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ABSTRACT

Twenty-six tenured faculty members of schools of education were interviewed in an effort to ascertain their perceptions of the circumstances that led to their becoming teacher educators. A clear and direct continuity of development from classroom teacher to university-based teacher educator was noted. Interviewees identified advantages of a career as a teacher educator and described circumstances surrounding their decisions to enter teacher education and to leave the classroom. Majority responses involved: (1) retention of psychic rewards of classroom teaching while gaining greater material and intellectual rewards; (2) more influence and impact on the nature and quality of the profession; (3) frustration with the static nature of teaching at the elementary and secondary levels; (4) greater amount of personal freedom; (5) intellectual challenge and stimulation of university life; (6) opportunity to combine interests in various disciplines with interests in teaching; and (7) relatively easy entrance to university-based teacher education. (JD)

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Research and Development Center for Teacher Education

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A STUDY OF THE ENTRY MECHANISMS OF UNIVERSITY-BASED TEACHER EDUCATORS

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Research in Teacher Education Program Area

Gary A. Griffin, Program Director

SP 022 089

A Study of the Entry Mechanisms of
University-based Teacher Educators

Mark M. Isham, Heather L. Carter and Roscoe Stribling

Considerable attention has focused recently on teacher education programs (Hall, 1979). In most instances, the brunt of the responsibility for the apparent failure of different levels of teacher education falls on the teacher educator. An invitational conference hosted by the Research and Development Center for Teacher Education and the National Institute of Education explored issues in teacher education which have potential for research. The first item in a list of priorities developed during that conference indicated the need for research on "teacher educators as practitioners" (Hall, 1979). Little is known of the background, values, goals, responsibilities, instructional strategies, and motivations of teacher educators.

As early as 1962 the National Society for the Study of Education commissioned a yearbook entitled Education for the Professions (Henry, 1962). Howard Becker contributed a chapter to that yearbook in which he discussed the nature of a profession. He suggested that a necessary question in determining the nature of any profession is ". . . what are in fact the characteristics of those work roles now regarded as professional?" (p. 33).

Although addressing needs for research on teaching, Shalock's (1979) comments are pertinent to teacher education. "In a profession where there is so much talk about attracting better people it is odd that so little research has been done on the characteristics and circumstances of persons entering the profession, and the relationships among these conditions of entry and subsequent success."

The purpose of this study is designed to address this need. It

seeks to answer the major question: How do personal decisions interact with social constraints to produce the assemblage of individual decisions which result in movement to teacher education? Specific concerns include circumstances surrounding decisions to enter teacher education, aspects of university-based teacher education that attract people, features of graduate programs in education that ease entrance to the profession, and characteristics of persons who enter the profession. This study is part of a larger investigation undertaken to examine the nature of teacher education as an occupation. Entry mechanisms seem a logical psychological place to begin to understand the profession of teacher education.

All occupations compete for members. As individuals choose among alternative types of work, professions struggle silently among themselves to attract and retain members. Where and how teacher education fits into the competitive recruitment system is less apparent than for occupations that have been more extensively studied. Professions offer different rewards and advantages and they attract some people and repel others. Lortie (1975) writes about recruitment resources as consisting of properties that assist an occupation in competing for members and talent. The authors selected the term "entry mechanism" to indicate that these resources work in concert to attract and facilitate entry into an occupation. Entry mechanisms are categorized as either attractors or facilitators. The former includes all the comparative benefits and costs proffered would be teacher educators. Facilitators, which are less commonly noted in research literature on occupational choice, encompass conditions and factors that help people move into an occupation.

For the purpose of sample selection and data analysis, a university-based teacher educator was defined as a tenure track faculty member who

had taught at least one undergraduate course designed for preservice teachers within the last calendar year. Each faculty member held a position in the Department of Curriculum and Instruction. The study was limited to tenure track faculty because it was considered that teaching assistants and assistant instructors are, first, graduate students and, second, faculty members thus forming a different population. Faculty members outside the Department of Curriculum and Instruction were not included in the study because of the extremely small representation from any single area. The responsibilities of faculty in each area are considerably different from one another and also from those of teacher educators in the Department of Curriculum and Instruction. Their inclusion could have created a potential confounding influence.

