The Politics of Teacher Education

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In this paper I shall draw attention to some very general aspects of the politics of education and make reference to situations as I see them in a number of countries. The paper should be seen in relation to the work undertaken by the London group in preparing for the conference and presented by Mr. Robert Cowen. Some of the points I make may give rise to discussion in the groups.

The politics of education may be viewed against concepts of a profession. Cowen mentions the criteria Myron Lieberman uses to characterise a profession. They are that members of a profession should:

1. perform some public service not principally for financial gain—this is the ethical criterion;

2. have esoteric skills and knowledge acquired over a long period of specialised training; and

3. collectively control entry to their profession by establishing standards of entry to training programmes, by selecting and organising the content of training programmes and by conducting examinations on the basis of which successful candidates are admitted to full membership of the profession.

Several features of the teaching profession set it apart from law and medicine. The development of universal primary schools, secondary education for all, and the rapid growth of general (non-professional) education at the tertiary level have made it necessary to create a mass teaching force. The aims of these three stages of education are not necessarily the same. At which stage should the emphasis be on general education and at what point should vocational preparation receive priority? For many years debate in the U.S.S.R. has turned on the possibilities of breaking down the dichotomy between general or liberal education and vocational training for the masses. In practice the prolongation of general education and the postponement of vocational training is a world wide, but debated, trend. Also debated is whether the principal purpose of education should be to develop individuals as unique personalities or provide an education designed to promote social well being, economic growth and political stability. And as for child-centred aims, should moral, aesthetic, intellectual or physical development be given priority? Perhaps it is a matter of emphasis, so that the French stress intellect, the English character and the Americans socio-political purposes. Doubtless each nation hopes to develop individuals so that they can contribute to the establishment of the ideal society. But even if these most general aims are clear the constituents of full individual development and the ideal society are not. The kind of public service which education should be providing is in debate in many countries because consensus about the ideal society no longer exists.

This is particularly evident in higher education. Student unrest and faculty doubts suggest that the role of higher education in a changing and uncertain society is
in question. Hence the public service to be performed by teachers at this stage is no longer unambiguous. The same may be said of secondary school teachers. Once, they were expected to pass on to a carefully selected elite the best of society’s accumulated knowledge. Secondary education for all forces on us some reconsideration of the purpose to be served by this stage of education. The aims of primary education are changing too and, with them, the public service the teachers in these schools should perform.

Because there are these three identifiable stages of education, each with somewhat different aims—or emphases—, what skills and knowledge all teachers should possess are debated. Certainly, in the past, primary or elementary school teachers were not expected to reach the levels of scholarship demanded of academic secondary school teachers who, in turn, were rarely expected to match university dons. But, for all there was some similarity of content, methods of teaching at the three levels were not entirely dissimilar. This is no longer the case. Even within each level the teachers may have different tasks to perform on the basis of quite different skills and knowledge. Team teaching and ancillary staff have changed the concept of teaching roles and the expertise associated with them.

It is clear that teachers at the primary, secondary and tertiary levels of education do not all require the same special skills and knowledge. The assumption is that they all require the same general education (i.e., a complete secondary education) but beyond that there is doubt about what should constitute the distinct forms of professional teacher training at each level. Previously the special knowledge developed in the universities was basic. The university subjects were taught in academic secondary schools and this tradition dominated the content of teacher education. Now the social sciences are held to be important constituents of teacher education but their relevance to professional expertise and a scientific basis are less certain than are the natural sciences in medicine. The status of the teaching profession’s esoteric knowledge has implications for control.

The need for a mass teaching force and this uncertainty about the proper constituents of teacher training programmes have raised questions of control of teacher education. Public policy, debated by agencies inside and outside the profession and frequently adopted by government, is closely related to teacher education. Governments may well set pupil teacher ratios. They may decide to expand secondary education or reorganise all schools at this stage along comprehensive lines. Such changes of policy have implications for the numbers of teachers required.

In short, the demand for teachers, and for various kinds of teachers, is created by government policies over which the profession as such has little direct control. Who should control the supply of teachers? The profession itself? Or government agencies? And at what point should this control be exercised? At the point of entry to the teacher education establishment? Or after the completion of a course of study? Inevitably the supply of teachers is influenced by economic resources made available. The provision and allocation of capital for buildings and finances to meet the running costs of salaries and equipment are frequently the responsibility of public government agencies. They can choose to support teacher education or starve it of funds, or they can favour one kind of institution preparing teachers or another.

