

TEACHER SELECTION

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THERE is a paradoxical aspect to teacher selection. Typically, the employing school system seeks to choose, following completion of training, the best candidate from among many applicants. When supply is markedly in excess of demand, affluent school systems tend to have employment advantages over less fortunate ones. The "market" favors the employer and the applicant is obliged to seek several employment opportunities.

A different approach to selection conceives of it as a means of identifying and admitting candidates into a program of teacher education. Successful completion of training presumes eligibility for employment. In other words, selection precedes rather than follows training and employment as a culmination of previously completed stages in preparation.

For many years, before the post-World War II period, teacher supply exceeded demand. Employing school systems could be and usually were exceedingly selective in choosing teachers. Selection standards were quite high. Many teachers applied for a limited number of positions. Few were chosen; many were destined for disappointment.

Following World War II, demand caught up with supply in many teaching fields. Selection tended to become more of an "academic exercise" than a realistic process. Only recently has a more equitable balance been developing between supply and demand. As a result, many school systems are beginning once again to consider a tightening of their selection procedures.

Underlying both these trends in teacher availability, is an assumption that entrance into the teaching profession is a free and open choice of the individual. This choice is restricted only to the degree that the teacher education institution may impose its own admission requirements. On the whole and until relatively recently, these entrance standards have varied widely and have often been less exacting than those for other professions. For many individuals, the decision "to be a teacher" has not been made at or near the threshold of college entrance. In fact, for some, the decision has often been an "afterthought" prompted by peripheral considerations.

In 1961, the National Commission on Teacher Education and Professional Standards, of the NEA, issued its report of the task force on *New Horizons in Teacher Education and Professional Standards*. In that report both the image and substance of the profession were redesigned. Teacher selection as conceived in "new horizons" was given a different emphasis. Rather than being a process coming at the end of the preparational stage and conducted as a prerequisite to employment, teacher selection was conceived as a part of identification and admission to preparation.

Significance of Selection

If selection is to be a part of employment, then the more applicants the better. By choosing from among many, presumably the one or ones chosen will be of the highest quality. In fact, supply should exceed demand if appointees of high quality are to be obtained. This condition is good for the school system that has a great deal to offer in the way of salary, working conditions and fringe benefits. Likewise, an oversupply of applicants can be advantageous for the less affluent and less favored school systems.

Selection, as a part of employment, can and may be wasteful insofar as the "surplus" applicants are concerned. It is uneconomic to prepare teachers who are of marginal or poor quality and who find it exceedingly difficult to obtain employment in their fields of specialization. It is a needless drain upon the employing school system's personnel resources to recruit, screen and evaluate the credentials and qualifications of applicants of low potential.

It is likewise a disappointment and frustration to the individual who has invested money, energy and time in preparation to discover that he cannot obtain the position of his choice or, in some cases, that he can obtain no position at all.

Present and Future Needs

How can we meet present and future needs? As has been said, selection depends upon teacher supply and demand. The past decade has seen an equaling of the two insofar as gross numbers are concerned. There still exists the problem of great scarcity in some fields and areas and an overabundance in others.

Ray C. Maul, former assistant director, Research Division, National Education Association, writing in the December 1965 issue of *The Journal of Teacher Education*, stresses three conclusions relative to present and future needs for teachers.

At the secondary school level, overall balance appears to have been achieved but not "balanced supply." An oversupply persists in social studies, speech, men's physical education and health and biology. On the other hand, scarcity continues in mathematics, physical science, English, foreign language, industrial arts, home economics and vocational and technical education. Special education is also an area of acute scarcity.

Second, an inadequate supply of elementary school teachers is a continuing problem. This shortage is likely to be intensified as the emphasis upon early child-

hood education gains momentum under the impetus of federal legislation for improving the education of the disadvantaged child.

The third conclusion is that the trend toward an academic major for elementary school teachers, urged by Conant and others, probably has implications for supply. It is difficult to predict what that impact will be, but it seems reasonable to assume that greater concentration upon subject matter competence in the pattern of preparation may discourage some aspirants who otherwise would enter the field.

An additional problem is unequal distribution of teacher applicants. Affluent suburban systems have a distinct advantage in teacher selection. Large cities and rural areas tend to fare less well. The former are plagued with severe staffing problems in their inner-city schools, particularly, and the latter have the disadvantage of limited resources.

Predicting Teaching Success

The literature abounds in studies that have examined carefully a wide range of selection techniques and measures. Consistently reliable and valid measures are difficult to find. Certainly college grades, student teaching, general intelligence, personal motivation, empathy for children and depth of interest in teaching are all factors to be weighed. The question is how best to assess these factors.

Those systems—usually large cities—that employ written and oral examination procedures rely heavily upon test scores and eligibility lists, objectivity in selec-

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tion being the paramount goal. Many systems which do not use written examinations, try to achieve objectivity by giving numerical weights to such measures as college grade-point averages, professional references and oral interviews. In doing so, they also achieve eligibility scores which permit a more objective weighing of the merits of the various applicants. Those systems that use a minimum of specific selection criteria, relying rather heavily upon an interviewer's judgment of the candidate plus application credentials, tend to believe that their methods of selection are as valid and reliable as those employed by systems using more elaborate procedures.

Despite all the evidence that has been amassed to predict teaching success through various kinds of selection procedures, it is difficult to cite any single criterion that has consistent high predictability. The most satisfactory approach is to use a combination of selection techniques. Three broad categories are usually included: college record (including student teaching), professional references and oral interview.

A safeguard in good selection is to use the probationary period after employment (usually from 3-5 years) as an extension of the selection process. If so considered, the first two or three years will generally yield far more "evidence" to predict ultimate success in teaching than can be obtained by means of pre-employment selection techniques.

Earmarks of Promise

There are many earmarks of professional excellence. They are easier to identify than to assess, yet it behooves those who select teachers to be alert to evidences of professional promise. The difficulty in suggesting qualities to look for is the possibility of omitting others of equal importance. Nevertheless, the following six seem essential: intelligence, sense of commitment, concern for children, preparational excellence, emotional maturity and professional pride.

There is no substitute for good general intelligence for it is the base upon which all else is built. Of equal importance is a genuine desire to be a teacher and to achieve a commitment to teaching as a long-range interest. Central, in the decision to teach, should be an acceptance of and a genuine concern for *all* children, not just the favored ones.

First-class preparation, especially in student teaching, is paramount including both subject matter competence and teaching skill expertness. A more elusive but nonetheless crucial quality is emotional maturity. Lastly, a high regard for teaching as a profession and pride of identification with it are important earmarks of professional promise.

The procedures deemed necessary in the selection of quality teachers are dynamic and should be the object of periodic evaluation to the end that qualitative improvement may be achieved. Whether selection takes place at the threshold of preparation or as a prerequisite to employment, it must be carefully and competently carried out if teaching is to become a full-fledged member of the family of professions. ☞

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