Methodology

A focused interview, described by Merton et al. (1956), was conducted with university-based teacher educators during the spring of 1980. The interview focused on the subjective experiences of the interviewees in an effort to ascertain their perceptions of the circumstances that led to their becoming teacher educators. Although the interview covered many topics pertinent to teacher educators, only a segment of it dealt with entry mechanisms. The staff constructed the interview schedule, which was used by two interviewers, to encourage open-ended, concrete, high-affect responses. Training procedures for the two interviewers included becoming familiar with the content and sequence of the interview and pilot testing the interview. Each pilot test was followed by a corrective feedback session on the use of probing techniques. The interviews ranged in length from one to two and one-half hours. Each interview was recorded on audio tape and transcribed.

Data Source

The sample consisted of 26 faculty members. All faculty members at the institution where this study was conducted and who fit this description were contacted. All but one agreed to participate. The sample was composed of eight assistant professors, eleven associate professors, and seven professors. Approximately 89 percent were of Caucasian origin.

Analysis and Discussion

In charting the career patterns and decisions of teacher educators, the authors noted a clear and direct continuity of development from classroom teacher to university-based teacher educator. Many attractions and rewards of the former form a link between the two occupations. The first part of this analysis section, then, explores the continuity between being a classroom teacher and a university-based teacher educator. The second part examines the attractions of teacher education. The authors assumed competition among career options; university-based teacher education "won out" against other types of careers and other forms of teacher education because it offered certain advantages to those making choices. To identify these advantages, the interviewers asked those within the occupation to list reasons why they left the classroom, to describe the circumstances surrounding their decisions to enter teacher education, and to discuss the advantages university-based teacher education held over other occupations. These questions were adapted from Lortie's interview for schoolteachers. The third part of this section discusses facilitators of teacher education.

Continuity between teaching in a public school and teaching in a university teacher education program

None of the faculty members interviewed considered teacher education as a career option prior to classroom teaching. Teacher education, as an occupation, is considerably less visible than teaching. Its roles, responsibilities, and rewards do not become apparent until one has been exposed to teacher educators. Only one respondent revealed that plans had been formulated while an undergraduate, to pursue an advanced degree upon completion of the undergraduate program. This person was dissuaded from doing so until an unspecified amount of classroom experience had been gained. All but two of those interviewed had taught prior to becoming teacher educators. All those interviewed had earned a doctorate degree. Considering that admission to most doctoral programs in curriculum and instruction requires at least two years of classroom teaching, this characteristic is understandable. The background of having been a classroom teacher may have led to the considerable homogeneity in responses concerning attractions and rewards of university-based teacher education.

Teaching either repels or addicts. As the following excerpts indicate, people whom we interviewed "fell in love" with teaching and this commitment to teaching not only attracted people to university-based teacher education, it also became a reward,

> "I really loved teaching and I wanted to stay in touch with it. I knew that if I went into science education I could still keep in contact with schools and I could still keep in contact with students."

> "I wanted to get back to teaching. That was number one. What I wanted again was contact with students."

Attractions of university-based teacher education

Several respondents rejected the assumption underlying the interview question that explored the reasons they left teaching by responding, "I didn't think I ever did." Many refused to accept the assumption that teaching preservice teachers differs qualitatively from teaching children and youth. One person continues to identify himself to the Internal Revenue Service as a "teacher." Several respondents describe themselves as teachers rather than as university professors or teacher educators.

A full sixty percent of our sample view university-based teacher education as an extension of or a special type of teaching. All of those in this group voiced the sentiment that by becoming teacher educators they could remain relatively close to children and youth and enjoy the psychological rewards of personal relationships that evolve between teacher and learner. The question, "What do you like best about teaching in college?" elicited the following remarks which echoed the rewards of classroom teaching.

> "Working with the students. It evolved when I was back in high school teaching, a pattern that has me get up three mornings very early, and do most of my busy work before I come to work, so I have time to talk to people. The thing I like best about college teaching is talking to students."
>
> "Again, I like the interaction that exists between my students and myself."
>
> "Just the teaching. If I had my druthers, I'd rather just teach. . . . working with people . . . seeing them get excited about what's going on."

By becoming university-based teacher educators, the respondents could retain the psychic rewards of classroom teaching while gaining greater

material and intellectual rewards not available to most classroom teachers. University-based teacher educators may, if they so choose, remain relatively close to children and youth and may enjoy the intellectual and psychological rewards of teaching preservice teachers as well.

In comparison to classroom teachers, university-based teacher educators have the ability to influence more people or to have greater impact on the nature and quality of the teaching profession. Described by one respondent as "the savior complex," this motive for influence recurred in and predominated an overwhelming majority of our interviews. The following responses are illustrative:

> "My first intent, in my doctoral program, was to move from the role of teacher to principal, with the thinking that if I could serve in the role of principal, then instead of influencing just children, I could influence faculty. And therefore I could bring about changes in entire faculties that would influence larger numbers of children. . . . But I didn't get hired as a principal. That led me to say, 'Another way I can influence teachers is through the training process, through the education of teachers.'"