Changes in educational policy also have implications for the content of courses for intending teachers. Secondary education for all in comprehensive schools demands teachers with new skills and different kinds of knowledge. Who should control the content of teacher education? Traditionally, for the academic secondary school teachers, it has been the universities in a very direct manner. Secondary schools prepared pupils for the universities which laid down entry requirements. Admission to full membership of the academic community conferred on
such graduates of the universities a licence to teach. Even today a first degree in England is accepted by the Department of Education and Science as a teaching qualification. Parenthetically, such graduates traditionally met the prerequisites for entry into the legal and medical professions in many countries.

The influence of the universities on the content of the courses for elementary school teachers was less direct. Originally they either trained as apprentice teachers or went to normal schools or special secondary schools where they completed their general education along the lines of the academic secondary schools. Such secondary schools still exist in Europe. So do normal schools. Over the years, policies have been designed to bring the level of general education acquired by intending elementary school teachers up to that of university entrants. Thus in England university entry examinations, "O" and "A" level general certificate of education, are also the basis of entrance requirements to colleges of education. Intending elementary school teachers in France may complete the baccalauréat in an école normale. The Abitur is an entrance requirement for teachers in the German Federal Republic.

This direct and indirect influence of the universities on the content of teacher education brings the university academics and the professors of education into a position where, faced with the demand for more teachers (and different types of teachers), political conflict is inevitable. This conflict is evident in the U.S.A. There are signs that it is developing in England and Wales and the U.S.S.R. There is conflict particularly over the content of teacher education and over certification procedures based upon examinations conducted by institutions of teacher education with or without control by the universities.

The power and corporate autonomy of the universities is everywhere central to any analysis of the politics of teacher education. On the one hand governments wishing to increase the supply of teachers may find the freedom of individual professors to accept or reject students and the autonomy of the universities frustrates them. The association of colleges of education in England, with the universities, has extended to the colleges, to some considerable extent, the autonomy and freedom of the universities. The uncontrolled expansion of universities in France during the sixties and in England resulted in an enormous growth in the number of social science students and a relatively small increase in the numbers of pure scientists and engineers.

In most countries there has been pressure to bring all forms of teacher education into higher education: thus policy in the U.S.S.R. since the mid-sixties. The McNair report in England established links between all forms of teacher education and the universities. In the U.S.A. the integration is virtually complete. Teachers everywhere strive for the status, which accompanies links with the university and the possession of a degree. In the U.S.S.R. several pedagogical institutes became universities. In Ontario, Canada, the education of elementary school teachers has become linked with the universities. But where the policy has been followed for some time consequences unacceptable to government agencies responsible for the supply of teachers are becoming apparent. Were all teacher education within the orbit of the university, in order to control this supply, governments must be in a position to control university expansion not only in numbers but in terms of the growth of particular departments and faculties. Everywhere the universities, and perhaps rightly, are bound to resist such interference in their affairs. The result will be the establishment of binary systems of higher education (university and non-university sectors) or the creation of a separate sector for the education of teachers.

The universities in a binary system will continue to admit applicants of their choice, to teach what they like as they think fit, and to conduct examinations in the light of what they regard as appropriate academic stand-
ards. If, as is possible, the universities relinquished to the government a measure of control over entry, are they as likely to abandon their control of content and examination?

Where they have expanded to incorporate training for primary and academic secondary school teachers, i.e. for virtually all teachers, conflict between the so-called "academics" and the "professors of education" over the content of teacher education is likely to develop. The argument has been going on in the U.S.A. for some time. There, university academics such as Hutchins, Bostor and Conant have been arguing for a return to an education for future teachers based upon the traditional university disciplines, i.e. the pure sciences, mathematics, history, foreign languages and so on. These claims are reflected in the U.S.A. in enriched high school courses in physics, chemistry, biology and mathematics. The political battle between the academics and the educationists was not only for the content of teacher education but for the control of the subject matter of high school education. In the U.S.A. the control had slipped in a very real sense into the hands of the professional educationists.

In England the lines of battle are being drawn for control of the content of the new B.Ed. degrees. In London, in the Faculty of Education, teachers in university departments and colleges of education are virtually in control of syllabuses and course requirements. Elsewhere academic departments of the university seek to impose syllabuses in B.Ed. courses which are more designed to prepare university research scholars than teachers in universal secondary schools.

