy, however; the solution probably lies in a higher level training and the training of more teachers for black education.

There is at present a growth rate of approximately 325,000 per year in black first-time school attenders. To cope, there is a need for 10,000 more teachers every year than the previous year (Niebuhr, 1992:3). Without addressing the problems of any backlog, more than 325 schools per year need to be built just to keep up with the population growth. At the same time, it is estimated that about 1.7 million children of school going age are not attending school (DNE^b, 1992:51). Should they go to school and one would continue with the present pupil/teacher ratio of 32:1, an additional 23,000 teachers would be needed. The training of these teachers according to a traditional three-year programme would cost R900 million (Niebuhr, 1992:3). The cost of the above mentioned needs and backlogs is not at all a viable possibility for the South African economy. It is estimated at present that with a three per cent growth in the economy, South Africa can very soon only afford nine years compulsory education. That would leave no money for senior secondary or tertiary education (Niebuhr, 1992:4). At present the three per cent growth rate in the economy is fictitious; it is rather the rate of decline.

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To provide for the above mentioned situation, the committee of education heads of departments has released its final planning document, namely the Education Renewal Strategy, in November 1992 (DNE^b). This document, although politically contentious, is probably the most representative and best scientific document available for any future political dispensation and for the government to use as a basis to plan the provision of education in South Africa. In this document, educational realities are taken into account and accordingly different scenarios are presented as possible solutions for the provision of education. The most probable scenario makes provision for nine years of compulsory education, partly subsidized, and the upgrading over a period of time of all teacher qualifications to at least three years after grade 12. These scenarios, however, will be in the hands of politicians and will depend on the economy of the country and the percentage of the budget they are willing to spend on education.

A very disturbing factor at the moment is the loss of human potential amongst black students. The drop-out rate from school and the poor matric results create massive problems. The drop-out rate can probably mainly be blamed on the political situation as described before. Poor matric results however are most probably linked to language problems and teacher qualifications.

Language problems will not be discussed further except to say that black students, on their parents' and their own request, receive education through the medium of English from grade four. English is almost a foreign language to most black pupils, which they only use during classes at school. Their mother tongue is a black language, and most of them speak more than one vernacular/African language. This situation creates major problems with black students' English language proficiency, which show clearly in the matric exam results.

Poor teacher qualification has already been mentioned. The problem lies not only in teachers' professional qualifications, but especially in their academic qualifications. A small research project done in Kwa Ndebele (University of Pretoria, 1990) confirmed that, especially in the natural sciences, the majority of teachers who taught those subjects had no formal training to do so. The probability of poor educational standards being linked to a deficiency in teachers' training in academic course work was also documented by Lasley & Payne (1991:211) and Vonk (1991:128). Lasley and Payne stated that more than 300 state and national reports in the 1980s in the United States called for more academic course work in teacher training. It should be clear from this paper so far that teacher training is a pivot for addressing the challenges set by South Africa's future educational dispensation. It is also clear that teacher training will have to be conducted amidst stringent monetary constraints. Different teacher training models will have to be weighed and the most efficient and effective model or models will have to be applied.

Teacher Training Models for South Africa

There are basically three possibilities for the provision of teachers to schools:

Appoint teachers with no academic or professional qualifications in schools. Although it is being done in some parts of the world, one can gather from Cooke and Pang (1991) and their experience in Hong Kong, for instance, that this is a near disastrous practice for the school system as well as the individuals involved. If given a choice, no one would opt for such a practice.

Appoint partially trained teachers in schools. From our experience with education for black children in South Africa, one can conclude that this is also a highly unsuccessful practice. It was shown before that about 90 per cent of our black teachers have three years and less training from teacher training colleges. This probably plays a substantial role in the high drop-out rate and poor matric results. Cooke and Pang (1991) also report many problems with partially trained teachers, in some areas even more than with untrained teachers. Untrained teachers are often ignorant of their shortcomings, while partially trained teachers experience anxiety because they know just enough to know of what they are not knowledgeable and what they can't handle.

Appoint trained teachers in schools. Properly trained teachers are probably the ideal all over the world. This ideal is the purpose of all academic endeavour with regards to teacher training. What proper training is and how to conduct proper training and in service training of teachers are the topics of many scientific studies worldwide.

The last option is naturally the one to strive for. Possible teacher training models for South Africa will now be discussed. Vonk (1991) documented two obvious models according to which teacher training programmes can be structured:

A two phases model. According to this model, theory could be taught by an institution like the university and practice taught by practitioners.

A one phase model that contains academic studies and professional preparation.

In the latter model, the curriculum can be organized in three ways (Vonk, 1991; Lasley & Payne, 1991):

1. An integrated programme. In such a programme academic studies and professional preparation are totally integrated. No academic territoriality is allowed and there is collaboration in the developing and the teaching of classes.

2. Parallel or concurrent programmes. In these programmes academic studies and professional preparation take place at the same time. The identity of disciplines are maintained. Courses may be loosely coupled or courses can be

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interrelated, interfaculty dialogue can take place and teaching can be synchronized.

3. Consecutive programmes. In these programmes academic studies and professional preparation follow one another.

In whichever of the above three ways one organizes the curriculum, the curriculum for teacher training usually consists of three parts:

Academic studies (usually a degree or diploma specialisation in at least two school related subjects).

