

# Throwaway Teachers?

THOMAS CALHOUN\*

---

*The question of retraining or replacing teachers cannot be addressed on an either-or basis. Only a cooperative approach to teacher growth can effectively satisfy the compelling need to retrain and upgrade existing personnel.*

---

**M**UCH OF American society has developed a philosophy in which replacing something within a short period of time is considered preferable to designing it for a long life or repairing it as needed. It may be surprising, therefore, to find a growing attitude that favors upgrading the quality of teaching by directing more attention to the professional development of teachers already in service, despite the now readily available supply of replacements. Several factors contribute to this trend.

## The Oversupply Is Not Qualitative

It is unlikely that anyone involved in any aspect of the educational process has ever indicated that his or her school or district has a faculty whose caliber could not be upgraded by either the replacement or the improvement of existing personnel. Some

observers of the educational scene appear convinced that the current oversupply of teacher applicants can solve this problem by simply replacing those who cannot or will not perform up to expectations.

Yet even if summarily replacing unsatisfactory incumbents with eager candidates were feasible, the simple truth is that the surplus of teacher applicants is a quantitative, not a qualitative, oversupply. If this judgment is correct, the only alternative is a joint effort in which school districts and universities pool their resources for the improvement of personnel.

## Accountability

Another force contributing to this belated interest in teacher improvement is the prevailing demand for accountability, with all that this term implies. Salary differentials for additional education have been the bait by which it was assumed that teachers would be encouraged to acquire the means of doing an increasingly better job.

Because the success of this strategy has not been demonstrated, however, the public

\* Thomas Calhoun, Director of Personnel, Newark School District, Delaware



what they are now." While colleges and universities must offer basic training in content and methodology to their prospective teachers, it is impossible for them to predict what skills and concepts will be most appropriate in 1980 or 1990. Yet simply to lament the difficulty of predicting and planning for what we think the future will demand of teachers is nonproductive. Some universities and school districts, therefore, have decided that it is more productive to screen prospective teachers for desirable personal qualities and then to foster the adaptive attitudes and the abilities necessary for continuous improvement during their professional careers.

### Teaching Centers

Although such efforts are long overdue, the past half-dozen years show a clear trend in an approach to personnel development which often is referred to as "training com-

*Even if summarily replacing unsatisfactory incumbents with eager candidates were feasible, the simple truth is that the surplus of teacher applicants is a quantitative, not a qualitative, oversupply.*

is now logically clamoring for some evidence of improved results from increased expenditures. Many educators have chosen to capitalize on this interest, directing some of its intensity into a more sophisticated assessment of educational programming and its product. Such evaluations then become the building blocks on which staff improvement systems are developed. In this way an essentially negative thrust can be converted into a positive force producing a better education for boys and girls.

### The Pattern of the Future Is Uncertain

Still another factor contributing to current teacher growth programs is the uncertainty regarding the nature of public education a decade from now. It probably can be agreed that the only certainty about the future is that "things will be different from

plexes" or "teaching centers." The blueprints for these centers are as varied as one could imagine. The structure or organizational pattern may vary from one which is voluntary, flexible, and independent to one which is tightly managed and even controlled by legislation. The purposes of a teaching center will range from a narrow aspect of teacher preparation to a wide variety of opportunities for the in-service development of teachers, or even of parents and other citizens. In their programming, teaching centers go from the development of curriculum and materials or the improvement of teaching skills to the utilization of community resources or the acquisition of improved personal qualities. Other comparisons will show a similar and marked diversity of characteristics from center to center.

In Delaware, for instance, a consortium between the Department of Public Instruc-

tion and institutions of higher education has focused on means of improving the continuing education of mathematics and science teachers and the upgrading of mathematics instruction in the public schools of the state. State and federal funds, as well as an industrial grant, have made a corps of field agents available to assist teachers in these fields. Approximately 25 in-service courses have been offered, and a teaching resources center has been made available on a college campus in each county. The evidence to date suggests that such a hands-on approach is offering relevant retraining which will substantially upgrade much of the teaching in target areas.

The word partnership and the connotation it implies in staff development should be carefully considered. So long as the control of the schools is a constitutional power reserved to the states, the responsibility for educational programs remains with the citizenry (through its elected representatives). This is not to deny that a common interest exists between boards of education and their constituents, school administrators, the staffs of their schools, and university faculties. However, the notion of an "equal relationship" or of "joint rights" in the matter of teacher improvement is contrary to the constitutional authority on which the public school system is founded.

Teacher demands for participation in the licensing and subsequent upgrading of the professional staff are undoubtedly a quest for the eventual control of the educational system and a means for achieving, hopefully, the improved welfare of staff groups. Involvement of teachers and professors is healthy and proper, but as collaborators in a consortium rather than in a pure partnership, and with boards of education retaining ultimate control of the process.

The global nature of the problem precludes the development of a model which will be universally acceptable and successful. However, such ingredients as consensus, compromise, and commitment can go a long way toward ensuring a successful "school-university partnership for teacher growth." The presence of these components will ensure

a high priority for, and a greater degree of success in, the development of a workable blueprint for teacher growth in any school district.

## A Focus on Change

How much of the school district budget in a typical community is allocated to the research and development, which business and industry generally regard as indispensable to their growth and even their very survival? Nothing? A few thousand dollars labeled "in-service programs"? Nonsense! Calculate the salary differentials for the advanced training of teachers and the amount involved in released time salaries as well as the obvious costs of in-service programs, and most districts will far exceed the 3 to 4 percent allotment which is typically thought to constitute an adequate budget for R & D. The proponents of accountability are asking: "How can the maximum dividend be realized from this investment?" School-university programs for teacher growth provide one viable answer.

The promise that necessary improvement in educational programming can be achieved from the chance for greater selectivity in staffing is a pitfall to be avoided. The fact remains that the majority of those teaching in America's public schools over the next several decades will be those already in service. Any substantial improvement in school system quality must therefore come primarily through redirected or upgraded teaching by the existing instructional staff. Thus a higher priority must be given to a school-university liaison aimed at upgrading the attitudes and skills of present practitioners in order to meet the changing requirements of public education during the remainder of the 20th century.

The question of retraining or replacing teachers cannot be addressed on an either-or basis. A cooperative approach to teacher growth could not only help provide vastly improved replacements in years ahead but could also effectively satisfy the compelling need to retrain and upgrade existing personnel. □

Copyright © 1975 by the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development. All rights reserved.