The academic argument is that the special knowledge which teachers should possess is to be found in the "disciplines". Physics as physics, history as history and so on, each with its own unique coherent logic are the subjects which should be offered in teacher education courses. As for the professional subjects the current argument is that sociology as sociology, philosophy as philosophy, history as history and psychology as psychology should be taught by professors of these disciplines. The professors of education should act as link men making difficult concepts palatable, if not understandable, to inferior students of education. Thus what is good for the university teacher is certainly good for the high school teacher and is at least marginally appropriate to the intending primary school teacher. In practice, these arguments are designed to regain for the academics the control over the content of professional education which, in the U.S.A., they have lost to educationists. This political battle is bound to flare up in one country after the other.

Meanwhile a third group of persons is now involved in the pattern of debate about the content of higher education. Students everywhere are demanding that university courses should be "relevant". If nobody is quite sure what this implies it is clear from the paper prepared for this conference by Alan Little that the teachers' view of the content of teacher education is that more attention should be given to the acquisition of subject matter including psychology and so on. In England there is indeed criticism by local authorities that many young teachers are inadequately prepared in the skills of teaching reading and writing in the primary schools. It is a criticism made in the past of primary school teachers in the U.S.A. The debates indicate the uncertainty which surrounds the constituents of the skills and knowledge needed by teachers as members of a profession.

In the event, debates turn on what should be the balance in teacher education between general education, subject matter, professional courses and teaching practice. In the U.S.S.R. this balance seems heavily in favour of the subject matter to be taught and general education. In England, for secondary grammar school teachers, three quarters of the period of education is spent on specialised subject matter, the remaining quarter is devoted to practical teaching and professional subjects. Another issue relates to the sequence of courses. Academics often wish
to postpone professional courses and teaching practice until towards the end of teacher education. Indeed this is common practice in many countries.

Concurrent courses for intending primary school teachers are common in England and the U.S.A. The resolution of these debates is a political matter in which alliances within the wider educational profession and between groups inside and outside the profession are formed.

Among the influential agencies outside the profession may be counted the churches. In England there remain many church colleges of education. Some of them are small others large but none of them is anxious to be taken over by a local education authority. Their outlook continues to be coloured by a religious commitment. In some countries this influence is central to the politics of education. Thus in the U.S.A. and in France the provision of public money to parochial educational institutions is still hotly debated. In relatively few Christian countries has the educational influence of the church been eliminated as in the U.S.S.R. In France, of course, the products of the écoles normales have for long been known for their anti-clericalism. Consequently, however slight the role of the churches in the politics of teacher education it should not be ignored.

Public Control of Teacher Education

The growth of universal education, the difficulties of identifying the appropriate esoteric skills and knowledge expected of all teachers in a mass profession and the autonomy of universities have raised vital issues of control. Inevitably capital costs and running expenses for teacher education have to be met in large measure from public funds. Under these conditions a number of agencies are involved in the politics of teacher education. They include government at the central, regional and local levels, bureaucrats, political parties, the universities and teacher associations. Patterns of power differ according to which aspect of policy is at issue. The four aspects of policy which would enable public authorities to regulate the supply of teachers and control the costs of training them are: (a) the admission of students; (b) the length of their courses; (c) the examinations of students, and (d) the issue of certificates to teach.

(a) Admissions

During the sixties the governments were prepared to finance the rapid expansion of higher education including university enrolments. University faculty and departmental autonomy determined patterns of expansion. This period of uncontrolled expansion made it necessary for governments to establish or build up institutions of higher education which would meet the demand for technologists. So, in England, polytechnics were created and, in France, university institutes of technology. The general shortage of scientists and mathematicians left the schools short of well qualified teachers of science and mathematics and, in England, with a poverty of young teachers with even a minimal background in these subjects.

In the early sixties demand for university places exceeded the supply. The situation is well analysed in Bowles, Access to Higher Education and many other studies. The number of formally qualified secondary school leavers was greater than the places available in universities. Growth in the number of pupils staying on to complete academic secondary school courses created a demand for more teachers. In England colleges of education expanded, departments of education were set up in polytechnics and mature persons with minimal academic qualifications were encouraged to enter teacher education programmes.

At the same time there was pressure to reduce admission requirements to the university. In the New York city system an open door policy was adopted. In Sweden soon anyone who has completed one of the many lines of secondary education will be able to enter higher education. But govern-