> "The justification I would use for being a college teacher instead of an elementary teacher is that I discovered a few ideas, or have been taught a few ideas which lots of teachers don't know and ought to know and could do a whole lot better if they knew. . . . If I can pass them on to someone else so that kids get a better education, then I am not just influencing a few kids, but in some small way hopefully influencing lots of teachers in what they do for their kids."

This desire to influence stems from several sources. One of the more salient motivations arose from a dissatisfaction with one's colleagues while one was a schoolteacher.

> "The second year I was there (elementary school), I became very distressed with the way kids were taught to read. . . . I became concerned about children coming to me at twelve years of age unable to read."

Another motivation stemmed from a realization that one had unique contributions to make to education.

> "I knew I was just as smart, and I was doing better things than he was. . . . I knew I knew how to teach teachers how to teach science."

Still another source of the "savior complex" grew from a feeling of frustration with the static nature of the profession and practice of teaching.

> "It simply was that I thought we (teachers) were pretty stable and there was no real concern with quality."

Another respondent revealed a strong commitment to help shape the future of society by helping shape the education of each new generation.

> "I really do believe that the most honorable thing that a person can do is to produce a decent new generation. Now there are two ways that one can do that. One is to spend a great deal of time working intensively with one or two individuals. The way our culture used to be, at least, that was the function of the mother, and it wasn't acceptable for a father to do that kind of thing. If I couldn't influence my kids to some extent, if I couldn't spend my life influencing my particular kids, and feel when I die, gratified in having accomplished that, then an alternative is to have some little influence upon a large number of people. And I think that is a major kind of consideration that affected me."

Special attractions and rewards of teacher education

University-based teacher education offers several additional rewards. While the following are not recurrent themes, they do help understand the range of attractions. University-based teacher educators are part of a larger community of scholars, researchers, and teachers. Forty percent of those we interviewed indicated they anticipated greater amounts of personal freedom, for example, setting one's own schedule, in collegiate teaching. Only ten percent perceived academic freedom to be greater than in classroom teaching.

> "In terms of how I went about my job, I was on my own. I could do anything I wanted to do and in any way I wanted to do it. . . . That's what I like about this kind of work, as far as teaching.

Teacher education was perceived by over half the respondents as a means of fulfilling personal aspirations; moving from classroom teaching to a more advanced or specialized position was part of one's professional maturation. Responses were phrased both positively and negatively.

> "What I liked least about teaching was what I saw happening to teachers who are about my age now. That really bothered me. Something had gone out of them after spending anywhere from ten to twenty years in the classroom. And I used to associate with a group of bright prople, some of them intelligent people, thoughtful people who were cowed by twenty years on the job."

> "I think it was a normal maturation process -- part of a normal adult growing up."

Intellectual challenge and stimulation of university life attracted several people. This attraction stems from the emphasis universities place

on research and publication. The role orientation of the researcher is one of the few means whereby university-based teacher educators may link themselves with other faculty members within the institution. By claiming oneself to be a researcher and writer, one may become more closely identified with the image of the university professor and may claim greater respectability, at least symbolically.

Symbolic or real, the intellectual challenge is greater than in classroom teaching. One's colleagues at a university, because of the emphasis and pressures mentioned earlier in this paper, tend to be more actively involved with ideas and the generation of knowledge.

> "I want to be in the middle of it. I loved being at the University of Minnesota which had an enrollment of over 40,000."
>
> "I like working with well educated, stimulating colleagues."
>
> "I like to be pushing the frontier of knowledge."

Nearly one-third of our respondents were attracted to teacher education because it afforded the opportunity to combine interests in various disciplines with interests in teaching. These responses were offered by individuals who enrolled in education courses or became certified to teach only after having received a Bachelors of Science degree.

> "I wanted to move into a situation where I could utilize my interests and training in reading instruction more, and, at the same time, be involved in teacher education."
>
> "I could teach both in the chemistry department and in science education. It appealed to me to be able to do more work in education without giving up my teaching in the science field."

Facilitators of becoming a university-based teacher educator

Some occupations, such as medicine or music, require the first in a series of decisions to be made early in life if one is to successfully negotiate entrance. Other occupations, such as classroom teaching, have wider decision ranges that permit entrants to postpone decisions and commitment until later in life. The latter, which do not discourage early decisions but do encourage late decisions, will have larger pools of candidates than occupations with narrow decision ranges. Early decisions need not affect the probability of becoming a university-based teacher educator.