Professional preparation (usually comprised by the study of educational theory from the founding disciplines and training linked with teaching skills necessary to be efficient and effective as a teacher in school).

School practice. This may vary from short practical periods in school to larger periods of internship. These periods may be supervised and reflected upon by training lecturers or the school personnel.

With the above possibilities in mind and given the situation in South Africa, the following teacher training models may be considered:

The Model Proposed in the Educational Renewal Strategy Document

With this model (DNE⁸, 1992) it is proposed that the existing three-year programmes running at residential institutions be divided into a two-year residential training and a one-year combination of distance training and internship. The same proposal is set forward for division of four-year programmes into a 3+1 structure. It is quite evident that the only motivation for this proposal is a financial one. It is believed that the cost aspect of the training of teachers can be reduced in this way. Although it is hinted that there is no evidence to support the supposition that three-year programmes are worse than four-year programmes, there is definite literary evidence to the contrary.

My own opinion is that such measures will harm the quality of teacher training immensely. Different questions arise: Which part of the training will be reverted to distance training? Will it be part of the academic studies or the educational theory part of the professional preparation? Is quality professional teacher training possible by means of distance training? What will be the influence on the quality of the teacher training if one shortens the time of study in favour of a longer timespan for internship?

It is nowadays fashionable in South Africa to argue in favour of an internship as part of teacher training. To my mind the problems that such a system will bring about to South Africa's already overburdened educational system don't make it a viable alternative to the present system of ± 10 weeks school practice. My fears are substantiated by amongst others Troman (1991), Davies (1991), Travers (1990), and Goodlad (1991). If one also takes into account the present workload of teachers in South Africa, one can hardly also burden them with the responsibility of being

a mentor for a prospective teacher over a prolonged period of time.

The above mentioned model will only make sense if one reverts part of the academic studies to distance education. This is also only possible to a limited extent. Some subject areas (for instance, the natural sciences) just don't lend themselves ideally to distance education. Where it is possible, one could have a system in which students take their first and second year subjects for a degree by means of residential study and then conclude their third year subjects for the degree by means of distance education during their intern or induction year. The same hold true for specialization subjects at a teachers college.

For such a system to work will probably also imply major cooperation in curriculum design between different teaching institutions. The question also arises: who will take the responsibility and award the qualification? Tertiary institutions are quite autonomous in South Africa and have almost no history of curriculum cooperation between institutions. In teacher education, such cooperation is especially problematic, as is also demonstrated in the ERASMUS programme in Europe. Bruce (1991:166) mentioned that the success of the ERASMUS programme in most academic areas has not been matched in teacher education.

Another possibility is not to revert part of the teacher training to distance education but to after hours studies at training institutions.

A big problem to overcome is the fact that a majority of the students that apply for college training at the moment do so because they do not qualify academically for university entrance.

The More or Less Status Quo Model

In this model, primary teachers need to be trained over four years at a teachers college or university. After completion of their study both groups start on the same salary scale. Every teacher's college affiliates with a university, cooperates in curriculum development, and thereby bargains for equalisation of the college's subjects on fourth-year level with the university's subject on second-year level. Such a college student then receives university entrance on the grounds of his or her college qualification and finishes his or her third year subjects. After the successful completion of outstanding subjects, the student's diploma gets converted to a university degree. With such a degree, the student can continue either with higher academic qualifications in an academic subject (Honours) or with his professional studies (B.Ed.).

Secondary teachers are trained over four years at: 1. A teachers college (diploma); 2. A university (degree); or 3. A technikon (diploma).

The same cooperation with regard to curriculum development and the equalisation of qualifications, as was mentioned for primary teachers, can be done for secondary teachers.

Both primary and secondary teacher's training programmes contain: 1. Academic studies (in at least two school related subjects); 2. Professional preparation

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(educational theory and teaching skills training); and 3. School practice (at least 10 weeks of reflective teaching under mentorship of school teachers and lecturers).

Conclusion

There are probably not many alternatives that are viable for the situation in South Africa with regard to teacher training. One tends to agree wholeheartedly with a quote in Mitter (1991:138) from Diesterweg in 1865 that read, “The school is worth precisely what the teacher is worth and for this reason an improvement in teacher education is a first step in any educational reform.” Enlightened people on the present worldwide crisis in education cannot argue with this statement. Many reports—for instance, *A Nation at Risk* (1983), *A Nation Prepared: Teachers for the 21st Century* (1986), and the *Tomorrow’s Teachers* (1986) report of the Holmes Group—point out the important role that properly trained teachers have to play in the complete well being of a nation.

South Africa must try and save money in any other area but cannot save money to the detriment of teacher training. Well qualified teachers are the only people that can really make a difference to the quality of a country’s work force. Rather wait with compulsory primary education for all and first concentrate on quality education for those who do attend primary and further education.

South Africa is in line with many countries whose politicians deeds don’t show much respect for the worth of quality teacher education. Living in this country, seeing what is happening from day to day, and reading international educational literature makes one realise that if a new government’s attitude doesn’t change towards a better dispensation for teacher training and doesn’t put education higher on its priority list, this country will sink back into a typical poverty-stricken third world country. The word “developing” country is deliberately not used, because in most instances there is no development in such situations. Maybe other possible models suitable for South Africa may be discovered for possible implementation in the country.

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