People can decide to become a teacher educator at any number of points. Although university-based teacher education has a narrower decision range than does classroom teaching, due mainly to the requirement of some teaching experience, those who do decide to become university-based teacher educators, according to our data, tend to postpone the decision until late in their graduate programs. Of those we interviewed, only 15 percent had chosen to become teacher educators prior to enrollment in a doctoral program. One respondent accepted a university-based position one year after completing his doctorate.

Nearly all of the late deciders whom we interviewed tended to drift into teacher education. Each of these enrolled in a master's degree program while a classroom teacher and each of them managed, more by default than by design, to transform a series of courses into a program of study.

> "As far as the Ph.D. is concerned, after I got my master's degree, I simply started taking courses for my own personal satisfaction, again to learn more about my field. The fellow who turned out to be my major professor said, "Why don't you formalize this into a Ph.D. program. And that's the way the whole thing began."

> "I remember talking to my advisor when I was in graduate school, I believe it was the last year I was there, when I was working on my disseration, I was talking about what to do after I got my degree. I mentioned working for the federal government. . . and her response was, she was unable to see me in that kind of bureaucratic setting and she said, 'I really think you belong in a university.' . . . I think once the interviewing got underway I wanted to be a university professor."
>
> "After teaching two years I really had no particular goal in mind, other than a Ph.D. would be nice to have. I guess there was a generalized expectation on the part of the family and friends that school-teaching is fine, but there'd be something wrong with you if you stay forever."
>
> "I had decided to reenter school. And I had not decided at that time to get a Ph.D., but simply decided to complete a program that the university had in teaching English as a second language. . . . (After completion of a master's program and a relocation) it seemed that I was so close to a Ph.D. it would be silly not to get one."

These responses clearly demonstrate the ease of entrance to university-based teacher education. The emphasis is placed more on the doctorate than on any other requirement or prerequisite, with the exception of classroom teaching. In many cases, in fact, people were advised to apply courses retroactively to a program of work. In those instances when a decision to enter teacher education is made somewhat by default, it is doubtful that a strong commitment to the profession will develop. Furthermore, ease of entry, coupled with a wide decision range, allows for a much larger pool of potential candidates for university-based teacher education.

Conclusions

This study contributes to the growing body of knowledge of teacher educators. The conclusions, however, must be treated with caution because of the sample limitations.

A major finding is that attractors and facilitators interact during the process of arriving at a decision to enter teacher education. One of the major interactions occurs between the attractions and rewards of teaching and the lack of opportunities for advancement within classroom teaching. Compared with other kinds of middle class work, classroom teaching offers few opportunities for advancement which is the essence of a career. One function of a staged career is the institutionalization of delay of gratification; stages force younger people to exert greater effort in hope of future gain. Career staging may also serve to balance the relationships among effort, capacity, and reward. Where the reward system is seen to be legitimate people beli ve the largest rewards go to those who earn them through effort and talent (Lortie, 1975). Classroom teaching is relatively unstaged. One means for making status gains, full-time administration, requires one to leave the classroom. University-based teacher education, on the other hand, allows one to advance without sacrificing the psychic rewards of teaching. Enrollment in a master's program may be interpreted as a means of advancement within teaching. Completion of a Ph.D. program may be understood as a means of further advancement.

University-based teacher educators do not leave classroom teaching because they fell they are inadequate. To the contrary, the majority of those we interviewed rated themselves as superior to most teachers. Not receiving rewards for their efforts and talent, they channeled their ambition into a different, but similar, occupation. University-based teacher education

with its promotion and tenure system, is staged and teacher educators may feel confident that their efforts and talent will be recognized and rewarded.

The time at which a decision to enter teacher education is made affects the quality of teacher education programs and the quality of research conducted by teacher educators. The effects of time of entry on the role orientations of teacher educators are not at this time known. Merton (1957) and Gouldner (1957, 1958) hypothesize that those individuals who enter a profession relatively early tend to be characterized as having a strong background in related disciplines, as conducting more research, and as emphasizing, in their teaching, generalizable processes and concepts. This is an area that will be explored during the second phase of this study.

The authors intended these interviews as preliminary, exploratory efforts to understand the contours of the profession of teacher education. Questions concerning the nature and extent of commitment to teacher education, how the process of identification with the profession occurs, and most importantly, how valid are these features in predicting success and effectiveness as a teacher educator need to be addressed.

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